

# chr guide

building a common housing register

**a practitioner's guide**



The Scottish  
Government

# chr guide

building a common housing register

**a practitioner's guide**

© Crown copyright 2009

ISBN: 978-0-7559-9111-2 (Web only)

The Scottish Government  
St Andrew's House  
Edinburgh  
EH1 3DG

Produced for the Scottish Government by RR Donnelley B59201 10/09

Published by the Scottish Government, October 2009

## SECTION

<b>MINISTERIAL FOREWORD</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. THE BASICS</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3. CHR COMPONENTS</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>4. INVOLVING TENANTS AND APPLICANTS</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>5. PARTNERSHIP WORKING</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>6. CHR MODELS AND OPTIONS FOR INVOLVEMENT</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>7. DEVELOPING COMMONALITY</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>8. CHRs AND CHOICE BASED LETTINGS</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>9. USING ICT TO RUN YOUR CHR</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>10. LAUNCHING A CHR</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>11. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>12. GOVERNANCE</b>	<b>151</b>
<b>13. EQUALITIES</b>	<b>165</b>
<b>14. MAINTAINING MOMENTUM</b>	<b>181</b>
<b>APPENDICES</b>	
Appendix One – Case Study Background	<b>197</b>
Appendix Two – Ethnicity Categories	<b>206</b>
Appendix Three – ICT system specification	<b>208</b>
Appendix Four – HOME Argyll Launch Implementation Table	<b>212</b>
Appendix Five – Midlothian Council’s Joint Protocol Arrangement	<b>218</b>
Appendix Six – Core components and schedules to be included in a CHR legal agreement	<b>221</b>



## MINISTERIAL FOREWORD



The Scottish Government is committed to making it as simple and easy as possible for people to access the housing they need. Common Housing Registers (CHRs) have an important role to play in bringing together housing providers and making the process for tenants simpler and more straightforward than ever before.

Change isn't easy. I recognise that there are challenges in working together on a common application form, providing common information and advice on housing options and in sharing information on housing applications. This guide aims to help you with all of these issues, it explains how these and other issues have been faced and managed by CHR Partnerships across Scotland. The guide highlights different CHR models and the range of ways in which housing providers can be involved to improve the experience of applicants for affordable rented housing.

The Scottish Government continues to support the roll out of CHRs and has awarded a new contract to the Scottish Housing Best Value Network to deliver the CHR support service for a further 2 years. They will continue to provide support to individual landlords as well as gathering and promoting best practice through publications and workshops where ideas can be shared and explored.

Today, there are 16 CHRs in operation across Scotland and they continue to build in scale and scope, but there is more to do. I encourage all social housing providers to use this Guide and the opportunities offered by the CHR support service to take up the challenge of developing a successful CHR in every area of Scotland, bringing benefits to both prospective tenants and landlords.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alex Neil'.

ALEX NEIL, MSP  
Minister for Housing and Communities



The left side of the page features several interlocking gears of various sizes. Some are dark grey, some are light grey, and one prominent gear in the center is a vibrant orange-red. The background is a light grey grid pattern.

# section**one**

---

Introduction



## SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

### *What is this guide for?*

This guide is for anyone involved in developing a Common Housing Register (CHR) in Scotland. It has been written mainly for people who have lead responsibility for developing or maintaining a CHR in both the local authority and RSL sectors. But it will also be useful for all CHR partners, social landlords considering participation in a CHR (both locally and nationally) and tenant organisations involved in the CHR development process.

The Scottish Government produced the first *CHR Practitioner's Guide* in 2004. However, CHRs now have a more established role in the way people find housing in Scotland. This new guide has been developed to:

- reflect the growing body of experience and knowledge gained by CHR partnerships across Scotland;
- provide more guidance on what to do once your CHR is set up;
- give more directional advice about what has been found to work well in CHR development; and
- act as the key publication to support CHR practitioners in Scotland.

### *How should I use it?*

The guide has been developed in such a way as to allow you to dip into the relevant sections when you need advice or assistance on a particular issue.

The guide includes practical examples from across Scotland, and beyond, so that you can learn from what has worked well for others.

### *Other resources*

This guide builds on previous resources produced in Scotland, such as factsheets, case studies and forms and agreements in use by CHRs across Scotland. It may be helpful for you to refer to these as you continue the development of your CHR. The key information and support resources can be found on the [Scottish Government CHR webpages](#) and the CHR Support Service [webpages](#).

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/Housing/16342/chr>

(<http://www.sbe.hw.ac.uk/shbvn/CHR/index.htm?pane=2>)

### *How was this guide developed?*

This guide was developed by ODS Consulting on behalf of the Scottish Government. It is strongly based on the experiences of 14 CHRs across Scotland, who kindly participated as case studies. The 14 CHRs/CHR partners are: Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray CHR (Apply4Homes), Cairn Housing Association, East Dunbartonshire, East Lothian, Edinburgh (EdIndex), Fife, Highland, HOME Argyll, Midlothian, Perth and Kinross, Renfrewshire, West Dunbartonshire and West Lothian.

A short summary of the background to each CHR is available as [Appendix One](#). Support in relation to Section Nine 'Using ICT to Run Your CHR' was provided by the ICT Advisory Service for CHR partnerships based at the Scottish Housing Best Value Network.

The page features several gear graphics. On the left side, there are several dark grey gears of various sizes, some overlapping. In the center, there is a single, larger blue gear. The background is a light grey grid pattern with some faint, darker grey circular spots scattered across it.

# section**two**

---

The Basics



## SECTION TWO: THE BASICS

### *What is a CHR?*

A Common Housing Register (CHR) is a tool which aims to make accessing housing simpler and fairer for people. Specifically:

“A CHR enables people to apply for affordable rented housing by completing just one application form and to receive joined up information and advice about their housing options. Tenants are selected from a single pool of applicants.”

In Scotland, a range of CHR models are already operational and many more are in development. Although approaches vary, all full CHRs should share three key components:

- a single access route for applicants;
- a single database of all applicants seeking housing; and
- shared provision of housing information and advice.

Typically, an applicant will register their need and housing preference by completing a single application form. They will receive information and advice about the range of options available to them. They will then be registered on a common waiting list held by two or more housing providers. Participating landlords then prioritise and select potential tenants from this single pool of applicants.

It is extremely important to recognise that establishing a CHR is often an incremental process. It may involve putting in place one of the key components while continuing to develop others on the way to implementing a fully functioning CHR.

### *Why develop a CHR?*

CHRs bring benefits to both applicants and landlords. CHRs should be based on the commitment that the process will both simplify and maximise access to housing.

- **The applicant perspective**

Social housing is now provided by a far wider and more diverse range of organisations than ever before. Existing systems where each landlord in an area has their own waiting list, based on lengthy paper application forms and home visits are increasingly viewed as unnecessary obstacles for applicants. Indeed some of those with the most urgent housing need may be the least equipped to negotiate this complex system.

Potential benefits of a CHR for applicants include:

- providing simpler and fairer access to housing for all applicants;
- promoting mobility within and between landlords for existing tenants; and
- greater choice of landlords, housing areas and types for applicants and tenants.

- **The landlord perspective**

For landlords working in a system of multiple waiting lists with unknown levels of duplication a CHR makes it possible to see who is in greatest need within an area. A single list enables a more robust estimate of housing need in the area. CHRs can also improve the use of social housing stock by providing a wider range of tenants for the stock available.

Potential benefits of a CHR for landlords include:

- assisting with strategic planning through fully understanding demand;
- improved use of stock through better matching of supply and demand;
- improved housing management including reducing voids; and
- realising operational efficiency through joint working.

“The development of a CHR is not a cost saving exercise – rather a service provision enhancement.” (EdIndex Partner)<sup>1</sup>

### *The Policy Context*

The fundamental aim of CHR policy is to simplify and maximise access to affordable rented housing. Without a CHR, prospective tenants may unintentionally limit their chances of finding a suitable house, either because they are unaware of the range social housing providers in their area, or because they are overwhelmed by the number of different application forms they need to fill in.

Housing law in Scotland requires that social housing is allocated on the basis of an objective assessment of housing need. Without the single list of applicants which a CHR produces, it is extremely difficult to see who, in a particular area, is in greatest need, and allocate accordingly.

---

<sup>1</sup> CHR Position Study, SHBVN, 2008  
(<http://www.sbe.hw.ac.uk/shbvn/CHR/Word%20docs/Position%20Study%202008.doc>)

CHRs also support the provision of consistent, quality advice to prospective applicants and tenants of social housing. Indeed, Councils have a statutory duty to ensure the provision of housing and homelessness advice and assistance to all people, free of charge, in their areas. This goes hand in hand with a simplified application process.



# section**three**

---

CHR Components







## SECTION THREE: CHR COMPONENTS

There are three key components to a full CHR:

- a common application form;
- a single database of applicants; and
- shared provision of housing information and advice.

However, CHR development is often an incremental process. For some partnerships this means establishing some of the key components ahead of others as they work towards developing a full CHR.

### *CHR Key Component 1: A Common Application Form*

The common application form should gather the key information that you and your partners require to assess applicants' housing needs. Experience across Scotland shows that developing a common application policy between partners makes developing the common application form, and more importantly the application process for applicants, significantly simpler.

The information gathered in the form obviously depends strongly on your allocation policy.

The form you produce should be as user-friendly and uncomplicated as is practical. The needs of the applicants should be foremost when partners are designing the application form.

The application form that you produce will be influenced by the model of CHR that you adopt. For example, if you choose a simple model which requires more limited information (e.g. if you adopt a single-pointing system or a choice-based approach) then the form is likely to be smaller. If you intend to undertake home visits on application you will need to decide what information is required in the initial application form, and what will be collected during a home visit.

Key issues include:

- don't start developing the form before the partnership has agreed the objectives and preferred model for the CHR;
- look at the model you are developing to assess what information needs to be collected and at what stage of the process. Be clear about what policies will be used to assess applications;
- where more than one allocations policy is involved, compare policies to identify core information requirements;
- separate out issues which attract points for only a minority of partners' policies – negotiate with partners who use this information on whether they can do without it, or collect it themselves later in the process;
- compare definitions for different aspects of housing need such as overcrowding, housing conditions and health; and
- take your own legal advice to ensure that all questions are compliant with legislation on equalities, Data Protection and European Convention on Human Rights legislation.

### *When to develop your common application form*

CHR lead officers feel that developing a common application form early in the process is beneficial as:

- it gives an early sense of achievement and momentum to the development process;
- it gives impetus to greater harmonisation of policies and/or procedures where it is clear that the form will be too lengthy without this; and
- it provides stakeholders with an opportunity to 'road test' the form ahead of full implementation.

You should not *finalise* your form before other elements are decided (such as the ICT or decisions to harmonise policies/procedures) as these element will influence content. However, it is important to think about the form early in the development process.

“EdIndex was driven by the idea of having only one form – getting the same number of points from landlords was the obvious next step on from that.”  
(EdIndex partner)

### *ICT and the common form*

Previous research<sup>2</sup> on CHRs in Scotland found that there are links between the design of the common application form and the complexity of your CHR ICT system.

<sup>2</sup> CHR Position Study, SHBVN, 2008  
(<http://www.sbe.hw.ac.uk/shbvn/CHR/Word%20docs/Position%20Study%202008.doc>)

You will need to consider how the common application form will fit with your ICT solution. The questions you ask will have implications on the system build, and vice versa. But remember, your ICT solution should not drive the process. Devise a form that is first and foremost easy for applicants to use, and secondly gives each partner the information they require. Then think about how you can use ICT to achieve this. Detailed guidance on ICT is provided in Section Nine: Using ICT to Run Your CHR.

### *Equalities*

An important aspect of the application form, and a key issue for monitoring and forward planning, is how you go about gathering information on equalities groups. In addition to standard information on age and gender, CHR application forms should ask for information on ethnicity and disability. Suggested categories for monitoring are detailed in Appendix Two.

A common application form and guidance should be accessible to all potential applicants. It should meet RNIB Clear Print<sup>3</sup> and Plain English Campaign<sup>4</sup> guidelines. The CHR partnership should ensure that the application form/guidance can be provided in other formats (large print, Braille or audio) and can be translated into different community languages.

---

3 RNIB Clear Print ([http://www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/publicwebsite/public\\_printdesign.hcsp](http://www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/publicwebsite/public_printdesign.hcsp))

4 Plain English Campaign (<http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/formsguide.pdf>)

**Example: Developing a common application form**

Between 2005 and 2007, the three core partners in the **Midlothian CHR** – Midlothian Council, Melville Housing Association and Castle Rock Edinvar Housing Association – met on a regular basis to develop a common application form. At the same time, Midlothian Council was developing a new housing allocation policy, which made the process slightly easier.

In developing the new policy, the Council worked with Melville HA and Castle Rock Edinvar HA to ensure commonality between their policies. The two Associations already had very similar policies. The Council made sure that the categories used within its allocation policy matched those of the housing associations. The pointing framework was still different, but the broad categories were the same. Because of this similarity, it was much easier to develop a common form.

The partners already had very good working relationships, and simply worked through what each partner needed from the form and included this. Generally, the partners agreed that if one partner needed certain information, it should be included. It was relatively easy to agree questions that gathered all of the information required. Although the final form was quite long, it did mean that each of the partners got what they needed from it.

The partners launched their common application form in February 2008, at the same time as Midlothian Council introduced its new housing allocation policy.

**Example: Learning from others**

Developing a common application form in **West Dunbartonshire** was a process of joint working with all partners fully involved, but initially one partner took the lead by collating the information in each partners' existing application form. Each partner sent a copy of their application form to the volunteer who collated the information. The HOME Argyll application form was also issued as a 'benchmark' for the form. This was seen as a good template, firstly because it was already operational, and secondly, because of one of the partner's involvement in HOME Argyll.

A draft application form was discussed by the partners at a steering group meeting, which literally consisted of going through the form page by page with partners commenting as they went through. The application form was then re-drafted based on this discussion, and a final version agreed.

The same process was undertaken to create a common medical form. One partner took responsibility for collating the information contained in each partner's existing medical form and designed a draft version of the medical form. The partners then worked together to comment on the draft, offering additions or amendments before finalising it.



### **Example: Developing an online application form**

**Apply4Homes**, the CHR which is being developed in Aberdeenshire and Moray, will involve a web-based application system. The Apply4Homes website will provide a broad range of information on local housing including:

- information on a location map;
- information on each settlement and local services;
- links to partner websites – such as Shelter and CABs;
- key documents – including the housing options guide; and
- basic information on partner allocations policies.

It is intended that the application system will be “intelligent”, tailoring the questions to the applicant. This means that if the applicant only selects one landlord, they will only be asked the questions needed for that landlord. The planned system will have information and advice for applicants as they fill out the form – for example, if they make limited choices or restrict themselves to landlords with low stock levels or high demand areas, the system will point this out to allow them to amend their choice. The idea is that the questions are tailored to their needs and that the system allows them to make informed decisions about their application.

Applicants will be able to approach any housing provider for advice about an application. Access issues have also been considered. Not everyone has access to the internet and there are many vulnerable applicants who might struggle to use an online system, so support will be available for people in completing the application. Laptops or PCs are to be available in partner offices.

### *CHR Key Component 2: A Single Database of Applicants*

A common database can perform two main functions:

- it allows partners to share applicant information, required for assessing housing need; and
- it allows partners to gain an overview of demand for social housing in their area and to see who is in greatest housing need.

Not all CHR partners need to have a direct link to the CHR database. More peripheral partners are more likely to receive shortlists or single nominations from the CHR.

Previous Scottish Government research setting out CHR Case Studies<sup>5</sup> demonstrated that the database of applicant names is essentially a “behind the scenes”, organisational issue which enables the delivery of a CHR. The real benefits to applicants come from a common application form and co-ordinated information and advice provision. But the case studies found that partners have often seen the development of new ICT systems as a way of solving underlying problems or challenges in CHR development and this in itself has caused problems. The prioritisation of ICT issues in some partnerships has led to a focus on the development of a common database, with less consideration given to improving the process from the applicant’s perspective.

---

<sup>5</sup> Common Housing Registers in Scotland, Scottish Government, 2006 (<http://openscotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/03/20094621/0>)



It is important to bear in mind that:

- ICT merely delivers a CHR, and should not dictate how it is developed;
- it is simpler to design a common database that points according to one allocation policy; and
- there is a relationship between the complexity of a CHR and the complexity of the technology required to deliver it.

It is worth noting that in some cases where there has been an incremental approach to CHR development, initially establishing the common application form and joined up information and advice elements of the CHR has in itself improved the applicant experience.

#### **Example: Building the database on an existing system**

In **Fife**, partners developing the CHR have taken the existing Council system and amended it so that it works for them. The Fife Housing Register (FHR) partners agreed to host their common applicant database on a specifically designed allocations module within the Council's existing housing management system.

The system is located on the Council's network which allows all the partners to access it in real time. However, the system is not online, nor is it web enabled. All forms are input by a team which is managed by Fife Council on behalf of the partners. Across the partnership there are around 500 people who are able to access and view the FHR system but only this team can modify or amend application information.

That means that only one team are inputting applications on behalf of all the partners although all users have access to facilities relative to their role within the housing access system including instructing changes, modifications and other updates.

The system automatically points the applications based on the FHR “Common Assessment of Need”. This is a joint way of assessing and prioritising applicants, which has been agreed by all partners. The system also includes a register of properties, and users have a range of criteria to match applicants with available properties.

### **Why did they go with this system?**

The partnership explored a range of different ICT options but ultimately the existing system was seen as being “tried and trusted” in that the Council system already had a number of the capabilities that the FHR required. The Council also had the skills in house to support the amendment of the system as necessary to meet the needs of all partners. Fife Council had previously worked with the software provider and they developed the concepts and functionality together. The key was to keep the ICT system as simple and stable as possible so partners chose technology that was already being used and was regarded as the safest option.

“We had a choice of either a high risk, high cost, unknown environment, or a CHR that was running with technology that we already know, in house.”



### *CHR Key Component 3: Joined-up Housing Information and Advice*

One of the essential – and often challenging – components of a CHR is the provision of coordinated and high quality information and advice covering all the social housing stock in the area. Applicants should be able to approach any partner to gain access to consistent housing information and advice. This means that partner landlords must be able to provide information on other landlords' stock or have robust referral/signposting procedures in place to give applicants access to the advice they need.

Partners need to be clear about the information and advice they will provide and what they expect staff to be able to do. The service provided should comply with the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers.<sup>6</sup> Approaches must ensure that anyone who may experience barriers as a result of accessibility, mobility, language or other issues can access the same quality of information and advice. Partners should make best use of available data sources in the provision of accurate and up-to-date housing stock information such as the Scottish Continual Recording System (SCORE), the Annual Performance and Statistical Return (APSR) and the CHR itself.

---

6 Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/Housing/access/nationalstandards>)

There are a number of options for delivering information and advice:

- all or some partners are equipped and trained to provide a holistic housing advice service covering providers using appropriate tools (such as a housing options guide);
- partners provide a more limited level of housing options advice covering all stock, but use a referral process for more detailed or specialist information;
- a one-stop shop for housing information and advice; and
- a combination of the above.

There should be ongoing training for the provision of information and advice. New staff should be adequately trained and there should be periodic refresher sessions for all staff.

### *Find out more...*

The Scottish Government has produced a factsheet on CHRs and the provision of housing information and advice. It sets out good practice on delivering housing advice and how this can be linked to your CHR model and is available [here](#).

(<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/08/19120545/05461>)

The Scottish Government's Information and Advice Standards Unit maintain a database of housing options guides which are completed and updated by local authorities. These examples can be viewed [here](#).

(<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/Housing/access/nationalstandards/housingoptions1>)

**Example: Providing housing information and advice**

In **Highland** applicants can access information and advice on housing:

- from each partner landlord's offices;
- on the partner websites; and
- on any of the Council Service Points (which provide information on Council services).

For example, the Council website provides links to wider information sources – like the Housing Options Manual and the Streetwise Directory, which provides advice for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless in the Highlands area. The application form includes information on how to complete the form and a detailed guidance booklet has been developed to help people with this.

The application form is paper based. It can be downloaded, but needs to be printed and sent to any partner office. It is logged and assigned to that “holding office”. Then the applicant can call anyone for advice or information about their application. The idea is to do as much as possible at the first point of contact, but then provide advice from whichever partner office the applicant wants to contact. The system is updated daily and all the partner offices then log on to the same system.

Each holding office is responsible for getting back to the applicants and inputting the application information.

**Example: An online housing information and advice site**

**HOME Argyll** have set up a housing information and advice website, at [www.homeargyll.org](http://www.homeargyll.org). This site has been extremely well used. Since HOME Argyll was launched in October 2006 the site has received an average of between 800 and 1,000 hits per month.

People are using the site to get information on all housing options – including owning, renting from a housing association, renting privately, and presenting as homeless. In 2007, the most popular pages related to:

- information about housing association options, costs of renting, location of properties and the common allocation policy (at least 3,965 hits);
- estate agent contacts and advice about owning a home (at least 3,804 hits);
- renting privately (at least 1,363 hits); and
- homelessness and urgent housing need (at least 837 hits).

The website has been used by both customers and staff as a way of gathering information about housing options in Argyll. It provides a user friendly one stop online information point which was not available before the launch of HOME Argyll.



# section**four**

Involving Tenants and Applicants



## SECTION FOUR: INVOLVING TENANTS AND APPLICANTS

### *Introduction*

While CHR brings benefits for landlords, the fundamental aim of CHRs is to improve the process of applying for a house for the applicants themselves. Since the CHR is there to benefit applicants and tenants looking to move home, it is important that they are involved in decisions about how the CHR is developed and managed.

Landlords will have already set out in their Tenant Participation Strategy how they will involve tenants and Registered Tenants Organisations (RTOs) in decisions that affect them. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 requires landlords to consult with RTOs and tenants on housing and related matters substantially affecting them.

This section relates closely to the issues raised in Section Thirteen: Equalities.

### *Evidence from research*

Scottish research looking at CHR Case Studies<sup>7</sup> in 10 areas found that the primary aim of CHR partners was to improve the process of applying for a house for the applicant themselves. Partners generally saw any organisational benefits as secondary objectives.

---

<sup>7</sup> CHR Case Studies

(<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/03/20094621/0>)

### *When should you involve applicants and tenants?*

- **When planning your CHR**

Applicants and tenants should be involved as early as possible in discussions on the CHR. They should be involved in discussions to agree taking forward a CHR and on how the CHR can bring benefits for applicants and tenants in the area, including: agreeing aims and objectives for the CHR; the CHR model; harmonisation or commonality in policies; the common application form; and the information and advice provided. All of these issues directly affect applicants and tenants.

Officers may be more involved in working through the operational details but applicants and tenants should be involved in key decisions about the nature of the CHR and how it will be delivered to the applicant. It would be best practice for RTO representatives to be involved in any working groups established to take forward implementation of the CHR.

#### **Example: Involving tenants and applicants at an early stage**

Partners in **East Dunbartonshire** were keen to involve tenants and applicants from an early stage.

At the point when they were first thinking about which CHR model they would develop they met with tenants groups in the area to gather views on the options available. The Council has an active tenants' forum that has been consulted on the CHR model and on harmonisation of allocations policies. In East Dunbartonshire this has led to a shared assessment of need.



Throughout the development process RSL officers have reported to their (tenant led) management committees. Committee approval has been required for any key decisions on the CHR. Wider consultation through an annual tenants and residents event highlighted issues such as limited awareness on applying for homes in particular areas, and how to apply to the relevant landlords, particularly where clusters of properties are owned by regional/national RSLs.

In order to involve young people in the process, CHR partners met with young residents at the Project 101 youth project. The young people were given information on CHRs and asked for their views on how a CHR should operate in East Dunbartonshire. When a common application form was developed they were also consulted on its effectiveness.

A pilot was conducted for the new application form to gather feedback from applicants and tenants. The pilot found that some questions were not being understood by applicants and as a result changes were made to the form.

The partners found that there was strong support behind the idea of establishing a CHR and the views of applicants and tenants have helped steer the process. They are keen that applicants/tenants continue to inform the development of the CHR following implementation. The partners are developing a programme of publicity for the CHR to market the CHR to potential applicants and raise awareness among local residents.

- **Once your CHR is up and running**

When your CHR is up and running applicants and tenants should be involved in periodic and regular reviews and evaluations of how the system is operating. Only applicants will be able to tell the partnership how the CHR is working from a customer's perspective – and will be able to highlight any problems in the operation of the CHR.

Consultation through, for example, surveys of applicants on the database and more focused discussion groups with applicants can be very revealing about local people's actual experience of the CHR.

Once your CHR is live tenants and applicants will be able to give you views on how well key elements have been working and how they might be improved. The questions you would hope to answer might include:

- What impact is the single application route having for local people?
- How effective/easy to use is the application form?
- How successful is the provision of housing information and advice in the application pack and from CHR partners?

**Example: Evaluating the impact**

The **Renfrewshire** CHR was launched in two phases. At each stage, the partners evaluated its impact, including consultation with applicants and tenants. Consultation methods included a postal survey of 1,200 applicants and discussion groups with applicants.



Consultation found that:

- applicants found the process of applying to a number of landlords using one form was useful and that applicants felt that the form was relatively easy to complete; and
- the information and advice contained within the form was of good quality.

“It means you don’t have to go to different offices to get a form.”  
(Applicant)

These findings were very important as partners were concerned that the CHR form was not user friendly. Although applicants were positive about applying for housing, they were less satisfied with the information and advice received after they applied. Applicants wanted more information on:

- availability and turnover of properties; and
- individual housing prospects, options and alternatives.

Almost a third of applicants said that they didn’t understand the initial response they received from each partner landlord. This set out the points and priority they had been awarded. This was because they didn’t understand how this related to their housing prospects.

“I would have liked to know about the turnover for each type of property. It would be a gauge of whether you could expect to get that type of house. If there was low turnover you would apply for other types.”  
(Applicant)

Most of the applicants felt that they had applied to more landlords than they would have as a result of the common application form. Most said that they were now more aware of the different landlords providing housing in Renfrewshire and this was seen to be very helpful in considering their housing options.

The application form itself was also seen to be user-friendly, being easy to understand and simple to fill in. But a few of the applicants felt that the form was too long and convoluted in places. Only two-thirds of applicants said that they understood the response they received from each partner landlord. Those who did not said that while they could count up the points it did not tell them how this related to their chances of being housed.

It was clear that good quality housing information and advice is very important to applicants. If applicants are to make informed choices they need a good understanding of their housing options and prospects.

### *Find out more...*

The Scottish Government has produced a factsheet on the role of tenant participation in the development of CHRs. It emphasises that meaningful participation requires landlords to engage with tenants throughout the process, from agenda-setting right through to decision making and is available [here](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/09/1295904/59056).

(<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/09/1295904/59056>)

## *How can you involve applicants and tenants?*

There is growing experience across Scotland of involving applicants and tenants in the development of CHR. A range of approaches have been adopted. The 2008 CHR Position Study<sup>8</sup> highlighted a number of examples of how applicants and tenants have been consulted, including:

- visiting local equalities groups to outline the concept of a CHR and gather feedback;
- consulting local youth groups;
- involving community groups in the appointment of consultants to assist the CHR implementation; and
- writing out to all applicants on the housing list asking whether they would like to be involved in the review of the allocations policy (as part of CHR development).

In order to gain as **broad** a view as possible your partnership might consider undertaking a postal survey of all live applicants on the database, or individual lists if you have not launched your CHR. Surveys should be relatively short and simple – mainly tick box – to encourage people to fill them in and you might consider an incentive such as entry to a prize draw. Around 20 to 25 per cent is an average response rate for a postal survey. Another way to gather a broad range of opinions is through large public events such as community festivals, annual tenants and residents' conferences or one-off consultation events.

---

8 CHR Position Study, SHBVN, 2008  
(<http://www.sbe.hw.ac.uk/shbvn/CHR/Word%20docs/Position%20Study%202008.doc>)

For more **detailed** views on the CHR you will need to hold more focused discussions with local people. These discussions might focus on some of the issues being raised by tenants/applicants and staff in the day-to-day operation of the CHR or issues highlighted in previous broader consultations. A good way to hear about people's experiences and opinions is through focus groups and small group discussions. Groups should be informal and participation should be encouraged by conducting groups in locations that are convenient for the participants. Any expenses should be covered and you might want to reward people for giving their time.

Some residents might not want to take part in group discussions and so it is worth considering holding discussions with individuals. This can be done by contacting tenant and applicants over the telephone. Another option is to involve frontline staff in the process with advice workers taking the opportunity to ask local people what they think of the CHR. Where staff are consulting on the CHR in this informal way, it is important that discussions remain structured around some key questions.

### *Find out more...*

The Scottish Centre for Regeneration has produced a Community Engagement How To Guide (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/regeneration/engage/HowToGuide>) which incorporates the National Standards for Community Engagement (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/94257/0084550.pdf>) and provides a range of techniques (and case study examples) to help you engage effectively with local people. The Scottish Government also outlined good practice in involving tenants in the Guide to Successful Tenant Participation. (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/1125/0076393.doc>)

Further support and advice on tenant participation can be gained through voluntary organisations including:

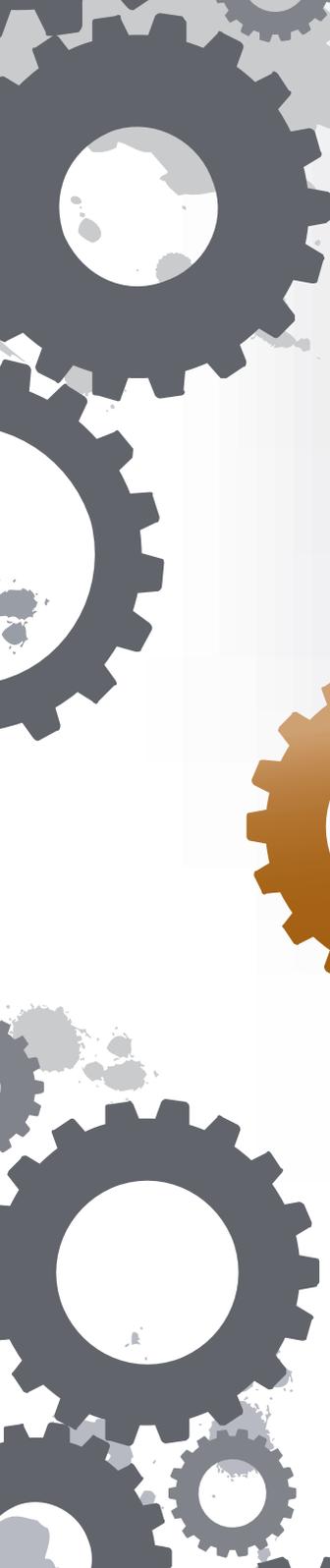
- The Tenants Information Service (TIS) – <http://www.tis.org.uk/>
- The Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) – <http://www.tpasscotland.org.uk/>
- TIGHRA – <http://www.tighra.org/index.htm>

**Example: Consulting applicants before CHR launch**

**HOME Argyll** wrote to all applicants on their list providing them with information about the CHR and the new common allocation policy. All these applicants were invited to contact the independent consultants for discussion and/or a copy of the draft new policy. The draft policy document was also sent to all Registered Tenants Organisations for comment.

There was a good response with over 100 applicants contacting the consultants to discuss either the policy or the CHR. There was general interest in the CHR and most felt that the process would be simplified.

“You get one form for all the different places ... it’s quite good because otherwise you’d have to fill out one form for each one.” (Applicant)



# section**five**

---

Partnership Working





## SECTION FIVE: PARTNERSHIP WORKING

CHR development is an exercise in partnership working. It requires the positive practice of compromise, openness, a shared vision and commitment. Equally, the process of CHR development has been seen to bring additional benefits for partners in terms of improved joint working and stronger relationships between housing providers.

An essential part of partnership working is ensuring trust between partners through equal and open relationships. Many CHR partnerships in Scotland have been led by the local authority as an inevitable consequence of high stock numbers, access to support funding and councils' strategic housing role. Regardless of whether the partnership is led by one organisation, it is important that, all partners are able to share their ideas and have a say in decisions as the CHR moves forward. It is helpful if this sense of equality and trust is supported by clear governance arrangements for your partnership. Governance options are discussed in more detail in [Section Twelve: Governance](#).

### *The challenges of partnership working*

Strong partnership working will enable the best decision-making for your CHR and allow the CHR to be delivered in a joined up way. However, it is important to recognise the significant challenges that can hinder partnership working and face these head on. Some common challenges facing all types of partnership include:

- **Competition between organisations** – although some competition between organisations can be motivating, excessive competition can result in an unwillingness to co-operate.

- **Authority** – it is important that all staff involved in partnership working have the necessary authority to take decisions. Lack of authority slows up decision making and frustrates progress.
- **Purpose** – the broad ranging responsibilities of partner organisations can mean that the specific objectives of the partnership can be forgotten. Also partnerships can often be overtaken by events and lose sight of their main function.
- **Communication** – it can be difficult to get the balance of communication right. Too many meetings can put partners off attending. Too little communication can result in duplication of effort, lack of understanding and mistrust amongst partners.
- **Funding** – there is a danger that some organisations get involved in partnership simply to access funding or to meet statutory requirements.
- **Culture clash** – when different organisations work together it can be difficult to adapt to each other's style of working. Each partner's expectations of partnership working may be different, which can lead to conflict when attempting to establish priorities and goals. The importance of this should not be underestimated.
- **Time** – the partnership working approach often takes longer to produce results than most organisations anticipate. For example, it takes time to develop trust between partners which can slow up the process of making decisions and using resources.

### *Find out more...*

There is a wealth of material on the challenges of partnership working, and the best ways to negotiate these. A good place to start is the Improvement Network website

(<http://www.improvementnetwork.gov.uk/imp/core/page.do?pagelId=1068162>) which focuses on partnership issues and includes a range of case study examples and toolkits (including a partnership checklist).

(<http://www.improvementnetwork.gov.uk/imp/aio/11468>)

The Improvement Network has also put together a list of the ‘Top 10 Partnership Killers’ and suggests solutions to avoid them happening – here.

(<http://www.improvementnetwork.gov.uk/imp/aio/11465>)

The Scottish Centre for Regeneration has produced a Joined Up Working How To Guide<sup>9</sup> which includes guidance research, toolkits and practice examples – and has particularly relevant sections on Joined Up Communication

(<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/regeneration/pir/resources/tools/JoinedUpWorkingHome/Themes/Communication>) and Joined Up Organisational Development and Staffing.

(<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/regeneration/pir/resources/tools/JoinedUpWorkingHome/Themes/OrganisationDevelopment>)

---

9 Joined Up Working How To Guide (<http://www.Scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/regeneration/pir/resources/tools/JoinedUpWorkingHome>)

### *The CHR partnership*

The first stage of developing the CHR is to identify your potential partners. It is important to involve all interested parties in the initial discussions about setting up a CHR, including all social landlords with stock in the area, and those with an interest in the CHR such as potential CHR users such as tenant representatives, voluntary organisations and advice agencies.

A key issue for any partnership is encouraging sufficient participation. Partnerships developing CHRs may experience resistance from some housing providers concerned about changing processes which they feel to be working well, or about loss of independence. Other providers may be reluctant to become involved if they have limited stock in the area or operate across a number of boundaries.

The Scottish Government's policy objective for CHRs is to ensure engagement of all social landlords in a given area. It is important that the reasons for any reluctance to participate are openly discussed – and that the objectives and potential benefits from the CHR are clearly communicated. For landlords with limited stock or operating across CHR boundaries, including regional and national landlords, CHRs should ensure that partners are fully aware of the different levels of involvement possible. These partnership options are outlined in Section Six: CHR Models and Options for Involvement.

Where the CHR partnership involves different levels of participation it is essential that there is effective communication and information sharing. If a CHR working group consists of core partners this group will be acting on behalf of the wider partnership. It is important that any 'arms length' housing providers or others that are taking a watching brief are kept informed about CHR development as it moves forward.

From an early stage there should be close links with existing multi-agency groups in the area to ensure a wider audience engages with the CHR development process. Those not involved in the core working group will be kept informed and have the opportunity to contribute to the ongoing development. This type of linkage with other initiatives will broaden involvement and strengthen the CHR partnership in the longer term.

Good leadership is essential to any successful partnership. CHR partnerships need to identify the appropriate lead officer(s) to take development of the CHR forward both before and after implementation. Lead officers should have good knowledge of allocation and CHRs, the local context and strong project management skills. Good leadership will ensure that there is effective communication between partners and continued dialogue where there are areas of disagreement.

**Example: Ensuring wide involvement in the partnership**

The CHR model for **East Dunbartonshire** was developed after consulting with the 14 landlords operating in the area, including national/regional RSLs and the Council. Some of the national/regional landlords did not appear keen to become full partners so it was decided that the best approach would be move forward with the three main landlords, who held 91% of the stock, and then look at how the others might link in to the CHR. The full partners for the CHR are East Dunbartonshire Council (EDC), Antonine Housing Association and Hillhead Housing Association 2000.

The CHR Coordinator held individual meetings with the national/regional landlords that own stock in the area at the initial phase of development and has remained in contact as CHR development has moved forward. As the CHR moved closer to launch the partners sought to finalise arrangements for involving non-core partners. Two landlords, one national and one regional, said that they would be happy to accept 100% nominations.

**Example: Good communication across the partnership**

In **Highland**, effective communication is seen by the partners as being a crucial feature of the project's success – in its development stages, pre and post implementation. Early work for example focused on engaging RSL committee members, by means of presentations by the Council. This ensured consistent, direct communication and helped promote the benefits of a common approach to key decision makers in the process.

The engagement of front line staff in particular throughout the process has been important in embedding the new CHR approaches so quickly.

“When the principles are explained to people early on they can see the bigger picture – front line staff quickly appreciated the potential benefits to the man on the street.”

“Anyone can plan something, but you need to front-line housing knowledge to make it work.”



The left side of the page features several interlocking gears of various sizes. Most are dark grey, but one gear in the center-right is a vibrant orange-red. The background is a light grey grid with some faint, darker grey circular patterns.

# section**six**

---

CHR Models and Options for Involvement



## SECTION SIX: CHR MODELS AND OPTIONS FOR INVOLVEMENT

### *Introduction*

No two CHR models are the same. And although it would be simpler, in reality there is no one model that works best. There are different ways that a partnership can effectively deliver housing information and advice, a common application form, and a common applicant database.

There is no evidence that one CHR model is better than all the others. Different features can bring advantages or disadvantages. One model will work better than another in a particular local context and CHR partnerships need to decide which CHR model will work best in their local area.

In reality, it is the way in which the CHR model is developed, and not the model used, that is a major deciding factor in any CHR's success. However, there are underlying principles common to successful CHR development.

It is also worth remembering that CHR development is often incremental and may involve putting elements of your CHR in place on your way to establishing a full CHR model.

### *Developing your CHR Model – Underlying Principles*

- **Think of the applicant** – the aim of a CHR is to simplify access to social housing for applicants. This approach means that you must firstly consider the common application form and housing information and advice, i.e. the parts of a CHR that the applicant sees. Then, you should consider how you can support this. A full CHR does involve a common database. But there are plenty of examples of CHRs that have launched initially without a common database, simply with a common form and joined up information and advice. This does create more administrative challenges, as you need to work out how to share information without a common system. But it can be a useful short term measure, if managed well.
- **Build a shared vision to take forward** – the partnership needs to establish a vision for the CHR that sits well with the visions of the individual landlords. The vision will be the basis for discussions on what to include in your CHR model and what not to include.
- **Think what your organisation wants to get from the CHR** – a CHR is only successful if partners are committed, motivated, prepared to invest time and effort, and are prepared to compromise. CHR development should start with a clear idea of what everyone wants from the process. This can only be achieved if you as an organisation are clear about what you want to get from the process, and what issues are less important. This will give you an idea of priorities and limitations.

- **Develop as much commonality as you can** – there is very clear evidence that commonality makes CHR development faster, easier, more cost effective and has a better outcome for partners and applicants. If you are committed to making the application process easier, you must think about how you can harmonise partners’ policies and procedures. Greater commonality can be achieved without individual organisations feeling that they are losing identity (or being dominated by another partner). Clearly, establishing a shared vision that suits the aspirations of all partners will help the partnership more towards greater commonality.

Detailed guidance on commonality is set out in Section Seven: Developing Commonality.

- **Keep it as simple as possible** – it is tempting to want to do everything through your CHR. But try to start with something relatively easy to achieve. CHR development is difficult, and takes time. Being clear and realistic about your aims, and focusing on achieving these can help you to keep your CHR simple. Really think about what is most appropriate in the local housing context, and what you can achieve early on. This helps you to demonstrate and celebrate your success, and the CHR can then be enhanced later on if it works well.
- **Drive the process with committed partners** – CHR development is primarily an exercise in joint working. CHR partners who are positive about their experiences are those who have worked closely with a shared vision. Their experience shows that the successful establishment of a CHR revolves around relationship building, compromise, trust and commitment – all essential components of working in partnership.

If some partners do not believe that they can achieve anything worthwhile from the CHR, progress can be severely hindered. If there are a smaller number of committed partners, it might be wise to start the process with them and focus on expanding membership when the CHR has become more established. Partnerships should look for ways to engage more peripheral partners in the process without hindering CHR development such as associate membership or buddying as outlined below.

### *Building your CHR model*

The CHR Practitioner's Guide gives very clear guidance about the practical elements to consider when building your CHR model. These eight core areas remain relevant today:

- provision of advice on range of housing options within the CHR;
- application form;
- home visits;
- administration (processing, assessing and updating applicant information);
- allocations policies;
- health assessments;
- handling applicants' post-application enquiries; and
- ICT implications: access to the CHR information.

The building blocks exercise within the initial CHR guide is a useful tool for considering your options, or reviewing your CHR model. It remains relevant for considering the basic model for your CHR. The exercise is available here. (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/03/19134/34961>)

### *Examples of CHR models*

- In both Highland and Argyll, a relatively simple CHR model has been adopted. The partners all use the same allocation policy, simplifying the process of setting up and running the CHR.
- In Edinburgh, a relatively complex model was introduced initially, with an ICT system accommodating a wide range of different policies. This approach has since been simplified.
- In Inverclyde partners introduced a common application form without a common database, as an initial measure.

### *Options for involvement*

Within any CHR model, there are many different options for landlord participation. Partners can participate in a CHR in very different ways. However, partners are advised that in the interest of simplicity you should aim to compromise and consider the full range of options for involvement.

Landlords need to be clear about how their involvement can best serve applicants and make access to their vacant properties simpler and more effective. RSLs working across local authority areas will need to be particularly careful that the arrangements adopted don't overcomplicate the allocations process either for applicants or staff.

### *Options: Participation in the common applicant database*

A key area where partners choose different levels of involvement is in relation to options for accessing and sharing applicant information and making allocations. There are many examples of different approaches in both England and Scotland. The range of options available depends on:

- whether partners wish to have their own allocation policy loaded onto the CHR system;
- whether partners wish to have ICT access to the central database; and
- whether partners play an administrative role in processing applications.

The examples below illustrate the different options for partners choosing to be a full partner, or those choosing to be an associate partner through mechanisms such as direct nominations, buddying or topslicing and repointing.

### *Nominations*

CHR partners can choose to allocate their properties through taking nominations from another partner with a similar method of prioritising applicants. This means that the partner does not need full access to the database, and can simply contact the other partner for suggested suitable applicants when a property becomes available.

**Example: Using 100% nominations and moving towards commonality**

The **West Lothian Housing Register** involves three partners – West Lothian Council, Almond Housing Association and Weslo Housing Management.

When establishing the Housing Register, the three partners considered the ways in which they could best participate. They agreed that the common applicant database would be best hosted through the Council's existing housing management system. At the time, Weslo didn't have a computer based application and allocation system. Weslo also felt that there were strong similarities between the Council's allocation policy and its own. The Council was due to review its allocation policy, and Weslo felt that this was an opportunity to create even more commonality.

"We may eventually go for commonality. But we needed to be realistic. Partners have different systems and don't always want to change. Now partners do seem to see the value of commonality – even a common assessment of need."

As a result, Weslo agreed to accept 100 per cent nominations from West Lothian Council as an interim measure. This meant that Weslo did not need to have access to the ICT system. Instead it simply let the Council know when a property was available, and received nominations from the Council's waiting list.

Weslo and the Council now hope that as a result of the Council allocation policy review they will both be able to use the same allocations policy. This means that the arrangement is likely to continue for Weslo.

**Example: A national RSL using 100% nominations**

**Cairn Housing Association** participates in HOME Argyll as a non-core member of the CHR. Having had problems filling some of their sheltered housing in Campbeltown, Cairn approached HOME Argyll to explore working as partners.

Through discussion, arrangements were established whereby Cairn is considered an “associate partner”. This means that they:

- receive 100% nominations from HOME Argyll;
- do not have access to the database of applicants; and
- are included on the CHR application form.

Involvement in the CHR benefits Cairn in two ways:

- raised their profile in an area; and
- reduced void level.

***Buddying***

In a buddying arrangement a landlord will nominate another landlord (usually with a larger stock presence in the CHR area) to take on their letting function for vacancies in the CHR. The smaller landlord (typically with low stock levels/turnover) will choose the partner that has an allocations policy most similar to its own and will approach them when they have a vacancy in the area. The larger landlord will provide either a single nomination or a shortlist of applicants to the smaller landlord. The smaller landlord will then complete the allocation according to its own procedures, typically conducting a home visit to assess the applicant in line with its own policies.

### *Example: Buddy arrangement*

**York Housing Association** is a full partner in York where it has most of its stock. But in Leeds it only has 80 properties. It therefore decided that it did not make sense for it to develop a full ICT link with the CHR in Leeds. Instead, the Council acts as its managing agent and provides it with nominees drawn from the CHR on the basis of York's allocations policy. They may then visit and re-assess two or three applicants to make their final selection.

### *Example: Buddy arrangement*

In **Bristol**, only the larger partners are full partners, with their allocations policies on the system, remote access to that system and with an administrative role. Smaller organisations with little stock in the area do not have their allocation policies on the system, do not have remote access to that system, and do not have an administrative role. Instead, they select one of the full partners to become their "buddy". This organisation then acts as an agent for them.

When a smaller RSL has a vacancy, it approaches its buddy and seeks a shortlist of applicants prioritised according to their buddy's allocations policy, which is loaded onto the system. One of the attractions of this approach is that small organisations can decide which of the full partners' allocations policies is closest to its own, and then choose to have a buddy arrangement with them.

### *Top-slicing*

Another option for partners to consider is top-slicing. There are two ways that this can work. First, partners with similar policies could come to an arrangement. One partner would have access to the system, and pull off a list of a shortlist of applicants eligible for a certain size and type of property, in a particular area as the other partner requires. These applicants could then be re-ordered according to the partners own allocation policy.

Secondly, a variation is for this approach to simply be built into the CHR. A single allocation policy is used to prioritise applicants within the ICT system, and some or all partners can then re-assess the top five or 10 applicants according to their own policy. This approach has the advantage that the ICT system doesn't need to deal with so many different allocation policies, but partners can still have some variation in their policies if required.

#### **Example: Top-slicing**

Within the South Somerset CHR, the common database holds a single pool of applicants prioritised according to one allocations policy, which was jointly agreed by all the partners. Landlords seeking to allocate a property then draw a shortlist of highly-pointed applicants from the list according to this policy, and then apply their own allocations policy to re-order the shortlist and make their final selection.

**Example: Common list administered by one partner**

In **Taunton Deane** the CHR is run by the Council. The Council holds a central database of all applicants. Twenty-four social landlords are involved in the CHR and there are both full and associate members.

Full partners contact the Council CHR team when a vacancy arises. The Council then faxes back details of around six suitable applicants. The RSL will then take over from here in terms of the assessment, home visits and allocations. Full members do not hold their own list and receive all their applications from the CHR.

Associate partners maintain their own lists but can come to the CHR when they require to do so. This can occur when they have a vacancy which they are having difficulty letting.

Associates are mainly those RSLs catering for those with particular needs and include some regionals and nationals as well as a number of small charitable organisations.

**Example: Top-slicing for smaller partners**

In **Leeds**, organisations with less than 120 properties in the area are CHR partners but do not have an ICT link. For these RSLs, the Council acts as a managing agent. If the RSL receives any forms it will forward them to the Council for inputting. When they have a vacancy in their stock, they request a shortlist of suitable applicants which will be selected from the CHR database according to the Council's allocations policy.

### *Options: Participating in the common application form*

CHR partners can participate in different ways in the common application form. In one example, an RSL operates across two local authorities where one area has an operational CHR but the other does not. The RSL has adapted the CHR application form to allow applicants to apply for their stock in both areas. This means that they do not have to fill in two forms.

Other non-core partners – who are not involved in common procedures or policies – may use the common application form as a simple route for clients to access their stock in the area. In practice, this may be as basic as including a tick a box for applicants who want to be sent an application form from a regional or national association which is not a full partner.

#### **Example: Broadening choice through the application form**

**Dunbritton Housing Association** operates in both Argyll and Bute and West Dunbartonshire. Originally there were concerns that this could prove a considerable barrier to their participation in the separate CHRs being developed in both areas. However, both staff and committee members at Dunbritton Housing Association stated their commitment to involvement in the CHR in Argyll and Bute (HOME Argyll), and were hopeful that through joint working between West Dunbartonshire and Argyll and Bute both CHRs could be developed in a way which took account of Dunbritton's situation.



Dunbritton considered the options of:

- being full partners in both CHRs; or
- being a buddy in one or both – asking for information from CHR database from another partner.

They reviewed their stock numbers and progress in both areas, and decided to participate as a full partner in HOME Argyll, as their stock level in this area was growing and CHR development was at a more advanced stage.

Dunbritton includes its West Dunbartonshire stock on the HOME Argyll form. This means that applicants can apply for stock in Argyll and Bute and West Dunbartonshire using the one form, and all information is held in the HOME Argyll common database. In the longer term Dunbritton will consider how to link with the West Dunbartonshire CHR once it is operational. In the meantime, Dunbritton is participating as a full partner in CHR development in West Dunbartonshire.

### **Example: Ensuring all options are promoted through the form**

In **Perth and Kinross** there are nine housing providers with stock in the area who are not yet directly involved in allocations through the CHR. The guidance which accompanies the common application form gives a full list of the other landlords in the area and lets applicants know that they will have to contact them individually in order to request an application form. As well as contact details the form gives details of where the landlord holds stock, the number and type of homes available and whether there are any criteria for applicants or special features in relation to the properties or allocations process.

### *Options: Providing housing information and advice*

Options for the provision of housing information and advice range from providing basic advice and signposting, to providing more comprehensive housing options advice and undertaking personal housing planning.

#### **Example: Information and advice from a holding landlord**

In **Manchester**, information and advice is provided by the organisation or office which received the original application and holds the case papers. This particular office informs applicants of their housing prospects on behalf of all CHR partners. Staff are trained in providing advice on other partners' stock with extensive information on stock type, availability and turnover which is held on the CHR system.<sup>10</sup>

### *Options: Participation in decisions about the CHR model*

Finally, there are options for how organisations actually participate in decisions about the CHR model. Landlords can either fully participate in CHR development, or can use other arrangements to be involved in the development process. For example, some landlords opt to simply receive information about CHR development to help inform their decisions. Others opt to nominate one representative for two or three partners, to limit the staff time dedicated to CHR development.

---

<sup>10</sup> CHRs: Considering the Options, Scottish Executive, 2001  
(<http://cci.scot.nhs.uk/housing/chr/docs/chrco-00.asp>)

Landlords with stock in an area where a CHR is being developed will, as a minimum, want to be clear about the vision for the CHR and the emerging model that is being developed. Decisions on the level of involvement will be influenced by the CHR model that is being developed – whether landlords feel they can integrate easily with what is being proposed or whether they need to influence how the CHR will operate. The level of involvement in CHR development, and ongoing involvement will be influenced by the level of stock held in the area and the level of turnover.

**Example: Taking only a watching brief**

**Hanover** is a national special needs RSL with housing stock in 10 local authority areas where CHRs are operational or being considered. Hanover have found it feasible to have different levels of involvement in different CHRs. It participates in the national CHR SHOP, – run by Bield, Hanover and Trust Housing Associations. It was also a full partner in Homechoice. It represented Bield and Margaret Blackwood in CHR development in the Scottish Borders. And it maintains a watching brief over Fife, Renfrewshire and North Lanarkshire CHRs.<sup>11</sup>

---

11 CHRs: Implications for National and Regional RSLs in Scotland, 2002  
(<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2002/12/15949/15118>)

### *Landlords operating across more than one local authority area*

Decisions about how to participate in CHRs are vital for all landlords. But they are particularly important for regional and national landlords operating across more than one local authority area. Guidance for national and regional RSLs<sup>12</sup> identified that in Scotland, nearly a third of RSLs work in more than one local authority area. Of these, 28 operate in three or more areas and nine operate in ten or more areas. Several have stock in more than 20 areas. While some RSLs have a relatively even distribution of stock across all their areas of operation, others have most of their stock in one area, with much smaller holdings in other local authorities. The Scottish Government guidance for national and regional landlords states that it may not be practical for regional and national RSLs to be fully involved and electronically integrated with CHRs in every area in which they have stock.

Regional and national landlords should think about the type of involvement they want to have in a CHR – and consider the options for involvement outlined above. There is no single answer to the difficulties faced by regional and national RSLs in Scotland. The decision depends on the local housing context, and what is acceptable to CHR partners.

---

<sup>12</sup> CHRs: The Scottish Executive's Guidance for Regional and National RSLs, 2002 (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/10/31140746/0>)

**Example: A national landlord working across a range of CHRs**

**Cairn Housing Association** is a national housing association with over 3000 homes under management across Scotland. Cairn HA is involved in a number of operational CHRs and in discussions with CHR partnerships developing their CHR. They have varying levels of stock in different CHR areas. They have chosen different levels of involvement varying from full partner status to involvement as an associate partner accepting 100% nominations.

**Involvement as a full partner in Highland and Edinburgh**

Cairn HA wanted to be fully involved in the Highland Housing Register (HHR) because they felt it was important to have a partnership which covered the whole of the Highlands.

“This is about making sure the right people get the right homes. The partners wanted a consistent service across the Highlands.”

Cairn HA participates in the same way as the other full partners, having adopted shared policies and procedures. Cairn HA makes a financial contribution based on an agreed formula (used to assess all partner contributions).

Cairn HA is also a full partner in EdIndex where policies and procedures were harmonised between the landlords operating traditional lettings (non-CBL). For Cairn HA, shared policies and procedures have not been a problem, as each organisation can still decide and agree its own priorities, and let properties accordingly. The harmonisation has made the system easier to understand for applicants.

As a national housing association, Cairn HA has recognised that there will be different approaches in areas across Scotland: “You can’t be rigid and say we are a national so we do it this way.”

### **Involvement as an associate partner in Argyll & Bute and East Dunbartonshire**

In East Dunbartonshire where the CHR is in development Cairn HA have only a small number of properties and very low turnover – typically only one vacancy each year. As such they are not a main player in housing provision in area. However, they are supportive of the CHR and wanted to find the most straightforward way of becoming involved.

Cairn HA previously had a 50% nomination arrangement with the Council in East Dunbartonshire and they recognised that a shift to 100% nominations would have minimal impact due to their low turnover in the area. Accepting 100% nomination was considered to be the most practical of participating. It would mean an additional landlord for CHR applicants to choose from, and would reduce their work on allocations for such a small amount of stock.

Cairn HA have a similar 100% nominations arrangement with the HOME Argyll CHR where they have a small amount of sheltered housing in Campbeltown. When the CHR was developed Cairn HA decided to re-establish the nominations arrangement they had previously held with the local Council. For Cairn HA, this would help overcome the problems of trying to let stock in Campbeltown from an office in Glasgow as well as being the most practical way of participating in the CHR in relation to their relatively small amount of stock.

### *How can we change our approach during development?*

It is unlikely that the ideas generated at your first CHR meeting will become the final model for your CHR. Issues may come up which represent an obstacle to progress and mean that a change of approach is necessary. Typically, a change of approach is required to overcome a practical issue or make the CHR model more effective, or to reach agreement on a model which is acceptable to partners.

#### **Example: Rethinking the CHR model during development**

In **West Dunbartonshire** partners have found new impetus having reached an impasse in the development of a CHR in the area. New life was breathed into the development process following some external support from the Scottish Housing Best Value Network (SHBVN). Although there had been initial progress in mapping areas of commonality, investigating options and holding discussions with national/regional RSLs, CHR meetings in West Dunbartonshire had not lead to an agreement on procedures or policies. At this time of initial development, many people involved in the CHR felt that progress was slow. Some partners felt that certain partners were more motivated than others and that interest dwindled following the end of the CHR Coordinator's contract.

Partners felt that the CHR had not made sufficient progress and so came to a decision to formally take stock of developments to date. This process was put out to tender for an independent view on what the CHR had achieved and what the next steps should be. In December 2007, the SHBVN facilitated a discussion with WDC and the partners about the future of the CHR. All the core partners attended. This meeting was felt to be of value and the first step in getting the partners together again around the table. Following the SHBVN discussion, the partner organisations in West Dunbartonshire agreed, with renewed optimism, to work towards a CHR.

“The partners were quite motivated; they agreed there needed to be a change – a compromise to get something up and running, even if it wasn’t all singing all dancing.” (CHR partner)

CHR development is now well underway with partners having agreed a draft common application form, and are discussing the details of a common allocations policy.

### ***How can we change our model once we are up and running?***

When you have agreed your CHR model, worked through the detail and got the new processes up and running you should still be receptive to making changes. It is likely that the CHR may have to be amended as local contexts change. Often CHRs are established with a view to further development later on in terms of expanding the number of partners and/or developing the scope/sophistication of the CHR model.

Partnerships may also identify operational problems with their CHR or feel that a change to the model will make the CHR more effective. Clearly, there needs to be strong monitoring and evaluation processes in place to ensure that any problems or inefficiencies can be identified.

The Scottish Government has produced a national monitoring framework for CHRs.<sup>13</sup> This was designed to help CHRs think about how they measure their performance. It sets out a number of potential indicators, but emphasises that these can be adapted to the local context. It suggests that whatever approach is taken to performance monitoring, CHRs should consider:

- how to make information available both for the CHR as a whole, and individual landlords;
- the geographical level at which information needs to be reported;
- how information will be collected and how often; and
- how action will be taken based on the findings.

It emphasises that the monitoring framework is designed to measure the added value and impact of the CHR itself, not the whole housing application and allocation process.

“CHR are part of the allocation process within a wider housing management function for social landlords.”

SHBVN<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Developing a Monitoring framework for CHRs Final Report, SHBVN, Heriot-Watt University, 2006

(<http://www.sbe.hw.ac.uk/shbvn/CHR/PDFs/Develop%20Mon%20Frameworks%20%20Apr%202006.pdf>)

<sup>14</sup> Developing Performance Indicators/Measurements for Common Housing Registers, SHBVN, 2005 (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/05/09111806/9>)

Across Scotland there are several examples of CHR models being further developed after implementation. The examples below demonstrate how a CHR can be changed to make it simpler and easier for applicants to understand, and how a CHR can be developed to make it more automated.

### **Example: Rethinking the CHR model once operational**

**EdIndex**, the CHR for Edinburgh, has developed substantially since its launch in 2003. At that time the CHR consisted of a common application form, central administration and a shared ICT database and system, but each partner still retained their own allocation and assessment policies.

Since then there has been recognition that having 25 separate allocations policies has made the development of the CHR particularly the common application form and the supporting ICT system complex. Partners also felt it was potentially confusing for applicants. Following a partner event in 2006, work began on developing greater commonality. Partners have gone down two routes to do this. Some landlords have adopted a harmonised assessment of need and others have adopted a Choice Based Lettings approach. This has resulted in essentially two systems running where there were 25 before.

Partners in Edinburgh stressed the need to continually review your CHR when it is up and running. They also feel it is important to work with other RSLs to explore what their plans are, and work together where possible. It is important to build on common areas, and not to develop your approach in isolation from the CHR.

“You can’t rest on your laurels. You need to keep an eye on it. You need to keep developing and shaping the system.”

**Example: Rethinking the CHR model once operational**

The **Perth and Kinross CHR** has continued to develop since it was established in 1996. The CHR involves three core partners – although a comparatively small number of landlords, these three own the vast majority of stock in the area (over 95%). The original CHR model involved a common application form, a central processing unit, and an ICT system that would re-point the waiting list according to the separate allocations policies. Management of the database has been the responsibility of the local authority. Since setting up the CHR partners have continued with their own allocations policies and have sought to make the ICT more integrated.

The partnership introduced new software for the CHR in order to link in each of the core partners to the database. This allows partners to download shortlists directly, pointed according to their allocations policy. The system also has built-in additional features such as automated overcrowding calculation.

Moving to a more sophisticated ICT system clearly has implications in terms of costs and staff time. Transferring information from one system to the next was a more lengthy process than partners had predicted. ICT can make the process more complex and one partner had to overcome initial difficulties in terms of establishing a secure interface. But initial problems are being overcome: “The ICT is getting easier and people are understanding it better.”



The background features a light gray grid pattern. On the left side, there are several dark gray gears of various sizes, some overlapping. A single, larger blue gear is positioned in the center-left area. The text 'sectionseven' is located in the upper right quadrant, with 'seven' in a bold font. Below the text is a thin blue horizontal line.

# section**seven**

Developing Commonality



## SECTION SEVEN: DEVELOPING COMMONALITY

### *Why is commonality important?*

With increased experience of CHR in Scotland there is growing awareness of the importance of commonality, i.e. harmonisation of policies and procedures. CHR partners are finding that building on areas of commonality and bringing policies and procedures into line, makes the CHR simpler for applicants and more straightforward to establish and manage.

Several CHR partnerships across Scotland have found that establishing a CHR with a range of individual allocations policies is complex. Partnerships have also found that this complexity cannot be justified given the high level of commonality that already exists between the partners' allocations policies. There are many examples of partner landlords looking at their policies and recognising that they are essentially prioritising the same people and assessing need by broadly the same criteria.

In recent years, there has been a considerable change in practice, with more and more CHR partnerships working to create commonality in their allocation policies and surrounding procedures. At the time of the 2007 CHR Baseline Study,<sup>15</sup> just five CHRs were developing or had implemented a common allocation policy, and two had or were developing a common assessment of need. By the time of the 2008 CHR Position Study, this had increased to 12 and five respectively. In addition, around half had introduced common medical assessments.

---

<sup>15</sup> CHR Baseline Study, SHBVN, 2007

(<http://www.sbe.hw.ac.uk/shbvn/CHR/PDFs/Baseline%201.pdf>)

The Scottish Government's CHR Case Studies<sup>16</sup> found that harmonisation and commonality in policy and practice are very important to creating a successful CHR:

"In areas where partners have been prepared to compromise on existing policy and practice, they have found the process of establishing a CHR much simpler than in areas where organisations have sought to hold on to existing procedures."

Harmonisation and commonality has also helped to simplify the ICT solution required to deliver a common database. Indeed for some CHR partnerships, the delivery of a full CHR with a common database would not have been possible without harmonisation of allocation policies. Some areas have found that in retrospect, they could have simplified their CHR through increased harmonisation.

The 2008 CHR Position Study<sup>17</sup> also found that introducing common procedures – such as common medical assessments – reduced the time and resources that partners required to dedicate to these areas.

In some cases partners have recognised after agreeing and implementing a CHR model that the CHR can work more effectively, and be more straightforward for applicants, when there is harmonisation of policies and procedures.

16 Common Housing Registers in Scotland, Scottish Government, 2006  
(<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/03/20094621/0>)

17 CHR Position Study, SHBVN, 2008  
(<http://www.sbe.hw.ac.uk/shbvn/CHR/Word%20docs/Position%20Study%202008.doc>)

**Example: Developing common policies and processes**

Since the launch of **EdIndex** – the CHR for Edinburgh – partners have recognised that the early decision to retain all 25 separate allocations policies made the process of developing the application form and ICT system more complex and difficult. Making changes to the ICT system (in response to organisational changes) and work to shorten the application form highlighted the difficulties of having so many different ways of doing things within one CHR. There was a feeling that developing greater commonality would make the system easier to understand for applicants, which partners had been committed to from the beginning:

“EdIndex was driven by the idea of having only one form – getting the same number of points from landlords was the next obvious step on from that.”

(CHR partner)

There were, however, fundamental differences in the way in which partners allocated properties. At that stage about a third of EdIndex partners were committed to Choice Based Lettings (CBL), about a third supported greater harmonisation with a traditional approach to allocations, and the remaining third were less certain or undecided on the best approach.

In order to simplify the picture RSLs were asked whether they would like to look at developing CBL (several landlords were already interested in adopting CBL) or work with others to develop a harmonised assessments of need. Two working groups were established to explore these options further.

The EdIndex partners have the following advice for others developing common processes:

- Partners need to be committed to improving the application process for tenants.
- A willingness to compromise is needed on the basis of partners being prepared to challenge their own policies and procedures and being clear about what is, and what is not, needed.
- Good communication is very important. Having a core working group gives focus and drive, but consultation and communication with those outwith this group is vital.

Increasingly, partnerships that are developing CHRs are looking at commonality as a *first step* in the process – and harmonising policies/procedures where possible and practical.

**Example: Ensuring commonality is there from the start**

**HOME Argyll** was launched in October 2006 involving:

- a common housing allocation policy;
- a single housing application form; and
- joined-up housing information and advice, including a new website.

The partners feel that there have been three positive outcomes for creating commonality. The first was the obvious difference the common application form had made to applicants. The form is now seen as clearer and simpler. The second benefit of commonality was that more consistent information and advice was available for applicants – whichever housing office an applicant enters, they receive the same information. Thirdly, the partners agree that common processes have led to better joint working, and there are now improved channels of communication between them. Due to Argyll's geography front line staff had often never worked together in the past, and have now built relationships which encourage sharing of information and expertise. Strategically, organisations are also more engaged. Committees are also developing a better understanding of how each organisation works, with joint events allowing the opportunity to share experiences and build links.

“There is more communication between partners now, as previously it was a case of ‘them’ and ‘us’.”

Partners in Argyll and Bute offer the following advice for those planning to work towards greater commonality:

- Start out with a common allocation policy

This simplifies the rest of the process, and above all makes the process easier for the applicants.

“I’d recommend the common allocation policy as a starting point – without that, then you’ve failed ... it just simplifies the rest of the process.”

- Keep talking – The partners felt the success of the CHR can be determined by the people ‘around the table’ and that personalities can have a lot to do with making it a success.

“It all depends on who is round the table; there can be negotiators and dictators but you have to be ready to compromise and not be precious.”

- Keep in mind the common goal – and to remember that the hard work starts once the CHR is up and running!

“Getting the CHR up and running is just the first step – you have to keep refining the policies.”

- Get feedback from front-line staff – Partners have found their operational group made up of front line staff very beneficial and would suggest starting something like this early in the process of the CHR.

“The operational sub-group has been invaluable to us.”

### *How to harmonise your policies and procedures*

CHR development is primarily an exercise in joint working. Successfully establishing a CHR depends upon relationship building, compromise, shared vision, trust and commitment, all essential components of working in partnership.

Case study examples have highlighted the importance which partners place on ensuring that the right people are involved, with most partnerships seeking to bring together a mix of strategic decision makers and operational staff, who will be involved in implementing the CHR at an operational level. One of the benefits identified for the development of CHRs was related improvements in joint working between the partners.

#### **Example: Working towards commonality**

In Highland, there were two main drivers for developing common policies and procedures including a common allocations policy:

- it would make life easier for applicants, who wanted a clear system of pointing; and
- it could make the development of a common application form and an ICT system more straightforward.

Early discussions had focused on developing a common application form, based on the existing sets of policies and procedures, but this had proved difficult. In addition, the initial work on developing a common application form highlighted the opportunities for a common set of policies and procedures:

“There was recognition that there were fundamentally more similarities than differences between the various organisation’s own policies. We knew the ICT impact of having different policies would be significant.” (CHR partner)

The Highland Housing Register (HHR) Working Group (made up of Housing Managers from each organisation) developed the common policy and procedures over a year. The group first focused on areas of commonality, then began discussing areas of difference between the organisations. Although it was resource intensive, partners found it relatively straightforward.

The partners recognise that it has been a positive step to develop common policies and procedures, but appreciate that such fundamental changes have to be effectively managed:

“The shared allocations policy has been a big step. We all had to be clear that it would be better, or as good, as what existed. We had to be sure nothing would be lost. It has been important to be clear about the downsides as well, and where these are outweighed by the benefits. The Committees have been able to focus on how this shared approach has improved the system and benefited customers.”

The result is a shared policy and set of procedures for how all the HHR partners will manage the housing list and allocate houses. This includes:

- a common allocations policy – which has a shared system of pointing;
- consistent assessments of poor housing conditions and health needs; and
- common procedures for gathering evidence to verify application details and for references.

The shared allocations policy is available from all of the partner websites.

### *How to develop a common allocation policy*

Where CHR partnerships have supported work towards a common allocation policy an effective approach has been to establish a dedicated working group (typically a sub-group of the main CHR working or management group). Broadly speaking, the process involves:

- reviewing existing policies;
- refining the common elements – areas of similarity where little further work is required; and
- dealing with issues at the margins – further negotiation on areas where there is no existing consensus.

Although the time required to achieve commonality has varied across CHR partnerships, and there are cases where the process has been relatively quick and straightforward, it is likely that harmonisation work will require regular meetings and a significant commitment of staff time. But this investment should save time and money in the longer term, and provide a more effective CHR for applicants.

It is also important to remember the duty the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 places on landlords to consult on policy reviews with tenants and RTOs.

**Example: Developing a common allocations policy**

**HOME Argyll** was one of the first CHRs to establish a common allocations policy. This is underpinned by a range of common procedures.

Following a feasibility study which concluded that the prospect of a CHR was viable, the partners established a harmonisation group. This consisted of relatively senior housing staff who also had experience of dealing with applicants. The aim of this group was to work through each of the partners' policies and to come up with a common policy all could agree upon. The issues discussed included definitions of poor property condition, lack of amenity and overcrowding and how tenancy references would be gathered.

Following the early success of the harmonisation group, the partners decided to develop a common assessment of need. All the current priorities within each of the allocation policies were printed onto cards and as a group, the partners were asked to rank the categories in order of importance. There was some debate and discussion, for example around issues such as homelessness, but a broad framework was agreed.

A session was held with relevant stakeholders to discuss progress with the CHR and to seek assistance with some of the more difficult aspects of commonality. During the discussion one committee member suggested it would be simpler to have a full common allocation policy rather than just tweaking the existing ones. The partners all agreed this would be easier to achieve and would ultimately be simpler for applicants.

The harmonisation group met to develop the draft allocation policy. To help inform their work, guest speakers and other specialists were invited to give talks on key areas such as health assessment. The partners looked at other CHRs to see what approaches others were taking. With help from an independent consultant, liaison took place with directors and managers as well as committee members to maintain motivation. The partners worked hard to negotiate and compromise to achieve a draft policy.

### **What made it work?**

To achieve these aspects of commonality, the partners sat round the table and discussed and debated different elements of their allocations policies. The whole process was facilitated by an independent consultant and the partners indicated that this was one of the key successes of this element of the CHR.

“It was a question of sitting down with the partners and looking at the allocations policy and saying ‘we do this ... what do you do?’ And agreeing which was the best way.”

Other aspects of commonality that HOME Argyll has achieved are joint policy development for homelessness and antisocial behaviour and joint service provision such as a shared approach to translation and interpreting services.

CHR partnerships are increasingly seeing the development of common policies as a key stage in getting an effective CHR up and running. However, some partners may still have concerns about giving up individual policies or key elements of their policy which they are committed to. Key to success is ensuring there is a shared vision that partners are committed to and working towards.

In some areas where there has been reluctance to develop a full common allocation policy partners have been working towards developing a harmonised assessment of need. This introduces a shared pointing system for applications but allows individual landlords to allocate homes according to their own policy. This allows landlords to prioritise particular groups in different ways if they choose.

**Example: Developing a harmonised assessment of need**

In **Edinburgh**, a working group was established involving staff from RSLs interested in retaining a traditional approach to lettings but with harmonised assessments. Getting the right mix of people involved in the group helped ensure different skills and perspectives from quite different organisations.

When the group began work it quickly became clear that there was a significant amount of similarity between how organisations allocated properties and managed lettings. Two aspects to the work were identified:

- refining the common elements, i.e. the areas of similarity that would be relatively straightforward to harmonise; and
- dealing with the elements where there was no obvious common ground.

Over 18 months, the group met regularly. It was labour intensive but there was continuity of staff throughout. There were various steps in the process.

Once the group agreed on the principle of having a common pointing system, the sub-groups (homelessness, harassment and so on) were agreed. The working group took a back-to-basics approach, and considered the legislative requirements for assessing housing need. This helped focus on what partners should be doing, rather than what they actually did.

Then the group looked at how points were currently being allocated by the different landlords. This was developed into a matrix. Obvious areas of common ground which were refined and agreed by the group. The group then looked at areas of divergence. There were some quite unique issues that were being pointed by some landlords, and these needed to be discussed. There were some areas of disagreement on definitions between landlords, e.g. on overcrowding. When the harmonisation was generally agreed the group revisited and refined the application form. This involved assessing whether all the questions were really needed and refining the answer requirements.

At key stages the group called meetings to update all partners, and consult on progress.

Developing a harmonised assessment of need with a common pointing system was not an easy process. It took time and focus by the working group. Those involved in the working group realised that people can be defensive about their own organisation's policies, and it took time to rationalise them. Throughout the process people had to ask themselves questions about their allocations policies, and what information they really needed. It made them consider what really mattered and what didn't.

Allowing others to decide whether to come on board with harmonisation until nearer the end of the process was important too as some people need to understand the detail of a policy or process before committing to it. It also has the benefit of a smaller, more focused group, being responsible for developing the process.



# sectioneight

CHRs and Choice Based Lettings

---







## SECTION EIGHT: CHR<sub>s</sub> AND CHOICE BASED LETTINGS

### *Traditional and 'Choice Based' Application Systems*

There are two broad approaches to the application and allocation process in Scotland. Traditionally landlords have used a landlord led approach. This means that the applicant applies for housing, giving broad indications of their choices, and then the landlord assesses their housing need. The applicant then waits to see if they receive an offer from the landlord.

Increasingly, landlords have been moving towards an applicant led approach – often known as Choice Based Lettings (CBL). This means that the applicant provides some information and is categorised according to their housing need, usually using a banding system with categories such as a gold, silver and bronze. The applicant then regularly checks what homes become available, and decides which homes to register an interest in. This requires the applicant to be more proactive in their search for housing, and can mean that applicants become more discerning in their choices as they gain a more realistic understanding of their housing options.

### *How can a CHR run with CBL?*

In Scotland, there are CHRs in operation where partners all use an applicant led approach, others where partners all use a landlord led approach, and others where there is a mix of both applicant and landlord led approaches. The CHR Case Studies<sup>18</sup> found that applicant led or landlord led lettings can work just as well in conjunction with a CHR as landlord led approaches. But, CHR development can be significantly simplified through ensuring that all partners in the one CHR adopt either an applicant led or landlord led approach, and that the application process is consistent, simple and transparent.

CBL can operate effectively within a CHR. **Commonality** within the CHR is key to developing and implementing a choice based system. The more commonality there is, in terms of information required from applicants, processes for administration, and policies for assessing housing need or medical issues, the easier it will be to develop CBL. The previous chapter discussed commonality in more depth.

CBL represents a significantly different way of working and it is essential that suitable training and support is provided. Equally, having several landlords adopt CBL over a relatively short period of time will be challenging and will require strong support and project management.

---

<sup>18</sup> Common Housing Registers in Scotland, Scottish Government, 2006  
(<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/03/20094621/0>)



It is also essentially that applicants are sufficiently aware of what CBL will mean for them. The introduction of CBL needs to be publicised and good information and advice on how CBL will operate provided. Where different lettings systems will operate within a CHR area it is particularly important that applicants are aware of the distinction and what is required under the different systems.

### **Example: Rolling out CBL within a CHR**

When the CHR began to be developed in Edinburgh, the Council was already planning to move to CBL. The CHR ICT system has been developed as part of the wider system within the Council. So, from the very beginning, the CHR was developed in a way that supported CBL.

The Council launched CBL at the same time as the CHR went live in 2003. In 2008, a further 12 landlords moved to CBL. At the same time, eight landlords within the CHR moved to a harmonised assessment of needs.

### **The shift towards Choice Based Lettings within EdIndex**

As part of their business planning process partners held a development day in 2006 to discuss future plans for the CHR. By then the CHR and CBL were well established, although only the Council was using CBL at that time in Edinburgh. Some partners were already interested in CBL, and all partners agreed that having 21 different allocations systems was making the ICT complex, and was potentially confusing for applicants. It was agreed that two working groups should be established to explore harmonisation assessment of need for those wishing to continue with traditional approaches to lettings and another to further explore the opportunity for more landlords to go down the CBL route instead.

The fact that CBL was already being operated within the CHR, and the Council already had the ICT and administrative arrangements well established were important considerations for partners in thinking about moving to CBL. The Council was also meeting the majority of the costs. CBL offered what one partner described as “an existing solution” to simplifying the lettings approaches. The Council actively worked to support other landlords use the system that was already operating effectively for them.

Following a successful pilot, four landlords adopted CBL in 2008 and there was a phased approach to bringing the others on board with CBL. The Council and twelve other landlords are now operating CBL in Edinburgh.

Individual landlords wanted to keep control over their own allocation priorities. CBL is very much seen by the partners as a different system for identifying applicants rather than making all organisations allocate their properties in the same way.

Partners feel that having CBL didn't really affect the CHR model they have adopted:

“It is quite possible to implement a CHR and CBL at the same time without one dictating the other.”

**Example: Practical experience of using CBL in a small CHR**

In **East Lothian**, two local landlords (East Lothian Housing Association (ELHA) and Homes for Life Housing Partnership (HfL)) have developed a CHR based on the Homehunt Choice Based system. The CHR partners feel that the system has been operating well and that it is not difficult to make CBL work within a CHR.

“There’s no doubt that CBL and CHRs can work well together.”

Partners feel that there are both challenges and benefits to adopting CBL within your CHR. One drawback they have found is that CBL can only provide information on need in areas where they have stock and sufficient turnover. Where they have no presence they are reliant on information from the Council list. However, information on demand is building up over time. Development partners have started looking for information on how many applicants are choosing particular areas and what types of homes they are looking for.

Although increased time has been invested in advertising and publicity, adopting CBL has reduced the level of administration despite a major increase in the number of applications from around 680 applicants on the list to typically having around 3,500 live applications.

One of the main advantages of adopting CBL and a CHR is increasing applicant access to more properties. Because East Lothian is such a high demand area partners believe that most applicants are on both the Homehunt system and the Council list. The landlords are now proposing to operate a joint Mutual Exchange list (whereby tenants can swap property with another tenant) in which East Lothian Council has expressed an interest in participating.

Partners also feel that the Homehunt system is more transparent and easier for applicants to understand than traditional allocations systems

### *How to manage different application processes*

Examples across Scotland show that CHRs can work where some of the partners use an applicant led or choice based system. Key to the process is strong partnership and good communication among landlords that are operating different application processes.

Partners need to keep the overall purpose and objectives for the CHR very much in mind as they try to negotiate any stumbling-blocks which result from operating multiple application processes. Partners need to make sure that the perspective of the applicant is foremost and find solutions that make the application process as straightforward as possible.

#### **Example: Operating a CHR with different application processes**

All partners in Aberdeenshire and Moray are equal in terms of the decision making process but different partners use the Apply4Homes system in slightly different ways. None of the partners were using CBL when the CHR began to be developed but now two, Castlehill and Tenants First, use the Homehunt lettings system.

Integrating CBL has never been seen as a major difficulty and has not influenced decision making at a strategic level, although it was very important that Apply4homes could accommodate CBL. The partnership was strong enough that CBL could be openly discussed and accommodated.



“The beauty of what we are doing is that it can accommodate a range of perspectives and approaches to housing – people do not have to use the same application process or allocations policy.”

In many ways, it has been simpler to accommodate landlords using CBL than those using traditional approaches to lettings. Those using CBL need less information for applicants initially, which means they do not have unique or specific questions to cover in the application.

There was also a sense that involving landlords using CBL has had a positive impact on the work to rationalise the application form:

“[RSLs using CBL] have really brought a challenging role to the group. They will say: ‘if answering a question isn’t going to help you allocate points, then why are you asking it?’.”

Where some partners are keen to move to a choice based system the CHR partnership should explore how this can be accommodated within the CHR. While some CHRs have worked to accommodate differences including setting up short term arrangements to ensure that partners using CBL can continue within the CHR, others have not accommodated CBL, leading to tensions and considerable frustration.

Partners may hold different views on the benefits of CBL. But where there is significant support for a switch to CBL it is important to explore the different options available and consider the implications of them within the CHR.

**Example: Transition to a revised form for CHRs operating different application processes**

Partners in **Midlothian** launched their common application form in February 2008. Following its launch, Castle Rock Edinvar Housing Association, which operates across a number of local authority areas, and is part of the wider Places for People group, made the decision to move to a CBL system. This meant that they required different information from applicants, and the common form no longer gathered everything they needed.

As a short-term measure, the partners agreed to continue with the common form. Applicants who were interested in Castle Rock Edinvar were asked to fill in the common form, and then a separate choice-based letting registration pack.

In the long term, the partners wish to adapt the common application form to gather the information that Castle Rock Edinvar needs to register applicants on the choice-based system. These changes will be agreed and made at the same time as some minor adaptations to the form when it is reprinted in 2009.

**Example: Challenges to integrating CBL within the CHR**

Homechoice, the CHR for **Aberdeen**, went live in 2000 but effectively stopped operating in 2007. At the time of launch no partners were using CBL but once it was up and running Castlehill Housing Association and Tenants First Housing Co-operative became interested in CBL, and began discussions with the partners to see how the system could accommodate it.



A six-month pilot ran in 2004 and 2005 to test how CBL might be integrated into the CHR. Four landlords were involved in four areas of the City. Properties were advertised online, in the Options Shop and in a city newspaper that was mailed out to applicants. The scheme was seen as being popular, and led to the allocation of a wide range of different stock. The ICT system cost £93k to run the pilot but the evaluation of the pilot identified the need to further develop the ICT system to support CBL properly.

However, partners feel that it was differences in view on the benefits of CBL for applicants and on the implications for the operation of Homechoice which contributed to the withdrawal of landlords from the CHR. On reflection, most partners believe CBL could have been integrated and operated within Homechoice effectively. There is a belief that CBL is not that different to more traditional approaches to allocations in that you need many of the same elements from a CHR. The key differences are around advertising and promotion.

“In reality, Choice Based Lettings could have been accommodated.”



The background features a light gray grid pattern. On the left side, there are several dark gray gears of various sizes, some overlapping. A single, larger blue gear is positioned in the center-left area. The text 'sectionnine' is located in the upper right quadrant, with 'section' in a standard weight and 'nine' in a bold weight. A thin blue horizontal line is positioned below the text.

# section**nine**

Using ICT to Run Your CHR





## SECTION NINE: USING ICT TO RUN YOUR CHR

### *What is ICT for in a CHR?*

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is a tool to help you achieve the outcomes you want to see from your CHR. It is an instrument that should **deliver** the CHR and its objectives. Technical issues should not define your CHR or direct its development in any significant way.

You should not focus on ICT requirements too early in the process but should be well down the road to finalising your CHR model and how the CHR will operate before identifying your ICT needs. By the time you talk to ICT consultants/staff, you must be able to clearly explain what you want your CHR to do.

However, it has become clear over recent years that ICT considerations cannot be left to the very end of the process. For example, it is important that you consider the likely cost implications of the ICT system required for the CHR model you are developing. The model may need to be reconsidered at a later date if ICT costs are too high for the partnership. Indeed, there is a danger that if you do not consider ICT issues early enough in the process you may have to rework your business model as a result of ICT being undeliverable, overly expensive, or a due to limited buy-in from all partners making the model unworkable.

Clearly, a simpler CHR model is likely to result in simpler and less costly ICT requirements. There may be opportunities to keep the process simple where a partner's existing ICT system can be used to take the CHR forward.

### *What are the options: For sharing information?*

The first key component of a CHR is a single route for applicants to different housing providers in the area. Sharing applicant details through a common database is one way of doing this. But there are other options for the shorter term.

At the most basic level, partners that are inputting applicant information individually need to ensure that each partner sees the applicant information. This could involve technologically simple options such as faxing or photocopying and posting or hand delivering the application to other partners. Alternatively ICT can be used to speed up the process by scanning and emailing applications between partners.

These options do not deliver the core CHR component of a common database of applicants, although may be part of an interim phase towards this. And while sharing information in this way keeps ICT costs to a minimum, there is duplication of effort with staff at each of the participating landlords re-inputting the same applicant information. The technologically simple solutions are likely to require more investment of staff time and associated costs. Partners also need to consider whether these options provide sufficient security for the transfer of data.

#### **Example: Using ICT for a single application route**

Partners in **Midlothian** did not feel that it was necessary to set up a common database with applicant details in the first instance. They felt that they could operate a common form simply by sharing information through email and passing hard copies between offices.



Each of the three core partners therefore accepts the common application form. Midlothian Council and Castle Rock Edinvar Housing Association both scan and share the form by email. Although Midlothian Council needs the whole form, Castle Rock Edinvar only needs the first page, which includes applicant details. It then asks applicants to register separately for choice based letting. Melville Housing Association keeps the hard copy. Midlothian Council and Melville Housing Association have offices on the same street, and so simply pass forms between offices. Any other evidence is also scanned and shared, or passed between offices. In practice, Midlothian Council has been receiving the majority of the forms and passing these on to the associations.

Both Midlothian Council and Castle Rock Edinvar were already set up to scan and share documents, and so no new investment in ICT was required. The Council did purchase the CHR module for its housing management system, in case a common applicant database was required in the future. The partners all have excellent relationships, and they “just put their heads together” to come up with an ICT solution. For example, Midlothian Council offered to meet the cost of Melville Housing Association purchasing scanning equipment if required.

The arrangements for scanning and sharing hard copies works well. All of the partners are able to easily and simply access the information they need for processing applications and making housing allocations.

So far, the main benefit of the CHR has been for applicants in terms of making the process simpler and clearer. The partners have seen some increase in their workloads relating to applications and allocations in the initial stages of the CHR.

### *What are the options: For creating a common database?*

Where the CHR is delivering a database of applicants the ICT options relate to how information is **inputted** and the level of **automation** and **access** to the database.

Inputting of information can be done either by some or all of the partners, or by a nominated partner or central processing unit. There are clear cost implications for establishing a dedicated central processing unit and resource implications for any partner that undertakes all the data inputting for the CHR. Participating landlords will have to weigh-up these costs with the cost in staff time of sharing the burden of inputting – and the ICT costs of developing remote access to the central database.

The common database will be held at a core ICT system. This central system will have the capacity to produce shortlists of applicants as required. The greater the commonality between partners, the less work will be required of the ICT system to produce appropriate shortlists. Hypothetically, if all partners in a CHR have agreed a common allocation policy the system can produce shortlists pointed to the one policy each time a landlord has a vacancy. The more landlords with separate pointing systems that are fully linked into the system, then the more sophisticated the system will need to be in order to be able to re-point the database according to a range of policies.



One option which simplifies the ICT specification, but sees some double inputting, is for a partner without an integrated policy to request a shortlist from the core ICT system which is pointed according to a similar allocation policy (for example in a buddying arrangement). This shortlist is then manually inputted to the partner landlords ICT system for pointing according to their own policy.

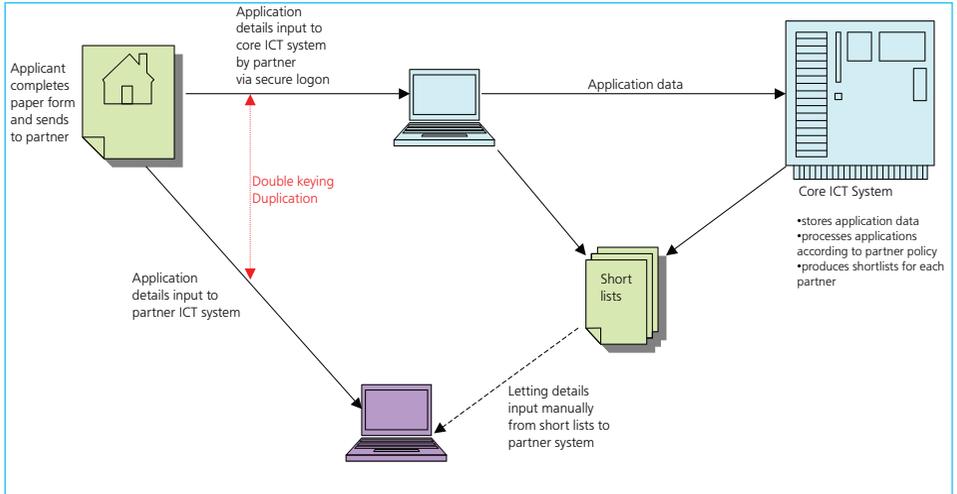
In addition to automatic pointing the CHR partnership will need to consider the level of access that is desirable. The system will be able to produce either manual shortlists for partners without a link or full partners will be able to view the shortlist through secure access to the database.

### **Example – potential ICT models**

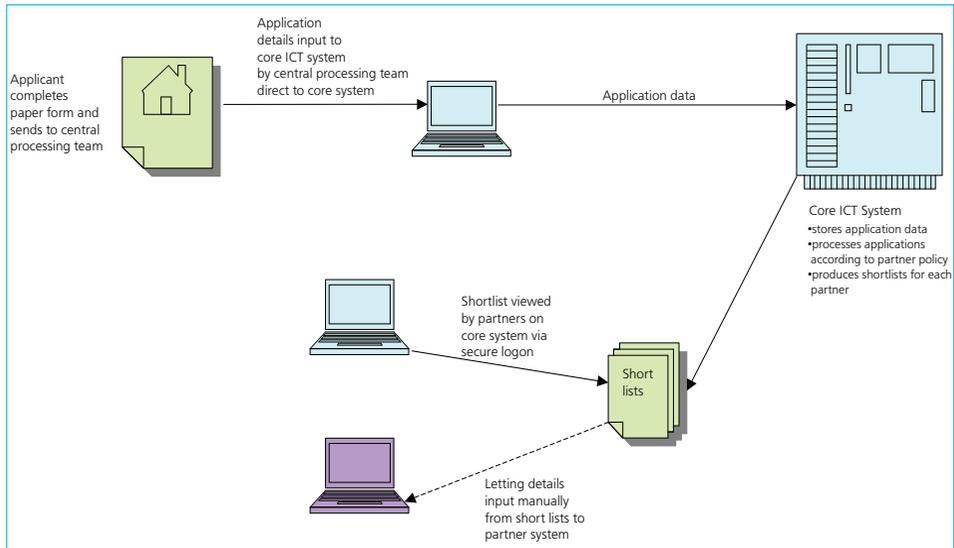
The ICT Advisory Service for CHR Partnerships based at the SHBVN have developed schematic diagrams showing the systems that have been developed after partners have considered the issues relating to inputting, access to the database and automation. In the diagrams below, partners with a link to the core ICT system are represented in blue while those without are shown in purple. Option One is based on the proposed system for the North Lanarkshire CHR where partners with a secure link to the system input application data themselves. Partners without an ICT link are forwarded applications to input to their own system.

Option Two is based on EdIndex where a central processing unit inputs application details. Clearly these options are not exhaustive but give a sense of how an ICT solution will look where partners have different ICT status.

Option One



## Option Two



### *How do we decide which option is right for us?*

When CHR partners are considering ICT options decisions will be influenced by:

- existing ICT arrangements;
- the number of housing allocations they are likely to make; and
- the potential size of the common database.

These issues will underpin any assessment of costs and whether a particular ICT solution represents value for money. For example, partners who only allocate a small number of homes each year may not want to spend significant amounts on establishing an automated ICT link. There may be cost savings in using an existing ICT system. An example of this has been seen in HOME Argyll where the CHR is hosted on the Council's pre-existing housing management system.

The CHR partnership will need to decide how complex the core ICT system needs to be. Issues that will influence this decision include:

- the level of commonality that has been achieved;
- the number of landlords involved in the CHR;
- the number of landlords with high levels of allocations and who are therefore more likely to need a link to the core system;
- potential resource savings from shared administration; and
- potential resource savings from automated matching of vacancies and applicants.

The ICT solution will be somewhere along a scale, running from the most simple to the most complex. Developing a comprehensive, complex system will require the highest initial capital costs. The most complete ICT system would be capable of:

- giving the correct level of priority to applicants according to any partner's allocation policy;
- reordering the database according to several different allocations policies;
- allowing electronic access to the database by a range of partners from different locations; and
- providing an automated property matching function.

Clearly such a system will be costly to develop. Greater commonality of policies and procedures will reduce the level of complexity and ICT costs. Partners will also have to assess the costs of developing the ICT system against potential benefits of reducing staff time spent on administration/allocations.

**Example: Keeping it simple**

**Fife** took the existing Council system and amended it. The Fife Housing Register partners agreed to host their common applicant database on a specifically designed allocations module within the Council's existing housing management system.

The system is located on the Council's network which allows all the partners to access it in real time. All forms are input by a team which is managed by Fife Council on behalf of the partners. The system automatically points the applications based on Fife Housing Register's common assessment of need. The system also includes a register of properties, and users have a range of criteria to match applicants with available properties.

The partnership explored a range of different ICT options but ultimately the existing system was seen as the best option. It was already in use and already had in that the Council system already had a number of the capabilities that the Fife Housing Register required. The Council also had the skills in-house to support the amendment of the system as necessary to meet the needs of all partners. Fife Council had previously worked with the software provider and they developed the concepts and functionality together. The key was to keep the ICT system as simple and stable as possible. The choice to develop a CHR that would run on proven technology was regarded as the safer option relative to other options that were considered at the time.

“We had a choice of either a high risk, high cost, unknown environment, or a CHR that was running with technology that we already know, in house.”

Partners feel that the key to having a successful ICT system is to keep things simple in terms of knowing what it is you want the system to be able to do, and to find the best way of achieving that. Very often it could be that the existing ICT system can be used, or adapted to save on costs.

“There is no point in getting a system with bells and whistles if you don’t need them, or won’t use them.”

### **Example: Problems with complex ICT requirements**

In **Renfrewshire**, it was agreed that the preferred solution for the ICT system would be to link a module to the Council’s new housing management system. At the time of this decision, the Council had just purchased this system and it had not yet been introduced.

But the process of moving to a new ICT system for a large organisation such as a local authority takes a significant amount of time. This meant that Phase One of the CHR was launched in 2003 using the Council’s existing ICT system to share information between partners. The system was enhanced to accommodate the common application form, and to give all partners remote access.



Each partner input the application forms they received into the common ICT system so that the others could see them and also into their own housing management system for shortlisting applicants. This double inputting was inefficient and created significant backlogs of applications. This was exacerbated by increases in demand, creating difficulties administering the system. It also reduced customer service for many partners and negatively impacted on the time taken to let properties.

As a result of this, work began to develop a data transfer interface where information could be downloaded directly from the ICT system into individual RSL systems. This would mean that there was no need for double inputting. The Council's IT department worked closely with each of the partners to develop an interface and help with the transition to the new system. This was a positive period of strong joint working between partners.

Partners were integrated onto the system between December 2005 and May 2006. Although there were some operational issues, partners were pleased that the system was working and was moving forward as a functioning CHR: "It gave us an indication of how a CHR could work."

Partners were getting used to working on the system and were gaining confidence in the CHR. But the Council's transition to the new ICT system was due to go ahead in October 2006 and this meant that the CHR database would also be transferred. The CHR was temporarily hosted by the new ICT system but shortly after its introduction it became clear that the system was not able to handle the complexities of the partners' different allocation policies. With hindsight, this area of functionality should have been explored before this system was selected.

It was agreed that further development work was needed, and the RSL partners reverted to the Council's old ICT system. Renfrewshire Council has continued to use the new system for its housing list. There were concerns that the process of transferring data between the Council's ICT systems had corrupted some of the information, with a number of inaccuracies becoming evident on RSL partners' housing lists. Eventually, the partners all reverted to using their old ICT systems, and the CHR was wound down.

Partners would now advise others to make sure that any ICT solution developed within a CHR is fully tested before going live.

### *How do we pursue our preferred option?*

- **Developing an ICT specification**

CHR partners need to be absolutely clear about what they want their CHR to deliver before they bring in ICT specialists to develop the system. This means putting together an easily understood list of everything that you need the system to do to make your CHR work.

The term ICT specification sounds technical but putting the list together is not a technical exercise. The ICT experts should take care of technical issues. The task for CHR partners is to think about everything the system will need to do in order to deliver your CHR objectives.

An example system specification for a comprehensive, complex CHR is given at [Appendix Three](#). This gives a good indication of the range of elements you may wish to consider including in a specification.



- **Tendering**

The partnership may choose to develop the CHR with an off-the-shelf ICT system, or decide to build the CHR on a housing management system currently in operation with one or more of the partners. In either case you will need to involve ICT specialists that are best able to deliver an ICT solution that meets the specification.

If this means bringing in external consultants you will need to develop and advertise a brief for the CHR ICT system. The ICT brief should clearly explain the background to the CHR, the purpose and objectives for the CHR, the CHR model chosen, and the detailed specification outlining the ICT requirements. The brief should also outline your expectations in terms of training for staff and ongoing support.

- **Managing your ICT provider**

The relationship between the CHR client, i.e. the partnership and the ICT provider is an important element in making sure your CHR is delivered successfully. The relationship should be built on a robust specification and a clear understanding of responsibilities.

When you have appointed an ICT provider they become another partner in the development of the CHR. You are working towards the same goal and are not on opposing sides. This understanding needs to be established at the beginning of the process and will rely on involvement of senior staff within the partnership and at the ICT provider.

It is essential that you have a single point of contact at the supplier that you will be able to contact throughout the life of the project. It is then important to establish an “escalation route” to deal with any issues arising as the project moves forward. You will need to have an escalation route within your own organisation or partnership and you need to know what the escalation route is beyond your point of contact within the supplier organisation. Since you are responsible for delivering the CHR you need to have the confidence to take control if barriers appear.

It is important to have a full project plan established for the development of the ICT system. This will set out a path to delivery including key stage dates and the go-live date. This should be agreed with the supplier along with escalation steps should dates be missed. Make sure you get regular progress updates from the supplier and make sure you feed back to them what other developments are taking place in the CHR.

### **Example: Developing an innovative ICT system**

#### *Getting started*

The **Aberdeenshire and Moray** partnership (Apply4Homes) started by exploring what they wanted the ICT to do. With ICT consultants, they developed a vision for the application system and developed a specification. The basic idea was that instead of filling out the whole application form, the applicant would only need to complete the necessary questions for the landlords they were applying for. This approach was very much driven by a desire to develop a system that was user friendly, without the need to agree a common policy. The partnership identified companies able to create an online application form through a tendering process managed by Aberdeenshire Council.



### **A web-based application system**

Apply4homes is a web based application system.

“You can think of it as an application portal. It is simply a way of applying for a house.”

“What we have done is like replacing ten different post boxes with one. The system then sends the information back to the ten other post boxes where it can be dealt with by the landlord. Nothing else changes.”

As the partners are retaining their own allocation policies, they all need to gather different information from applicants. The Apply4Homes system will be designed to take account of these, but simplifies the process for applicants through the development of “intelligent processes”. An applicant will input basic information – like their name and address – which is common to all landlords. Then they will select the areas they want to live in from an interactive map. The system will identify which landlords have homes in that area and the rest of the questions are tailored to the information only those landlords need.

### **Data management and ICT**

Applicant information from Apply4Homes will be transferred to the partners’ individual housing management systems overnight. This will involve a file being created which can then be picked up by each partner’s own ICT system. Staff in each partner organisation will then look at the information each day before validating and accepting the information into their own system.

Each partner is planning a slightly different way of linking to the Apply4Homes system. Moray and Aberdeenshire Councils are developing an interface together as they both use the same ICT systems. This allows costs and development time to be shared.

Getting the new system to work with each partner's system has been extremely challenging.

"In theory it should not be a problem, but in reality it always is."

There are plans to develop a Service Level Agreement before the system goes live. It will set out protocols, how information will be shared and timescales for inputting data. A data sharing policy is also being finalised.

### **ICT costs**

Some of the capital costs have been met by CHR funding from the Scottish Government, but additional capital development costs have been shared between Aberdeenshire and Moray Councils. Running costs will be shared across the landlords on a pro rata basis. Each RSL is then paying for the development of the interface needed to connect their own system with Apply4Homes.

The ICT has cost more than originally envisaged. But partners feel that it has not been as expensive as it might have been. Increases have largely been due to changes to what partners want from the system. From a local authority point of view, working across two geographical areas has had cost benefits, as they are sharing the development cost.



### Challenges along the way

There was general agreement that the ICT development process has been very challenging, and has not as yet delivered what the partners had hoped for. The system is not yet as intelligent as partners had hoped, and there are still a number of issues to be resolved. The main challenges have been:

- ICT security – There have been concerns about the security of sensitive data held within the ICT system.
- Lack of commonality – Some partners suggested that starting with greater commonality rather than relying on the intelligent system to limit the number of questions may have been more effective and perhaps easier.
- Terminology and jargon – Some people involved felt that their lack of ICT knowledge had made the process more challenging.  
“Everyone is ICT aware up to a certain level or point. But we do not talk the same language as the ICT developers sometimes do.”
- Resources and timescales – Progress has been slow and early delays have led to further delays with the ICT supplier and the partners. It has been a resource intensive process, and some partners feel this led to some of the delays because most of the people involved have other responsibilities. There was also a sense that the partners may have underestimated the task in terms of its size, the length of time and its complexity.





# section**ten**

---

Launching a CHR







## SECTION TEN: LAUNCHING A CHR

This section considers the issues involved in launching your CHR. Going live with your CHR will involve a number of tasks to be delivered within a short timeframe. The main activities involve managing the publicity and information strategy, establishing your single database of applicants, and managing lettings during the transition period. The key activities you will have had to complete before you can launch your CHR:

- formal sign-off of agreed policies and procedures which will make up your CHR;
- implementation of ICT solutions, including testing;
- testing or piloting of CHR procedures to ensure smooth operations;
- legal agreements and service level agreements signed by all partners;
- approval of branding, PR and publicity strategy; and
- CHR application forms printed.

The CHR partnership should establish a clear Implementation Plan for the launch of the CHR giving a fixed timetable for all the tasks that need to be undertaken and which partner(s) are responsible for completing the task. This should include detailed tasks that need to be undertaken both pre- and post-implementation.

### *Find out more...*

HOME Argyll was officially launched in October 2006. Partners established an Implementation Timetable setting out all tasks which had to be completed in the period August to October. The timetable also included key tasks that would be ongoing post-implementation and is included as Appendix Four.

### *Training for staff*

Staff from all partner organisations should be given comprehensive training on the CHR. This will involve delivering a series of training sessions in the lead-up to the CHR launch, as well as ongoing training post-implementation. Training provides a good opportunity to strengthen the CHR partnership. Running joint training courses will bring partner organisations together and can help encourage a real sense of partnership working.

The content of training will vary with the CHR model adopted and the level of involvement of individual partners. However, all training should help staff understand how the CHR works, how they can make best use of it and how they will advise applicants. The training should give staff a sound understanding of all stages of the CHR application process including the application form, provision of housing information and advice, arrangements for processing forms, updating applications, and advising applicants on progress of their application. If staff have access to the system, and/or an inputting role, it is probable that specialist ICT training will need to be provided on using the system.



In addition, launching a CHR marks a new way of working for staff and will often see a significant change of culture for partners. Staff will be expected to have knowledge beyond their own organisation and work with partners operating in different areas and potentially with different client groups. These issues should be considered in training and staff should have a clear understanding of the implications of the CHR in terms of working practices.

**Example: Supporting staff before and after launching**

In **Highland**, the challenge of embedding new systems and process for a large number of staff was addressed through extensive training.

The partners invested in training on both the IT system and the new shared policies and procedures. Before implementation the training brought to the surface frustrations about the changes and concerns about increased workloads:

“It was a bit fraught. But people accepted this and carried on – we hoped people would be brought along with us.”

A second round of refresher training was completed late in 2008 after the system went live. This proved particularly useful as, having used the system, staff were able to pinpoint areas where support was required. Before running the training the partners looked at the quality tests run on the system to identify problems with how people were using the system, so that this could be tackled through the training. Staff feedback on the training has been very positive.

**Example: Training for new health and housing need assessments**

Partners in the **Argyll CHR**, agreed that staff would be in the best position to assess health in relation to housing need. In the past, many partners had used a medical professional to assess health and housing needs applications. This was a new, and very different, way of working. The frontline staff group met fortnightly to consider applications that they were unsure of how to deal with individually. The group also cross checked a small number of applications to ensure consistency in how applications were being dealt with.

In addition, an e-bulletin with common issues arising from processing applications was circulated on a weekly basis. This was used to complement and update the procedural guide, again to ensure consistency. It didn't always go smoothly. Sometimes it became clear that partners were assessing applications in different ways. But these procedures meant that discrepancies were identified relatively quickly, and a common approach agreed.

***Publicising the CHR***

As well as ensuring that staff are clear about the new system, you will need to provide positive information on the CHR to people in the area – existing applicants, stakeholders such as advice agencies and the wider public.



CHR partnerships should develop a clear publicity strategy setting out actions, timescales and allocating responsibilities. When developing your publicity strategy, partners should think carefully about:

- what you need to say;
- who you need to say it to; and
- how and when to get the message across.

Publicity material should explain the reasons for the new approach and the benefits of establishing a CHR. It should provide clear information on how the CHR will operate and what the implications are for existing applicants, including any action they will need to take to ensure they are registered with the CHR.

Timing is important in effective publicity. You should raise awareness of the CHR early – but not so early that you are not able to respond to detailed questions about how the CHR will work.

In order to reinforce the message, you should repeat the information about the CHR several times in the lead-in to launching the CHR. This is particularly important where applicants are required to re-register for the CHR. In this case there should be several opportunities to reregister and reminders provided about registration.

### *Establishing your single database*

A key task in establishing your CHR is moving from the multiple housing lists held by partners to a single list of applicants. This can be a time consuming task and will have to be conducted while applications continue to be received and allocations made. Partners will have to agree how they will carry out the process.

Given that landlords will probably have been collecting different information, it is likely that you will need to collect further information from applicants to ensure that all applications can be considered by all the participating landlords. The data collection process for the re-registration of applicants is likely to involve one of two options:

- collecting partial additional information from existing applicants – this depends on how much information is missing from the existing lists and would require applicants completing an application review form; and
- requiring existing applicants to complete the new common application form – this would ensure consistent, complete and up-to-date information on the database ensuring more efficient CHR. But this would be more time-consuming for applicants.

Whichever option is adopted you will need to collate the existing lists into a single list, removing duplicate applications. This will ensure that each applicant is written to only once to re-register. Where landlords hold electronic lists these can be brought together in an electronic master list. The duplicate entries can then be deleted. Where one or more landlord only holds a manual list they should compare their list with the master list adding only applicants who do not already appear. They would then pass on the master list to the next landlord holding only a manual list who would then carry out the same exercise.



The re-registration exercise will involve several forms and a significant amount of inputting. If your CHR model involves a central administration unit you would probably expect the unit to undertake the inputting. However, if you plan to share administration across partners, staff at all organisations will have been trained to input onto the system, and so you all staff can share the task of inputting the forms. Whichever approach you take, this will be a large task and partners need to ensure that there are sufficient resources in place to complete it successfully.

### *Dealing with lettings during the transition phase*

Partnerships need to have a clear strategy in place for dealing with new applications and lettings while they are setting up the single database. Options for accepting applications during the transition include:

- Applicants continue to use existing forms until the system is fully operational. New applicants would complete the landlord's existing form and after the launch complete the new common form within a short period of time.
- Applicants complete existing forms and complete the new common form – applicants would fill out two (or more) forms. They would be considered for vacancies under the individual landlord system(s) and would also be entered onto the CHR system ready for launch.

Whichever option you choose you should focus on ensuring that the process is as straightforward as possible for the applicant. If an applicant submits an individual application form for a landlord you should accept the application, explain the changes taking place, and ask them whether they would like their application considered by other CHR landlords.





# section **eleven**

---

Financial Management



## SECTION ELEVEN: FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

### *Types of cost – development and running*

The costs associated with any CHR will vary according to the level of complexity. More sophisticated central elements such as a central administrative unit, a one-stop shop for the provision of housing information and advice, and a complex ICT system will be associated with higher costs initially at least.

But it is important to consider any savings that will result for individual partners as a result of shared allocations processes. Many of the centralised revenue costs associated with running a CHR will replace costs to individual partners. And, an efficient CHR model has the potential to result in an overall cost saving for partners.

Partners also need to recognise that many of the costs associated with the development and running of a CHR would be incurred or partly incurred in the normal development of housing management practice. Although establishing a CHR will highlight issues to be addressed as best practice, partners should be realistic about what costs would arise if there were no CHR and you were continuing with your existing allocations process. For example, individual partners would periodically undertake reviews of their allocations policy, they may upgrade their ICT systems over time, and would have to meet the additional costs for issues such as the allocation of housing to registered sex offenders.

When developing a CHR partners need to consider the following types of cost:

#### **Development/capital costs**

- staffing (project management, ICT development/support, administrative)
- research/feasibility work
- ICT – feasibility, specification, development work, system build or procurement
- publicity, public relations and consultation
- ICT – hardware and software including electronic links
- network extension and security
- office set-up costs
- central administration unit set-up costs
  - one-stop shop set-up costs
  - transitional arrangements (including merging existing lists/undertaking a review to create a new, single list)

### Revenue costs

- Staffing including recruitment, training and other on-costs
- Rents and office facilities – photocopier/fax/telephone installation and rental etc
- Overheads
- ICT contracts
- Administration costs including inputting forms, collecting/verifying additional information etc
- Production of forms including training manuals and procedures
- Publicity
- Updating applicant circumstances
- Ongoing waiting list review

### *How to develop a framework for sharing costs*

The key to sharing CHR costs is agreeing a framework which is fair and acceptable to all partners. However, the sharing of costs is not a perfect science and will be based on “reasonable estimates”. In some cases in Scotland the adopted approach to sharing costs has been a compromise which partners view as interim and subject to review after implementation.

Typically, costs of the CHR have been divided according to a cost-sharing formula based on one or more of the following:

- the total number of units of stock managed by each landlord;
- the number of tenancies held by each participating landlord;
- use made of CHR over a set period i.e. number of lets;
- number of applications to each landlord within the CHR; and
- a combination of two or more of the above, which can be weighted.

Different costs can be shared using different approaches.

Before you can decide whether a cost-sharing formula is fair you will need to assess how the contribution to the CHR compares with what was spent on applications and allocations before the CHR. This is something that has not been widely done across Scotland leaving a rather hazy picture of the costs of the allocations process pre- and post- CHR implementation.

- **How to assess what you spent on applications and allocations pre CHR and post CHR**

This is an exercise best done ahead of launching your CHR as it is difficult to do retrospectively (see below). It requires some self-monitoring on the part of staff members and equal commitment from CHR partners. Partners will also have to agree what is a reasonable time period in which to measure activity on allocations. Partners should decide on the appropriate time of year and number of months to undertake the monitoring exercise.

- Partners should record the volume of applications they receive and process and the number of allocations they make in a given time period
- Using work diaries/time sheets, record the amount of staff time spent on applications/allocations – i.e. processing and checking applications, dealing with waiting list enquiries, administration and review of the waiting list, prospect interviews, reporting, training and management etc.
- Record the amount spent on associated resources – stationary, printing of applications forms etc.
- Collectively, partners should assess the level of duplication of effort pre CHR by comparing the applicants on their waiting lists.

Partners will want to consider these costs against the development and capital costs and revenue costs anticipated for the preferred CHR model to help them decide if the proposed model represents value for money, and how they wish to approach the sharing of costs.

Following implementation, the partnership should review the costs of running the CHR to ensure that the financial management arrangements remain appropriate. This will involve a similar exercise as that undertaken before launching the CHR – i.e. monitoring overall staff time and spending on the application/allocation process along with new central/shared costs for the CHR.

- **How to assess costs retrospectively**

Partnerships may wish to undertake a comparative assessment of pre and post CHR costs after they have launched their CHR. Conducting the assessment retrospectively will rely on estimates and will not be as accurate as an assessment conducted before and after launch, but essentially you will be aiming to measure the same cost elements.

Partners should assess the current costs for running the CHR in the way described above: setting an agreed time period and monitoring staff time and spending on the application/allocation process. This should include resources associated with allocations including, for example, any stationary or printing costs incurred by individual partners as well as central/shared costs for the administration of the CHR.

Individual landlords should then make best estimates for spending on allocations before the CHR was established. The most accurate picture will be built up by the considering staff numbers involved in allocations and asking staff how much time they spent processing and assessing allocations for the agreed time period. Consulting previous annual budgets should help with the assessment of resource costs such as stationery, printing etc.

**Example: Assessing costs before and after launching the CHR**

**Renfrewshire CHR** partners wanted to be able to compare the time and resources dedicated to the application and allocation process before and after the launch of the CHR. This would help them to assess whether it had met one of its core aims – to achieve efficiencies in the allocations process. The partners recorded:

- how many application forms they received before and after the CHR – on a monthly basis;
- the proportion of applicants choosing more than one landlord; and
- the staff time dedicated to dealing with waiting list enquiries, processing and checking applications, administration and review of the waiting list, management, prospect interviews, reporting and training.

By gathering this information both before and after launch of the CHR, it meant the partners could assess the impact on resources.

**Example: Assessing costs before and after launching the CHR**

**West Lothian Housing Register** partners went through a clear process of assessing:

- the pre-CHR costs of dealing with applications and allocations; and
- the costs associated with introducing a CHR.

To assess the overall resources dedicated to dealing with applications and allocations before the launch of the Housing Register, all partners assessed staff time through completing a time sheet for one week. The assessments of the resources dedicated to applications and allocations varied significantly between partners.

The partners then assessed the cost of introducing a CHR. This included the costs of maintaining the common database, the cost of printing forms, advice booklets and other stationery, and the staff time involved in running the CHR. The costs of setting up the ICT system and the CHR were met by Scottish Government CHR funding. It was estimated that the ongoing costs of running the CHR would be £17,300 per annum.

There were many discussions about how the costs should be split. Because the landlord's assessments of the costs already dedicated to applications and allocations were very different, it was hard to agree a formula that suited everyone. In particular, one partner had dedicated a proportionately low level of resources to applications and allocations. This meant that this partner was less willing to dedicate money to the CHR.

Having considered a number of options, eventually the partners agreed that the CHR costs would be split based on stock size. This meant that Weslo contributed £1,800 (10%), Almond £2,500 (15%) and the Council £13,000 (75%). This was a compromise solution, put into place as an initial measure simply because “we wanted to get up and running”. The partners agreed to review financial contributions after a year of operation. They were undertaking that review at the time of writing. The Council expects that in the future, there will need to be some adjustments to the way in which costs are apportioned.

Although the partners believe that the CHR has worked well, it has not yet resulted in any efficiency savings. The Council believes that in the long term, perhaps after 5 years, the CHR will result in savings. But in the early stages, the costs for dealing with applications and allocations have been higher than normal. This is because partners have gone through the process of setting up a new system and learning how to work together efficiently. It will take time for real financial benefits to be realised.

### ***How to share costs in practice***

Partners need to make sure that the best governance arrangements are in place for the sharing of costs. The agreed process for apportioning costs should be clearly stated in writing for the CHR partners.

Where the CHR is underpinned by a written legal agreement a schedule of the agreement will outline the budget for ongoing revenue costs. This should also explain how costs will be redistributed across partners. The legal agreement should also outline how payments will be collected, by whom and how frequently, and any sanctions for non-payment such as interest accrued. Partners may choose to set out cost arrangements in a less formal written partnership agreement which would potentially reduce legal costs.

CHR partners also need to be aware that services provided between organisations as part of a CHR are not VAT exempt so the service provider will need to include VAT on all costs unless the service recipient is exempt because of their status. You are advised to check your own position carefully.

Where functions are shared amongst partners rather than provided under contract by another organisation VAT will not be applicable. So, for example, using shared administration rather than a central administration unit will provide additional cost savings as it will reduce the need for cross charging between partners.

**Example: Sharing CHR costs**

In **Perth and Kinross** the CHR is managed by the local authority who have been responsible for development costs as the CHR has moved forward. The Council is responsible for the CHR Revenue Budget and have agreed a cost-sharing formula with the other partners for eligible costs. These include staff with a dedicated remit to deliver the CHR and applicable supplies and services costs. Costs are then apportioned across the partners pro rata of stock owned. ICT (infrastructure and support) costs are additional to this and charged for each user according to use each year.

The distribution of CHR revenue costs are set out in the Service Level Agreement established between the CHR partners.

**Example: Sharing CHR costs and reviewing the budget**

Fife Council is the overall budget holder for **Fife Housing Register (FHR)** and maintains the financial management role for all shared costs. Shared costs include ICT, FHR Support team, printing and production of materials, consultation and marketing costs. Other costs are still absorbed by the partners, such as their own front line advice services and each partner meets the costs which will benefit their own organisations, such as internal ICT costs.

Anticipated costs are outlined through the FHR Business Plan. The FHR Management Executive receives a quarterly budget statement and on agreement, Fife Council issues invoices to the partners for their quarterly share. This allows the CHR to review costs at least every quarter.

Budgets are planned in alignment with a three-year business planning process which allows partners to make advance allowance for FHR costs. This regular review ensures that figures remain on target, or budgets are adjusted accordingly and in line with partnership priorities.

The Council felt that RSL partners were better able to make accurate assessments CHR costs:

“The housing associations were able to say that they have three, ten or forty people inputting applications, but at the Council, this is just part of people’s jobs – someone could be doing it only part of the time, so it’s never easy to get costs.”

#### **How has Fife Housing Register shared costs among the partners?**

The Fife Housing Register partners share costs on the basis of stock share. This means that the share is relevant to stock size within Fife, and since all of the current partners are fully, or significantly Fife based, the partners believe this works relatively well.

The resourcing of FHR is currently under review as invitations are extended to regional and national housing associations to participate.

**Any areas of cost sharing that were difficult to agree?**

One stumbling block was where the Council had a complement of Occupational Therapists (OTs) who were shared between housing and social work and so between them they had to decide how much to pay. The costs were broken down based on how much of the OTs time was spent on housing assessment activity and these were the only costs that were ultimately included within the FHR resourcing agreement. The Council retained the balance of the OT costs to pay for their wider role in terms of strategic planning and housing management activity.

Building up trust between the partners is important for conducting any financial assessments, as is being realistic about the costs incurred. FHR tried to work out what the costs were before the CHR and after, based on the increased numbers of applicants and the impact this would have on costs. A 20% increase was budgeted, but this is constantly under review when conducting the assessments.

***How to do a risk assessment***

The CHR partnership, as for all well managed projects, should undertake a risk assessment exercise. The risk assessment should show that you have considered all the potential risks associated with the CHR project. Undertaking the risk assessment will help partners identify any potential stumbling blocks and consider the appropriate mechanisms to put in place to resolve the problem.

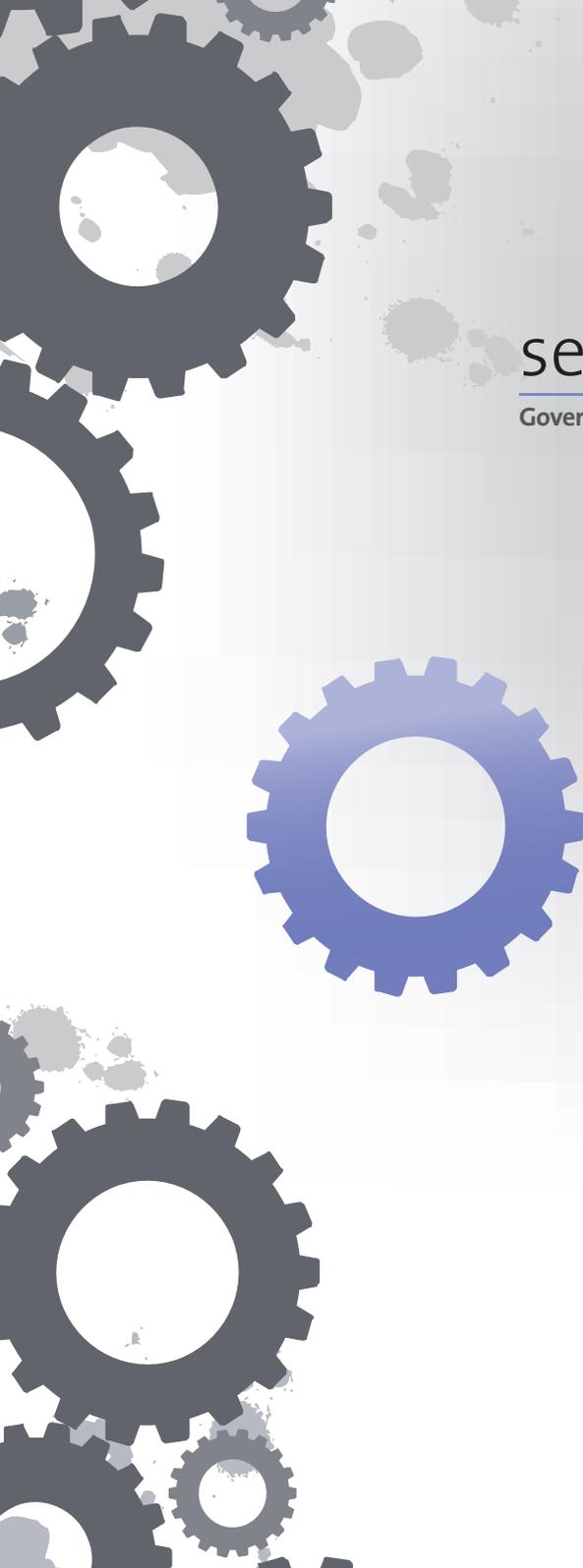
There are different approaches to conducting a risk assessment. But a basic approach would involve:

- listing the potential risk factors to the CHR;
- considering the consequence of the risk for the delivery of the CHR;
- identifying the risk level – whether there is a high, medium or low chance of this issue arising;
- where possible, outlining the risk indicators that can be monitored to show whether a potential problem is occurring; and
- putting together a realistic and achievable recovery plan for each identified risk. This may build on exist relationships and escalation routes and/or propose alternative courses of action.

The risk assessment might be laid out in the following format:

Potential Risk Factor	Consequence for the CHR	Probability of Risk Arising (H/M/L)	Risk Indicators	Recovery plan
<i>Example:</i> Insufficient participation of core partner	Delays to development and launch of CHR	L	Absence from meetings/decision-making process	Ensure strong communication strategy with partners; CHR lead officer visit to partner to discuss issues.
<i>Example:</i> Delay to establishing CHR ICT system	Delay to launch of CHR	M	Slippage in agreed timescale for ICT system build; Compatibility issues with existing ICT systems	Escalation within ICT supplier; discussion of technical issues and need/potential for amended specification; change of ICT contractor.



The page features a decorative graphic on the left side consisting of several interlocking gears. Most are dark grey or black, while one gear in the center is a vibrant blue. The background is a light grey grid pattern with some faint, darker grey circular shapes scattered across it.

# section**twelve**

---

Governance



## SECTION TWELVE: GOVERNANCE

### *Governance arrangement for the partnership*

Partnerships are strongly recommended to consider governance arrangements at an early stage in the development of the CHR. Governance arrangements should be reviewed periodically and it may be appropriate to create more formalised structures as the CHR develops. Establishing a written partnership agreement brings clarity for partners in terms of obligations and responsibilities and provides reassurances as to where liability rests if things go wrong.

There are three main governance options available for CHR partnerships:

- continue as an informal partnership;
- formalise the CHR with a written partnership agreement (e.g. Service Level Agreement, written constitution); or
- set up the CHR as a separate organisation/company.

### *Option One – Partnership without written agreement*

The first option is simply to continue with existing partnership arrangements. This means operating without any form of written agreement and continuing to work on the basis of trust and relationships. The main advantage of this option is simply that it is easy. CHR partners would not need to invest time in developing new governance options.

The clear disadvantage is that this option is not a sustainable, long term solution and would offer only a fragile structure. It presents risks in terms of:

- no clear written agreement of partner roles and responsibilities;
- no formal decision making structure; and
- potential over reliance on the largest partner.

As the CHR partnerships develop its activities further, these issues are likely to become more of a problem.

<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
Easy	Not equitable
Builds on the spirit of trust	Not sustainable over long term
Don't need to make decisions	Puts off decision making for future

### *Option Two – A written agreement*

This would involve the CHR partnership operating as an unincorporated association. It means that the CHR partnership has no legal entity or personality, separate from the partner organisations. Because of this, an unincorporated association cannot borrow money, enter into contract in its own name, hold property, or start legal action. This would have important implications for employing staff.

By law, this type of alliance does not need to have a written legal agreement or constitution. But it does make roles and responsibilities much clearer, and provides a written frame of reference. Most unincorporated associations are governed by a constitution or written agreement, which sets out the roles and relationships between partners. This can be very simple and there are standard constitutions available. It would set out areas like the CHR's aims, membership, powers, roles, meetings (including chairing, quorum, voting etc), decision making processes and an exit strategy. Partners may choose to bring in a lawyer to write a formal legal agreement or choose to write their own partnership agreement or constitution.

This option would also allow flexibility to add new members if, for example, other national and regional associations operating in the area wished to become members.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Simple to set up	CHR cannot employ staff
Low costs	Cannot enter into contracts in the CHR partnership's name (e.g. for website, stationery etc)
Flexible and easy to change constitution/written agreement as desired	One partner could dominate if taking on role of employer/lead contractor
Legally easy to develop an exit strategy from the partnership, if required	Need clear governance arrangements – for example clear about responsibility for complaints/appeals
Scope to become a separate organisation/company in the future, if appropriate	Officers can be personally liable for debts and legal actions
More organic and gradual approach	Need to consider charitable issues (such as the seconding or sharing of staff between charitable and non-charitable organisations)

The main disadvantage of this option would be that the CHR partnership could not directly employ staff. If this was necessary, the partners would need to explore other options, for example one partner acting as the employer. This could create slight complexities relating to sharing or seconding staff between charitable and non-charitable organisations.

If setting up the CHR as a constituted, unincorporated association, the partners may wish to review the current structure of the partnership. For example, it may be appropriate to consider formal representation of partner Committee members or service users within the CHR structure. It may also be useful to consider ways in which the CHR links with other related bodies within the local authority area such as groups responsible for strategic housing decisions.

A written agreement can be very simple and straightforward outlining the main areas for joint working. Partners in Midlothian have produced a simple joint working protocol which can be viewed at [Appendix Five](#).

For more formal legal agreements partners will require legal advice. We have included a list of the core components and schedules that should be included in the agreement at [Appendix Six](#).

### **Example: An informal joint-working charter**

**Fife CHR** is managed by a Project Board, which involves senior managers from each of the partner organisations. A Project Team and System Development Team sit below the Board, taking forward issues at a practical and operational level.

The partners deliberately decided that they did not want to have a partnership agreement drawn up by lawyers. They felt that this could be too rigid, and provided scope for partners to sue each other. Instead, an informal Partnership Charter was drawn up. Partners all contributed to the development of the Charter, and believe it provides a satisfactory basis to their work.

**Example: Working to a written agreement**

The **Highland Housing Register** (HHR) is underpinned by a Partnership Agreement. It covers two years, this being seen as the minimum initial commitment that partners needed to make to give the register a proper chance to work. It sets out how the HHR will be managed, the responsibilities of the partners, how decisions will be made and how information will be shared.

The work is driven forward at a strategic level by a Management Group, made up of Directors of Housing from the partner organisations. The group, chaired by the Head of Housing of the Highland Council, is responsible for:

- monitoring and managing activity, performance and service delivery;
- agreeing budgets;
- making strategic decisions;
- making recommendations about policy changes;
- making decisions on procedural change and development;
- manage dispute resolution if required; and
- undertaking other functions as may be agreed between the Partners.

There is also a Highland Housing Register Working Group which has been the 'engine room' for development. During the development and implementation of the HHR it was made up of mid level managers from the partner organisations and, until May 2008, a coordinator. Much of its work has focused on developing the detail of how the common policies and procedures would work, the application form and the integrated ICT system. Those involved have worked hard to get to the bottom of issues, asking challenging questions about why each organisation does things a certain way.

Effective project management is seen as having been an important part of the governance and management arrangements, especially as a new set of policies and procedures and a new ICT system for everyone other than Council staff were being introduced at the same time.

"Our biggest strength has been the governance of the project."

Managers, front-line staff and committees have been involved throughout the development of the CHR. The HHR Working Group has had a key responsibility for devolving information to operational staff, alongside the extensive training that has supported the development and implementation of the new approach and the ICT system.

Effective communication is seen by the partners as being a crucial feature of the project both in its development stages, pre and post implementation. Committees have been involved in critical decisions such as agreeing the joint policies and the partnership agreement. They receive regular updates and performance reports.

Partners feel the partnership has been a strong one due to their shared commitment to developing the HHR. This has built on previous joint working and existing trust between the organisations. At times this has meant compromising on issues to move things forward.

### *Option Three: setting up the CHR as a legal entity*

The third option is to establish the CHR as a distinct legal entity. This means that the CHR would be an incorporated body with its own legal identity, separate from the individual partners. This has been described as a “special purpose vehicle”.

Options include establishing a company limited by either shares or guarantee. The main reason for having a company limited by shares is that profits can be passed to shareholders. In the case of a CHR, it is likely that the shareholders would be the CHR partners. Each partner would pay a nominal fee for shares.

A company limited by guarantee would have members the CHR partners, and would be run by Company Directors. The liability of the Directors for debts or legal actions would be limited to an agreed level, almost always £1. It is not normally possible for a company limited by guarantee to pay profits to its members. This could be an issue for a CHR if the company ceased operating, and it had assets. The assets could not be redistributed to partners.

Normally, the main reason for public or voluntary organisations setting up a separate organisation is if their existing structure, for example charitable status prevents them from undertaking a certain activity. This may not be the case for CHR partners but you may feel there are benefits in setting up a separate organisation on grounds that it gives the CHR a clear, separate legal identity, it could employ staff, and it would offer more protection to people on the governing board.

This option could also offer the potential to expand the range of services that the CHR partnership takes responsibility for. For example, in the longer term there could be potential to include other housing management services within the CHR partnership given the scope of joint working between the organisations.

The disadvantages would be that it would be more complex, time consuming and costly, both to set up and to manage on an ongoing basis. It is also a less flexible option for joint working.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Could limit liability of management committee/ directors for debts/legal actions	Could be legally and financially complex – need legal advice to set up
Could employ staff – no need to share staff between partners which could have charitable and VAT issues	Set up costs would be higher – and work involved could be considerable
Could enter into contract in CHR company name	Changing company structure or membership would be more difficult/costly
Would have clear legal status – for example for appeals and complaints	Legally more difficult to exit partnership
Could formalise financial arrangements – regular partner contributions	Need to produce accounts for the CHR company – small additional running costs
Company could have charitable status if appropriate	Organisation could take on a life of its own

### Example: importance of clarity of roles

In **Aberdeen** partners decided to establish Homechoice as a company limited by guarantee. However, the governance and management of the CHR is seen as being an important factor in the CHR having to stop operating. Although some partners felt the right structures were in place, the relationships were difficult and often strained.

The Homechoice Board provided a strategic direction for the Homechoice Company. Each member had an equal vote. The partners each approved two nominees who were either Committee members or Senior Officers from the partner organisations. From the beginning there was a tension between the roles and responsibilities of the Board members. Each member was responsible for making decisions that would benefit the Homechoice Company as a whole. On the other hand, they were representing the interests of their own organisation. At times the two sets of priorities conflicted. Some partners felt this led to an unwillingness to deal with issues openly as they came up and a lack of flexibility and compromise.

Partners feel that it is essential to have a clear vision, and be clear about the purpose and task of the CHR model. In particular, it is important to be clear about the nature of the partnership, and think carefully about what roles different organisations should have. Otherwise there are issues about equality between organisations and tensions between conflicting roles.

### *VAT issues*

When deciding on the most appropriate governance option partners need to keep in mind issues regarding VAT. Where functions are shared amongst partners rather than provided under contract by a separate organisation VAT will not be applicable. This means that sharing responsibilities across partners rather than establishing a new CHR organisation would result in VAT savings. However, this needs to be considered within a wider assessment of costs.

**Example: Weighing up VAT issues**

In **Scottish Borders** partners originally hoped to establish an arm's length/host organisation for the CHR, but this raised issues with VAT. Instead, they drew up a contract between the partners whereby each partner would second a member of staff to the CHR. They remain within their own organisation, and have responsibility for a specific area of the CHR. Administration is shared between partners. For example one deals with priority passes, the other with advertising, and so on. A document management system where documents are scanned and shared on a network has been introduced to support this.

Each partner pays for the costs associated with their area of the CHR. At the end of the year, finance staff will compare what each organisation has spent, and look at a way of rebalancing it the following year.

The original aim was that responsibilities would rotate between partners but in reality this has proved complex logistically.

Although the system was introduced to save VAT, in reality partners believe it has cost as much, if not more, to administer. The partners are now in the early stages of discussions to try to get one organisation to host the CHR and create a more seamless service.



# section**thirteen**

---

Equalities





## SECTION THIRTEEN: EQUALITIES

### *Equality and the law*

There are different approaches to equality and diversity. The terms used can vary depending on whether referring to service provision, or workforce management. The Scottish Government highlights that there are three different approaches to ensuring equality for service users.<sup>19</sup> These are:

- *Equal treatment* – everyone is treated in exactly the same way.
- *Equal opportunities* – measures are in place to make sure that certain communities or individuals don't experience barriers or discrimination. For example, you might make sure that you advertise services in lots of different places, or provide childcare or interpretation to make sure people can access services.

Equal opportunities is defined within the Scotland Act 1998 as:

“the prevention, elimination or regulation of discrimination between persons on grounds of sex or marital status, on racial grounds, or on grounds of disability, age, sexual orientation, language or social origin, or of other personal attributes including beliefs or opinions, such as religious beliefs or political opinions”.

- *Equality of outcome* – particular services or support are available for people who experience disadvantage or inequality. For example, if you found that people from minority ethnic communities were not getting equal access to your houses, you might involve people in the design of new homes to make sure that they are suitable. This type of approach can be known as positive action.

<sup>19</sup> Equality Strategy, Scottish Government  
(<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library3/social/wtem-00.asp>)

The Scottish Government is very clear that equal treatment does not achieve equality, and can actually result in indirect discrimination. People may be disadvantaged by a situation which appears neutral, but is in fact catering for the majority. Organisations should be considering how they can create equal opportunities, and equality of outcome.

In Scotland, the approach to promoting equality has focused on protecting and raising awareness of the rights of people who may be disadvantaged because of their:

- age;
- gender or gender identity;
- disability;
- ethnic origin;
- religion and belief; and
- sexual orientation.

The laws on equality in relation to ethnic origin, disability and gender are most advanced. It is unlawful for any service provider to discriminate for any reason relating to race, disability or gender. In employment and training, it is unlawful to discriminate on the basis of age, gender, gender identity, disability, ethnic origin, religion, belief or sexual orientation.

This covers both direct and indirect discrimination. Indirect discrimination can occur if a situation results in a certain group of people being disadvantaged, even if this is an unintended consequence. This means that housing providers must always ensure that they comply with the law through considering the impact of policies and activities on people from different equalities groups. When doing this, it is also vital to remember that people can all fall into multiple equalities groups. And it is important to understand that people are all individuals, and people in the same equalities groups can have very different needs and experiences.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 introduced further statutory duties for registered social landlords. RSLs now have a duty to encourage equal opportunities and provide all services in a way which promotes equality. Essentially, this means that equality must be a central consideration for all housing providers, and must be built into the process of policy development and review.

### *Best practice in relation to equalities*

The Scottish Housing Regulator has very clear expectations of social housing providers in terms of equality and diversity.

“We expect all social landlords to embrace diversity, promote equal opportunities for all and eliminate unlawful discrimination in all areas of their work.”

(The Scottish Housing Regulator, Online Guidance, 2008)

The Regulator has a series of Performance Standards which housing providers should meet. A central aim of these Standards is to make sure that housing providers contribute to social inclusion and equality. One of these standards relates specifically to equal opportunities:

“We embrace diversity, promote equal opportunities for all and eliminate unlawful discrimination in all areas of our work.”

(Performance Standards, Guiding Standard 2.1)

This is a Guiding Standard, meaning that it should underpin everything that landlords do. The Scottish Housing Regulator sets out a series of self assessment questions, which allow housing providers to check that they are meeting this standard. There are 56 self-assessment questions which apply to housing associations and outline best practice. Some of the key areas included are:

<b>Action Planning</b>	
Clear, published commitment to equality	Realistic targets with clear responsibilities
Resources, training and support	Understand profile and needs of communities
Support and link to local equality networks	Staff and board members aware of approach
<b>Consultation and Participation</b>	
Individuals and representative groups involved in policy development	Analyse and report on responses from different individuals and groups



<b>Monitoring Equality Issues</b>	
Monitor equalities issues through both qualitative and quantitative approaches	Analyse, report, feedback and act on monitoring information
Consult with people about how monitoring information is gathered and used	Link information to targets and objectives
<b>Delivering Services</b>	
Ensure comply with the law and guidance	Benchmark and share good practice
Provide accessible information	Respond to harassment/discrimination
Identify and tackle gaps/barriers or disparities	Mainstream equalities in service planning and delivery
<b>Staffing, Governance and Membership</b>	
Published commitment to equal recruitment and employment practices	Comply with law and statutory guidance
Train recruitment and HR staff on equality issues	Advertise widely without unfairly restricting range of applicants
Gather information about staff, Board and membership profile	Compare profile with wider community composition
Set targets to address any disparities	Regularly monitor and report on performance, and take action

### *Find out more...*

You can learn more about best practice in relation to equalities – and the Performance Standards – from the Scottish Housing Regulators website [here](#).

([http://www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk/stellent/groups/public/documents/webpages/shr\\_equalities-ourexpectations.hcsp#TopOfPage](http://www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk/stellent/groups/public/documents/webpages/shr_equalities-ourexpectations.hcsp#TopOfPage))

### *How to do an Equalities Impact Assessment*

In order to ensure equal opportunity and equality of outcome CHR partnerships should consider what effect a new system of allocations will have on all communities living in the CHR area. This means conducting an equalities impact assessment for your CHR. An impact assessment will help ensure that the policies and processes adopted will reflect the needs of residents. Equalities impact assessments can take place during CHR development or after implementation to review the service being delivered.

I&DeA – the Improvement and Development Agency for local government – have published a practical learning resource which gives clear guidance on conducting equality impact assessments. The resource includes a six-step guide to conducting an equalities impact assessment, which involves:

- **Initial screening** – of new and revised policies and procedures. If it is felt that there is the potential to cause adverse effects or discriminate against different groups in the community then it will be necessary to continue with the impact assessment;

- **Scoping and defining** – determining who should undertake the assessment and the best time for it to take place;
- **Information gathering** – using existing monitoring, new research and consultation with appropriate stakeholders;
- **Making a judgement** – deciding whether or not there is potential for the service to result in a less favourable outcome on any group within the community, or unlawful discrimination of any kind – and whether particular issues need to be addressed;
- **Action planning** – determining the necessary actions and positive changes as a result of the assessment; and
- **Publication and review** – effectively communicating the outcomes within your organisation, with partners and with the wider community – and establish how progress will be reviewed.

### *Find out more...*

You can find out more on the general approach to conducting an equalities impact assessment from the I&DeA website [here](http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=8017247).

(<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=8017247>)

**Example: Carrying out an Equalities Impact Assessment before launching the CHR**

**HOME Argyll** commissioned an equalities impact assessment to be conducted by an independent consultant prior to the launch of their CHR. The equalities impact assessment asked the partners to consider which groups of people would be affected by the introduction of the CHR and what the positive and negative impacts might be. The equalities impact assessment summarised the key issues to take forward, such as promoting HOME Argyll to equalities groups, progress joint working on welfare rights and on interpretation and translation services, and recommended a fuller equalities impact assessment take place.

The partners will consider conducting a fuller assessment once they have completed their policy review, which is planned for 2009.

Currently, equalities questions are included on the application form, but these questions are not mandatory and so applicants can choose not to give HOME Argyll the information. The questions relate to disability and ethnic origin as well as age and gender.

Through HOME Argyll the partners have developed a shared policy on translation and interpretation and recently the partners have received some applications in Polish which they pay to have translated. There is currently discussion about working towards an accreditation such as "Happy to Translate".

## *How to engage with people from equalities groups*

There is a wide range of techniques that partners can use to effectively engage with residents from equalities groups. The Community Engagement How To Guide produced by the Scottish Centre for Regeneration provides a comprehensive guide to community engagement techniques.

(<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/regeneration/engage/HowToGuide/Techniques>)

It also includes a dedicated section on Engagement and Equalities

(<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/regeneration/engage/HowToGuide/Equalities>)

which outlines best approaches to making contact with equalities groups and working with groups in a collaborative and meaningful way.

The 2008 CHR Position Study<sup>20</sup> showed that tenant/applicant consultation often occurred at the same time as methods to engage specifically with people from equalities groups. The timing of engagement is important and engagement with equalities groups should happen from the outset and should be revisited throughout the life of the CHR.

Some key issues to consider when engaging with equalities groups are:

- The people you are wanting to work with will know the best methods of engagement – find out from them how they would like to be consulted. Be accommodating to their needs and flexible about how you bring them into the process.

---

<sup>20</sup> CHR Position Study, SHBVN, 2008

(<http://www.sbe.hw.ac.uk/shbvn/CHR/Word%20docs/Position%20Study%202008.doc>)

- Diversity between and within equalities groups is substantial and needs to be reflected in approaches to engagement.
- Making the initial contact can be challenging – work with trusted organisations, group/community leaders and take time to building relationships.
- All community groups expect engagement to be meaningful – involve groups as early as possible and at key stages in the decision-making process and feedback the outcomes of consultation.
- Good planning is essential to effective engagement – be clear about the purpose and what will be involved. For particular groups (minority communities, people with disabilities, younger people etc.) you will need to think carefully about the most appropriate way to facilitate discussions. Things you might have to consider include:
  - what support you should offer – childcare, incentives etc;
  - the location and timing of the event – what makes it easiest and most familiar for participants;
  - whether you need translation and interpretation services;
  - the gender of the facilitator(s) – in male or female only events; and
  - the clothing that the facilitator will wear – particularly when meeting community members in places of worship.

### *Find out more...*

The Scottish Centre for Regeneration has produced a Community Engagement How To Guide<sup>21</sup> which incorporates the National Standards for Community Engagement<sup>22</sup> and provides a range of techniques (and case study examples) to help you engage effectively with local people. There is a dedicated section of the How To Guide looking at issues around Engagement and Equalities.<sup>23</sup> Information on engaging with equalities groups can also be found in the Scottish Government's Guide to Successful Tenant Participation.<sup>24</sup>

#### **Example: Addressing equalities issues**

Partners have taken account of the needs of equalities groups in the development of **EdIndex** in a number of ways:

- The application form was developed with equalities in mind and Equality Officers within the Council reviewed the draft form.
- Participation of equalities groups is monitored within the CHR. Regular monitoring reports are provided to landlords allowing them to raise and address areas of concern.

21 Community Engagement How To Guide (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/regeneration/engage/HowToGuide>)

22 National Standards for Community Engagement (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/94257/0084550.pdf>)

23 Engagement and Equalities (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/regeneration/engage/HowToGuide/Equalities>)

24 Guide to Successful Tenant Participation (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/1125/0076393.doc>)

- The move of most of the EdIndex landlords to Choice Based Lettings (CBL) means there is a greater reliance on applicants making choices for themselves – partners felt it was important to monitor the impact of the new system on particular groups and ensure that adequate support was given to those that would need it.
- There is a Choice Outreach worker based within the Council, who supports people in applying for housing. The work includes a special service for visually impaired people. People are identified who have difficulty completing the application form or search for properties through Choice Based Lettings. The outreach worker can help them complete the form, and then arranges to contact them on a weekly basis to discuss the properties advertised each week. This service works alongside other support that may be provided either through Council services or other agencies.
- Partners discussed how best to ensure people who do not speak English as their first language could complete the form. They considered translating the form into certain common languages in Edinburgh – like Polish – but the challenge then is that it needs to be translated back. Instead, the outreach worker would arrange a translator to help complete the form and explain how Choice Based Lettings operates.
- The Edinburgh Housing Advice Network has been engaged at various stages in the development of EdIndex. This has allowed partners to disseminate information about EdIndex to a range of agencies delivering information and advice in the City.



The partners are looking to improve their equalities monitoring in the future. The new business plan outlines plans to improve the application process, including a more proactive approach to encouraging applications. This might involve identifying people with more significant support needs (which is possible using the systems reports) and supporting them further.

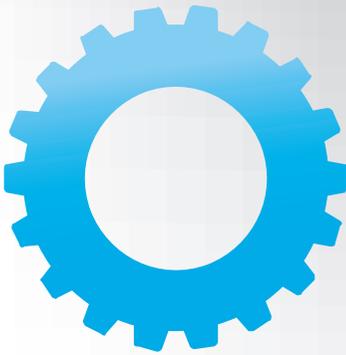




# section**fourteen**

---

Maintaining Momentum





## SECTION FOURTEEN: MAINTAINING MOMENTUM

### *You have launched – now what?*

Setting up your CHR, training staff, publicising the new system and managing the transition period requires a lot of hard work and effort. Successfully launching a CHR is a huge achievement.

But the achievement of a successful CHR does not end with implementation. In order to ensure that your CHR is meeting its objectives and delivering the intended outcomes for applicants and partner organisations, you will need to thoroughly monitor and evaluate the new system on an ongoing basis. In addition, the CHR will not be the finished article when it is launched but should continue to develop and improve after it has been launched.

This means that you will have to think carefully about the governance structure for the CHR post-implementation. It is recommended that you retain some of your working/steering groups and have a group with a dedicated remit for monitoring functions after the CHR has been launched.

The following key issues should be considered by CHR partners for the post-implementation phase:

- ensure that the appropriate management structures and working groups are in place – recognising the new working relationships and need for robust monitoring;
- ensure that partners have the resources in place to continue their commitment to the CHR partnership. This will include arrangement for continual training of new staff and refresher training for existing staff;

- establish a robust ongoing monitoring framework for the CHR with clearly defined responsibilities and timescales; and
- deal with teething difficulties that are hindering service delivery but for an agreed period do not make major changes to the CHR – allow the new system to bed in.

Partners should also agree on the future direction for the CHR when it has been established. For example, you may wish to consider:

- Is the long-term objective simply to establish an operational CHR within the existing boundary?
- Would you like its coverage to expand?
- Do you want it to evolve into other areas of joint working and function as more than a CHR?
- It is worth considering the long-term plan for your CHR?

### *Recognising success*

It is almost inevitable that such a significant change in the way people apply for housing will create some difficulties. Understandably, asking large numbers of staff from a range of different organisations to change their way of working can be a challenge for everyone involved.

It is important to keep sight of the headline objectives for the CHR and the benefits being delivered for applicants and tenants. Frustrations will be kept to a minimum with good training and making sure that there is clear understanding of what the CHR is aiming to achieve.

**Example: Recognising the benefits**

Partners in **West Lothian** have seen clear benefits from their Housing Register. The information contained within the common applicant database allows partners to easily see levels of demand for different areas and stock types. Applicants have also taken advantage of the opportunity to apply to a wider range of landlords using one form, resulting in some partners' lists increasing in size. This is increasing applicant choice and ensuring that partners are more effectively matching those in the greatest housing need with the properties that become available. But there have been some glitches and difficulties along the way, mainly because partners are used to working in different ways and people can be naturally resistant to change.

In late 2008, the West Lothian Housing Register partners began to formally review how the Housing Register had operated in its first year. In particular the partners are considering whether there are options for other RSLs to join the Housing Register, not necessarily as full partners. The review is also considering whether the process could be made more efficient and understandable for applicants, for example through increased commonality in policies.

West Lothian Council would advise any other partners involved in a CHR to:

- remember the customer – CHRs are first and foremost about improving services for applicants;
- take a realistic approach – focus on what is possible and achievable, be pragmatic and be prepared to compromise; and
- think long term – the value of a CHR will become more evident as systems bed in and partners develop their working relationships.

### *Revisiting previous decisions*

It is essential that the CHR is able to develop and change over time. The decisions you have taken are not set in stone, even though they may have taken significant effort to agree upon at the time. The context you are working in may change over time, or the development of the CHR in terms of more (or fewer) partner landlords and geographical coverage may mean that previous decisions need to be revisited.

Where elements of the CHR are not delivering what had been hoped partners may have to review the CHR model or specific functions. Any changes should be founded on evidence in terms of current performance and potential impact of a new approach. And, again, decisions need to be taken with the CHR objectives and the interests of customers at the forefront.

This process will be helped by strong partnership management structures and good monitoring information.

### *Wider joint working and policy development*

The CHR does not sit in isolation from wider policy in relation to housing and other areas. The CHR is more than just an administrative solution to housing allocations and can provide valuable information to feed into wider housing and other strategies.

Management information from the CHR including information on housing supply and demand will potentially inform:

- the local housing strategy;
- the housing information and advice strategy;
- local lettings plans;
- rehousing reviews;
- the antisocial behaviour strategy; and
- the ongoing work of the housing strategy steering group.

It is important that the appropriate structures are in place for collaborative working with the groups or departments responsible for developing these policies and strategies.

In the development phase of the CHR, partners should undertake forward planning and consider the best opportunities for further development of the CHR post-implementation. In addition to the likely areas for expansion in terms of geographical coverage and CHR functions partners should consider the opportunities for joint working and greater links with other initiatives.

### *Measuring impact*

Clearly, CHR partnerships need to monitor and evaluate the impact that their CHR is making in terms of achieving its objectives for applicants and partner organisations. The previous CHR Practitioner's Guide stated that CHRs should result in:

- simpler and fairer access to housing;
- increased mobility and choice for applicants and tenants;
- more robust understanding of housing needs;
- improved use of housing stock; and
- operational efficiencies.

Effective evaluation of your CHR will enable you to:

- identify real delivery issues; and
- review progress towards outcomes.

In reviewing whether you are achieving the outcomes for your CHR you will need both:

- quantitative data in relation to service performance (numbers/statistics); and
- qualitative information from applicants, partners and other stakeholders (reflecting views and experiences).

There are a wide range of evaluation techniques to consider, but a CHR evaluation should involve:

- measuring progress against agreed targets and indicators;
- establishing applicant views – through customer satisfaction surveys, focus groups, consultation events etc.;
- consultation with partners – at a range of organisational levels; and
- consultation with other stakeholders.

CHR partnerships should involve tenants and RTOs in the monitoring and evaluation process. Planned approaches should be set out in Tenant Participation strategies.

The Scottish Government has produced a national monitoring framework for CHRs.<sup>25</sup> This was designed to help CHRs to think about how they measure their performance. It sets out a number of potential indicators, but emphasises that these can be adapted to the local context. It suggests that whatever approach is taken to performance monitoring, CHRs should consider:

- how to make information available both for the CHR as a whole, and individual landlords;
- the geographical level at which information needs to be reported;
- how information will be collected and how often; and
- how action will be taken based on the findings.

---

<sup>25</sup> Developing a Monitoring framework for CHRs Final Report, SHBVN, Heriot-Watt University, 2006  
(<http://www.sbe.hw.ac.uk/shbvn/CHR/PDFs/Develop%20Mon%20Frameworks%20%20Apr%202006.pdf>)

It is important to note that the monitoring framework is designed to measure the added value and impact of the CHR itself – not the whole housing application and allocation process.

“CHRs are part of the allocation process within a wider housing management function for social landlords.”

### *Find out more...*

You can find out more about developing a monitoring framework, and the range of performance indicators that may be used, from the SHBVN report Developing a Monitoring Framework for Common Housing Registers

(<http://www.sbe.hw.ac.uk/shbvn/CHR/PDFs/Develop%20Mon%20Frameworks%20%20Apr%2006.pdf>).

A concise Performance Indicators factsheet

(<http://www.sbe.hw.ac.uk/shbvn/CHR/PDFs/PM%20Newsletter%20May%2007.pdf>) is also available, giving suggested indicators and a guide to using these as part of an overall performance management framework.

**Example: A process of ongoing review**

**HOME Argyll** had a launch day in 2006 to celebrate their achievements and to mark the launch of HOME Argyll. Applicants, tenants, committee members, local councillors and the local press were invited to attend.

**Review Day**

One year later in 2007, a review day was held for staff and committee members. The aim of this session was to discuss progress so far, and consider which aspects worked well and what could be improved. The session also acted as a planning session for the coming year.

**Governance Review**

HOME Argyll commissioned an independent consultant to do work on improving governance arrangements. The aim was to strengthen HOME Argyll as an entity. As part of this review, the consultants examined the impact of HOME Argyll, in order to demonstrate the importance of continuing to invest in it. The report explored impact including:

- how many applications received;
- who processed them; and
- the use of joint information and advice website etc.

**Policy Review**

HOME Argyll is conducting a policy review in 2009. An Action Plan is already in place to do this. HOME Argyll held a series of workshops and events where staff from each partner organisation considered different aspects of the Common Allocation Policy. As everyday users of the policy, staff were able to make recommendations and suggestions for aspects they believe could work better and more efficiently. HOME Argyll are working through these suggestions to re-draft the policy before sending copies to applicants and tenants who have indicated their willingness to be consulted.

**Tenant satisfaction surveys**

Fyne Homes and Dunbritton HA have gathered views of tenants through satisfaction surveys and there are currently discussions about extending this to applicants in the future. All the partners agree that the next steps after the policy review will be to look at generating feedback from applicants and tenants on their services.

**Example: Evaluating impact**

**Renfrewshire** was one of the few CHRs to evaluate its impact in terms of the difference that the CHR made to applicants and partner organisations. The CHR was launched in two phases, and both of these were evaluated. To do this, the partners firstly drew up an evaluation brief.

The partners then commissioned consultants to evaluate the CHR. The evaluation process considered: basic benefits for partners and applicants; the impact on customer services; managing the workload and resource implications; the effectiveness of partnership working; and applicant views.

The evaluation found that:

- The Renfrewshire CHR achieved the first of its objectives – “to make it easier for applicants to apply for housing through completion of a common form”. It did this through:
  - Simplifying the application process through applicants filling in one single form
  - Increasing awareness of social landlords operating across Renfrewshire
- The CHR did not realise its objective of achieving efficiencies in the allocations process.

- Some partners felt that the CHR did not achieve its objective of providing better understanding of patterns of need and demand. This was due to the time taken to develop a common database and the absence of a housing information and advice strategy. But Renfrewshire Council found that the CHR did provide improved strategic information about demand, by removing duplication from individual waiting lists.
- Although there were positive impacts for applicants, the impact on partner organisations in terms of the time and resources dedicated to dealing with applications and allocations was not seen to represent value for money.

Overall, while there were some advantages of the CHR for applicants, the lack of harmonisation, co-ordination and joined up housing information and advice meant that the process was still confusing. While making the initial housing application was easier, it was not coupled with common procedures – such as a common medical assessment – or coordinated information and advice about housing options and prospects. Some applicants were making uninformed choices which did not reflect their aspirations and distorted the stated demand for housing. This reflects the importance of joined up housing information and advice provision, an area which the Renfrewshire partners are now focusing on.

## *Innovation and options for the future*

As stated, CHRs do not sit in isolation from wider policy in relation to housing, but rather have a central role to play in the wider housing system. As such, CHR partnerships should include considering whether there are options for the CHR beyond the allocation of social housing.

There is growing policy emphasis, reasserted in the Scottish Government housing discussion document *Firm Foundations*,<sup>26</sup> that the private rented sector has an increasing role to play in meeting local housing need. There is evidence of greater engagement with the private rented sector in tackling homelessness. Many local authorities in Scotland are actively working with the private sector including supporting social lets in the private rented sector and large scale rent deposit schemes.

As a CHR partnership, it is worth reflecting on wider housing needs in your area, the capacity of the social rented sector to meet those needs, and the role that your CHR can play in helping local people into the full range of housing options available.

### *Find out more...*

The Scottish Government has published a review of good practice in local authority engagement with the private rented sector. This draws on case study examples from across the UK and covers relevant issues such as options for working with private landlords to house homeless households. The report is available [here](#).

(<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/03/23135441/0>)

---

<sup>26</sup> *Firm Foundations: The future of housing in Scotland – A discussion document*, Scottish Government, 2007

(<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/10/30153156/0>)

**Example: Developing the CHR beyond social housing allocations**

In **Perth and Kinross** the Council is developing a new approach to allocations which will take the CHR beyond social housing into wider housing options. The new system will see a move away from the current approach whereby the Central Allocation Team (CAT) assesses 100% of applications with a view to making a social housing allocation. The service will become an integrated “Housing Options Service” which will incorporate housing advice, homelessness prevention, private sector link work, signposting to other specialist agencies and access to social rented housing.

For those in most need there will be a new “top band” that will receive more robust assessment through the Social Housing Allocations Team. Those in less acute need, and with limited prospects for a social housing allocation, will be offered the housing options service giving advice on alternative options. Due to the shortage of social housing in the area there is a significant role for the private rented sector. For those most likely to be housed in private rented accommodation it is intended that they will be referred to a Perth and Kinross Council Letting Agency which is being set up. This will match assessed housing applicants with accredited private landlords.

The overall approach will take the CHR to a more advanced level and will mean that it is a route into other tenure options. It is a response to homelessness and serious housing pressure in the area. Housing staff at the Council state that there is a need to widen-up the housing marketplace and assure quality for people by managing the letting process. The proposed new approach is supported by the other CHR partners. It will mean that those in the most acute need will be prioritised. There is no financial implication for the other partners.



# appendices



## APPENDIX ONE – CASE STUDY BACKGROUND

### *Aberdeen City – Homechoice*

The development of a CHR in Aberdeen began in the early 1990s. In 1996 a limited company called Homechoice was established to provide a one stop Options Shop as part of the CHR. In March 2000 the Options Shop opened in Aberdeen City Centre. It offered co-ordinated housing information and advice.

By October 2000 the full CHR was launched. It involved six partners. In October 2007 the CHR effectively stopped operating, following the withdrawal of two RSLs in 2006 followed by another in 2007. The information and advice element of the Options Shop continued until July 2008.

Since 2004, the majority of the landlords operating in Aberdeen City have been participating in the development of a Common Housing Register in Aberdeenshire and Moray Council areas.

### *Aberdeenshire and Moray – Apply4Homes*

Landlords in Aberdeenshire and Moray are developing the Apply4Homes CHR covering both local authority areas. It has nine participating partners. The partners aim to go live in 2009.

Since the Aberdeen City CHR (Homechoice) ceased operating in 2007, the Aberdeenshire and Moray CHR has expanded to cover the Aberdeen City area. All of the landlords operating in Aberdeen City except Aberdeen City Council are now participating in the development of Apply4homes. Aberdeen City Council has had some discussions with the partners involved Apply4homes, but there are no plans for the City Council to join in the near future.

### *Cairn Housing Association*

Cairn Housing Association is a national housing association with over 3,000 homes under management across Scotland. It has stock in 30 of the 32 local authority areas in Scotland. It has participated in CHRs locally in varying ways. This guide draws out Cairn's experience in Edinburgh, Highland, Argyll and Bute and East Dunbartonshire.

### *East Dunbartonshire*

The CHR for East Dunbartonshire has been in development since 2004 when a CHR co-ordinator was appointed with funding from the Scottish Government. The CHR is expected to go live in 2009.

The CHR model was developed after consulting with the 14 landlords operating in the area including national/regional RSLs and the Council. Some of the national/regional landlords did not wish to become full partners so it was decided to commence development of the CHR with a view to engaging other landlords at a later stage. The three main landlords hold 91% of the stock. The full partners for the CHR are East Dunbartonshire Council (EDC), Antonine Housing Association and Hillhead Housing Association 2000.



### ***East Lothian***

Discussions to develop a CHR began in 2003 involving East Lothian Council, East Lothian Housing Association (ELHA) and Homes for Life Housing Partnership (HfL) as local partners and Castle Rock Edinvar HA and Bield HA as the most significant regional/national providers. By 2006, the partnership had agreed a CHR model and was looking at options for creating greater commonality. However, discussions stalled at this stage. ICT issues had not been resolved and although an initial application form had been agreed some partners had concerns about the content and length. At this time the Council was undergoing restructuring and an allocations review and so CHR discussions were put on hold.

In spring 2008 discussions began again. By this time, three landlords (ELHA, HfL and Castle Rock Edinvar) had decided to adopt Choice Based Lettings (CBL) through the Homehunt system and Bield were actively considering engaging with SHOP (Scottish Housing Options) to deliver CBL. In the new context, the previously agreed model and form were no longer relevant. The Council is considering how it can contribute to a CHR in the area.

### ***Edinburgh – EdIndex***

EdIndex, the Edinburgh CHR, was launched in 2003. It is the largest operational CHR in the UK, initially bringing together 25 national and regional landlords operating in the area. Following mergers between landlords, there are now 21 landlords involved. Only very small or very specialised landlords are not involved. Almost two-thirds of the stock in the city is owned by the City of Edinburgh Council, and the Council has had a lead co-ordinating role to play in developing and delivering the CHR.

The CHR has developed substantially since its launch. Initially each partner retained their own allocation and assessment policies. Since then there has been recognition that having 25 separate allocations systems has made the development of the CHR (particularly the common application form and the supporting IT system) complex and potentially confusing for applicants. Partners have now developed a harmonised assessment of need for landlords using traditional allocations methods, and a co-ordinated Choice Based Lettings approach.

### *Fife*

Fife Housing Register is one of the longer running CHRs in Scotland. Development of the FHR began in earnest in May 2002. Phase One of the CHR was launched in October 2006 with three partners: Glen Housing Association, Ore Valley Housing Association and Fife Council. Phase Two, which involved two new partners joining (Fife Special Housing Association and Kingdom Housing Association), was launched in November 2008. Altogether the five CHR partners have approximately 40,000 properties, representing 95 per cent of the social rented stock in Fife.

The CHR partners have developed a “common assessment of need” whereby applicants are pointed according to one system. Allocations are made according to partners’ individual allocations policies. The common database is hosted on the Council’s ICT system and all applications are processed by a central administration team at the Council.

## *Highland*

Landlords in the Highlands first began discussing the possibility of a Common Housing Register in 2001. After seven years of development, the Highland Housing Register went live in May 2008. The CHR has six partners, and the main social landlords with housing stock in the Highland Council area are all involved. There are five other RSLs with specialist or low levels of stock in the area. Although involved with the register, they are not full partners. They participate in the HHR by buddying with the council who they ask to put forward applicants for some of their vacancies in the Highlands. Three of these RSLs also have their own housing list and people can apply to them directly.

As this guide was being developed the partners were beginning their planned six-month review of the Highland Housing Register. The review will explore the extent to which intended policy outcomes anticipated are being delivered.

## *HOME Argyll*

The Argyll and Bute Common Housing Register Partnership was established in 2003. A subsequent feasibility study found that there was an overlap of 26 per cent between the housing lists of the local housing associations and the Council. This demonstrated that many people were interested in being housed by more than one landlord, and therefore that a joint way of working would provide better services for customers.

Since then, Argyll and Bute Council, and the four locally-based housing associations – Fyne Homes, West Highland Housing Association, Dunbritton Housing Association and Argyll Community Housing Association (ACHA) – have all worked together to bring the concept to reality. HOME (Housing Options Made Easy) Argyll was launched in October 2006, involving:

- joined-up housing information and advice including a new website;
- a single housing application form; and
- a common housing allocation policy.

In mid 2007, the final element of HOME Argyll was introduced in the shape of a shared IT system which allowed applicant details to be shared among partners electronically.

### *Midlothian*

The three core partners of the Midlothian CHR partnership, Midlothian Council, Melville Housing Association and Castle Rock Edinvar Housing Association, began to develop their CHR in 2004-2009, with funding from the Scottish Government CHR Fund.

Following detailed discussion, the partners agreed that their main priority was to make the process easier for applicants. As a result, they agreed to focus their efforts on developing a common housing application form.

The common application form which they developed uses a simple system of scanning and sharing. Regional and national landlords participate through receiving nominations from Midlothian Council.

### ***Perth and Kinross***

Perth and Kinross was the first local authority in Scotland to establish a CHR having begun operating in 1995. The CHR has three full partners: Perth and Kinross Council, Perthshire Housing Association and Hillcrest Housing Association.

Development of the CHR has been led by the Council and initial development was characterised by informal arrangements between the Council and partners. This was followed by the establishment of centralised administration through the Central Allocations Team (CAT). The most recent phase of development, supported by Scottish Government funding in 2004, has seen the improvement of the ICT system and the establishment of more formalised arrangements, including a Service Level Agreement (SLA) and formal procedures for the sharing of CHR costs.

### ***Renfrewshire***

The Renfrewshire CHR was set up in 2003. The CHR in Renfrewshire involved Renfrewshire Council and the five Federation of Local Housing Associations in Renfrewshire (FLAIR ) partners.

The CHR ceased operating in June 2007. The partners have continued to work together, considering how to provide a joined up service to applicants without incurring the negative impacts previously experienced through CHR development. The current focus is on how housing information and advice can be provided in a cohesive and complementary way. The partners are also beginning to discuss the potential of creating more commonality in housing allocation policies, to simplify the development of the CHR.

Renfrewshire was one of the first areas to implement a CHR in Scotland, having received funding through the Modernising Government Fund in April 2001. Discussions about a CHR in Renfrewshire had taken place since the 1990's. It was therefore a pathfinder and had few examples of experience and good practice to refer to from elsewhere.

### *West Dunbartonshire*

Partners in West Dunbartonshire are working towards establishing a CHR. The CHR partnership in West Dunbartonshire involves West Dunbartonshire Council and eight core partners.

Having received funding from the Scottish Government, West Dunbartonshire appointed a CHR Co-ordinator to help facilitate the development of the CHR between August 2004 and August 2005. The West Dunbartonshire CHR Project Board was established during this period and formed sub-groups to progress particular aspects of the project.

In 2007, the partners took stock of their progress and agreed on a new approach which will place commonality at the centre of CHR development.



## ***West Lothian***

The West Lothian Housing Register came into being in September 2007. It involves three partners – West Lothian Council, Almond Housing Association and Weslo Housing Management. It includes a common housing application form and a common ICT system (Academy). One of the partners – Weslo – accepts 100 per cent nominations from West Lothian Council as an interim measure. This buddying arrangement operated efficiently for the first year of the CHR. Weslo and the Council hope that as a result of the Council's allocation policy review, they will both be able to use the same allocations policy.

In late 2008, the West Lothian Housing Register partners began to formally review how the Housing Register had been operating. In particular the partners are considering whether there are options for other RSLs to join the Housing Register, not necessarily as full partners. The review is also considering whether the process could be made more efficient and understandable for applicants, for example through increased commonality in policies.





## APPENDIX THREE: ICT SYSTEM SPECIFICATION

The system specification provides a detailed description of how the individual tasks involved in running the CHR will operate, and the ICT requirements to deliver them. Areas that should be covered are:

- access by partners to the system and the communication between them regarding applications and nominations, including access for enquiries, data transfer and record updates;
- applicant details required and data entry from the application form;
- for each partner landlord, as applicable, eligibility criteria and assessment of housing need, number of lists required and whether they operate separate housing need criteria or points schemes;
- landlord, rent, tenure, and property details to be held and the type of property details to be used for drawing up shortlists of suitable applicants;
- offers, multiple offers and visits and when they will be recorded;
- facilities required to cater for transfers and mutual exchanges;
- facilities to delete, withdraw, cancel, suspend, reinstate and accept applications and offers;
- facilities to cater for different policies between partner landlords on offers. For example, the acceptable number of refusals of an offer, and the length of time given to an applicant to accept or refuse an offer;
- customer information requirements;
- frequency of review of the waiting list;



- letters and other printed output;
- management information requirements of the different partner landlords;
- how the initial collection of information is to be administered and how this data is to be entered onto the system. Volumes of data will need to be estimated;
- data confidentiality and control;
- provision for updates and amendments to applicants and properties;
- the requirements of the partner landlords to undertake modelling. For example, the facility to enable imaginary points systems or eligibility criteria to be entered to analyse the effect on waiting lists and allocations; and
- the audit requirements.

The system should also allow the user to set up:

- options that define the scope of the CHR, such as the number of housing providers using the system, the number of needs groups or the type of allocation policy;
- data items defining preferred properties and geographical areas;
- data items linked to eligibility criteria;
- data items linked to points and the points amounts; and
- options that allow the user to display management information and statistics in the required groupings (such as options for current housing type or reason for seeking accommodation).

If the CHR holds property data, or if the task of matching or recording the offer of accommodation is within the remit of the CHR, then additional features will be required. To carry out the matching and offer process, the IT system will be required to:

- list all applicants that are suitable tenants for properties taking into account the applicant's preferences and needs;
- prioritise suitable applicants and generate a list of applicants in priority order;
- automatically generate and record the offer process;
- provide simple and easy management information on offers;
- provide reports to ensure that all offers have been made fairly, and in line with the policies of the housing provider;
- support and monitor nomination agreements; and
- support and monitor local policies in respect of priority needs.



In addition to the data requirements and facilities required to administer a CHR, the specification should also include general system requirements that would be needed for all housing systems such as:

- data back-up facilities;
- enquiries screens;
- management information facilities allowing the user to produce their own management reports. The specification should list all the standard management information reports required;
- maintenance of audit trails;
- complaints logging and statistics; and
- general letter production facilities.

From: Charlesworth, Z (1998) *Common Housing Registers – an IT Guide*, Chartered Institute of Housing.

## APPENDIX FOUR: HOME ARGYLL LAUNCH IMPLEMENTATION TIMETABLE

Date	Activity	Responsibility	Progress
w/b 7th August			
ONGOING	Ensure that ICT systems can be adapted to new policy	Partner RSLs	
w/b 14th August			
14th August	Provide list of all applicants for review of duplication between lists	Partner RSLs	
14th August	Agree responsibility for duplicate applicants	Partner RSLs	
14th August	Agree to record and analyse duplicates in applications 14th-21st August	Partner RSLs	
14th August	Agree to establish a Health and Housing Need sub group and confirm attendees	Consultant and Partner RSLs	
14th August	Decision on printing Choice of Area forms	Partner RSLs	
14th August	Agree publicity material/communication with applicants and other stakeholders	Partner RSLs	
14th August	Agree information sharing arrangements between partner	Partner RSLs	
14th August	Agree arrangements for sharing information when allocating	Partner RSLs	



Date	Activity	Responsibility	Progress
w/b 14th August			
14th August	Agree future meeting dates	Partner RSLs	
By 18th August	Print (and distribute if necessary) Choice of Area forms	Partner RSLs	
By 18th August	Analyse duplication of applications between partners	Consultant	
By 18th August	Set up central database of all applicants	Consultant	
By 16th August	Develop procedural training programme for staff and send out agenda	Consultant	
By 18th August	Ensure HOME Argyll website is up to date and reflects launch arrangements	ABC	
By 18th August	Check key partners happy with site content – CS and Crofters Commission	Consultant	
By 18th August	Sign off HOME Argyll site and pay invoice	Consultant	
By 18th August	Sign Escrow Agreement	ABC	
By 18th August	Explore whether applicants can be offered access to the internet	Partner RSLs	
By 18th August	Finalise letter to be sent out with application forms	Consultant and Partner RSLs	

Date	Activity	Responsibility	Progress
<b>w/b 14th August</b>			
All week	Ensure all staff aware of procedures for re-registration	Partner RSLs	
All week	Ensure all staff aware of HOME Argyll website and its contents	Partner RSLs	
All week	Ensure all staff aware of focus on housing information and advice	Partner RSLs	
<b>w/b 21st August</b>			
21st August	Procedural Training – Rothesay	Consultant facilitates RSLs confirm attendance	
21st August	HOME Argyll site goes live	Consultant to check and co-ordinate	
21st August	Application Forms to be delivered	Printer	
21st-25th August	Re-registration letters issued	Partner RSLs	
23rd August	Procedural Training – Oban	Consultant facilitates RSLs confirm attendance	
By 25th August	Draft Procedural Manual for staff	Consultant and Partner RSLs	
By 25th August	Develop standard forms	Consultant and Partner RSLs	

Date	Activity	Responsibility	Progress
<b>w/b 28th August</b>			
29th August	Steering Group meeting	Partner RSLs/Consultant	
29th August	First meeting of Health and Housing Need sub group – training and discussion of responses to date	Consultant facilitates RSLs confirm attendance	
31st August	Procedural Training – Ardrishaig	Consultant facilitates RSLs confirm attendance	
All week (ongoing)	Send out acknowledgement slips for applications received – state which landlords interested in	Partner RSLs	
All week (ongoing)	Copy forms to other partner RSLs		
<b>w/b 4th September</b>			
4th September	Procedural Training – Dumbarton	Consultant facilitates RSLs confirm attendance	
All week	Staff trained on using ICT systems with new policies and procedures	Partner RSLs	
8th September	Deadline for initial responses to be received	Partner RSLs	
8th September	Database of responses to be sent to ACHA	Partner RSLs	

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Progress</b>
<b>w/b 11th September</b>	Analyse non respondents and update database	ACHA	
12th September	Issue reminder letters (with option to state form returned to another RSL)	Partner RSLs	
12th September	Steering Group meeting	Partner RSLs/ Consultant	
All week (ongoing)	Begin processing forms	Partner RSLs	
All week (ongoing)	Issue pointing letters as processed	Partner RSLs	
By 15th September	Agree arrangements for homelessness information sharing	Homelessness/Partner RSLs/ Consultant	
15th September	Final responses required	Partner RSLs	
15th September	Database of responses to be sent to ACHA	Partner RSLs	
<b>w/b 18th September</b>			
18th September	Housing lists close – preallocate as much as possible	Partner RSLs	
All week	Input new application forms	Partner RSLs	
All week	Ensure information on ALL applicants sent to appropriate RSLs	Partner RSLs	

Date	Activity	Responsibility	Progress
<b>w/b 25th September</b>			
All week	Ensure information on ALL applicants sent to appropriate RSLs	Partner RSLs	
26th September	Steering Group meeting	Partner RSLs/ ODS	
By 29th September	Issue letter saying removed from list if not responded	Partner RSLs	
<b>w/b 2nd October</b>			
All week	Assess who has NOT responded to review (to any RSL)	Partner RSLs	
<b>w/b 9th October</b>			
9th October			
10th October	Steering Group meeting	Partner RSLs/ ODS	
<b>Ongoing</b>			
October 2006 onwards	Keep up to date with ICT progress	Partner RSLs – lead ACHA	
November 2006 onwards	Roll out health and housing need training	Partner RSLs	
2007	Stock familiarisation programme	Partner RSLs	
2007	Establish links with Move UK	Partner RSLs	
2007	Joint mutual exchange procedures	Partner RSLs	

## APPENDIX FIVE: MIDLOTHIAN COUNCIL'S JOINT PROTOCOL ARRANGEMENT

### *Protocol arrangement for new common application Arrangement*

This is a protocol arrangement for the new Common Housing Application Form introduced in April 2008. The arrangement is between Midlothian Council who's registered at Buccleuch House Hart Street, Dalkeith, EH22 1DJ, Castlerock Edinvar Housing Association and Melville Housing Association.

### *Management of the agreement*

The following steps will be taken when processing new applications:

The new application forms received by Midlothian Council are stamped with Melville Housing Association (MHA) name.

It is intended that once processed and scanned the actual form would be sent to MHA for their records.

Any forms for Castle Rock Edinvar will be scanned and front page emailed to Gill Mackay. All application forms will be stamped with Castle Rock Edinvar Housing Association (CREHA) name.

Any evidence including medical assessment and visit reports also to be scanned and shared amongst the three organisations bound to this protocol. Scanned documents must be sent to the Midlothian Council Letting contact officers, Gill Mackay CREHA, Nancy Booth MHA.



Any changes to the application form will be dealt with by including an insert sheet in the application. This will include ethnic origin of applicant 1 and 2. Insert sheet to be agreed with CREHA and MHA prior to implementation. It may also include choice of property type etc.

### ***Equal opportunities***

The parties agree to operate this Agreement at all times within the terms of their Equal Opportunities Policies.

### ***Liaison meetings***

Representatives bound to this agreement will meet on an annual basis to monitor performance and the terms of this Agreement. These meetings will be formal and minutes will be held by all parties.

### ***Ending this agreement***

Notwithstanding the terms of section Disputes of this Agreement, this Agreement may be terminated by:

- a) The Agreement of all parties
- b) Either party giving three months notice in writing; or
- c) If at any time during the currency of this Agreement, either the council or the Association contravenes or fails to comply with the provisions or contained within this Agreement; or
- d) If either party shall be formally dissolved or cease operations.

Where either party seeks to terminate this Agreement in accordance with c) above, they shall first serve notice on the other party intimating the contravention or non compliance and give thirty days in which it may be remedied. If all steps agreed by both parties to be necessary to remedy the breach or no compliance have been taken within the period of thirty days neither party shall be entitled to terminate this Agreement. In the event of contravention or non-compliance, both parties should follow their complaints procedures.

IN WITNEESS WHEREOF these presents, together with preceding pages are executed by the parties hereto on the.....

Signed on behalf of Castle Rock Edinvar

.....(Name)

.....(Designation) Date .....

Signed on behalf of Melville Housing Association

.....(Name)

.....(Designation) Date .....

Signed on behalf of Midlothian Council

.....(Name)

.....(Designation) Date .....

## APPENDIX SIX: CORE COMPONENTS AND SCHEDULES TO BE INCLUDED IN A CHR LEGAL AGREEMENT

### *Core components*

The following core components should underpin a legal agreement for a CHR:

Core component	Description
The parties	There are two main types of parties: the organisation contracted to manage the register, and the landlords joining the register. In most cases this would be the council and the RSLs.
Duration	The initial term for which the agreement will stand. It is recommended that this be at least three years for the initial contract to provide commitment, stability and sufficient investment of time and resources to establish the CHR.
Termination	The rules under which parties can resign from the register after the initial three-year period.
Obligations	Each party will be held to contractual obligations under the agreement. These include contributions, policies and complaints processes (including the obligations of the party contracted to manage the register).
Liability and arrangements for default	You must ensure every partner landlord is held accountable for the component parts of the CHR. This includes staffing, compensation claims, failure to deliver targets and standards, liability of any staff employed for the purposes of delivering the CHR, and termination of any party to the agreement.
Review and audit (operations)	Audit processes and procedures ensure you are able to carry out performance review, resolve disputes, change or terminate the agreement, deal with default and liabilities, and manage assets.

Core component	Description
Dispute	Rules must govern dispute between parties.
Administration	Contractual obligations relate to the processing of applications and the maintenance of the database. Details of the partners' expectations on quality of service can be written into service level agreements.
Financial matters	These include revenue costs, payments, budgets, VAT, arrangements for charging, collection of contributions, setting and managing budgets, and so on.
Security	Security is maintained by compliance with data protection legislation.

### *Schedules*

Your CHR legal agreement may include the following schedules:

#### **Performance targets and standards**

This will include setting targets such as:

- Acknowledging receipt of completed application form
- Processing application form
- Requests for additional information/clarification
- Change of circumstance
- Cancelling applications
- Timescales for responding to verbal and written enquiries.

### **ICT delivery, support and security**

This part of the agreement will set out the details of the service provider, the host of the system, the system specification, and management and administration of the operational system. Often detailed documentation will already exist if the software chosen to run the CHR is an add-on to an existing system. In these cases, the original documents may require only minor amendments in order to meet the partnership's legal needs. Similarly, with a bespoke system, it is possible to adapt existing documentation drawn up in the process of specifying and procuring that system.

### **Forms: application forms, home visit forms, etc**

Once you have agreed a shared application form, it should be attached as a schedule to the legal agreement. This will ensure that all partners have made a legally binding commitment to use the common forms. If for any reason a partner continues to use their own forms without the permission of the partnership, they can be challenged. The use of a single application form is of course one of the essential components of a CHR, and it is therefore critical to ensure that the legal agreement can enforce this if necessary.

### **Housing advice service statement**

Rather than develop a policy on delivery of housing advice within the CHR, a service statement setting out standards and any related processes could be included as a schedule attached to the legal agreement.

## Procedural guidelines

It is critical to set out and agree procedural guidance prior to implementation to ensure consistency of service delivery and to hold partners accountable for poor service delivery. However you must recognise that it is inevitable that you will change some of these processes as your CHR beds in. You will want to monitor and evaluate the processes you have agreed upon and whether the procedures you have set are providing an efficient service which meets the needs and aspirations of all the partners. The procedural guidance may include some of the following:

- Who can apply to your register?
- The administrative process, including data capture, data input, change of circumstance, cancelling applications
- Filing and accessing applications
- Reviewing the register
- Verification
- Provision of advice and information, signposting and referral procedures
- Health and support
- Homes/HEMS
- Nominations
- Homelessness
- Harassment
- Policies (shared or otherwise)

- Access to information
- Sharing information
- Managing the CHR

### **Data protection principles**

Depending upon the model of CHR you develop and how it is to be administered, you may need to register separately with the Data Protection Office. It is advisable to agree data sharing protocols for the CHR partnership to ensure consistency and accountability.

### **Customer care charter/complaints**

Development requirements in this area will depend on the model of CHR you choose. If you opt for shared administration then it is unlikely you will need new procedures as the partners are likely to have existing procedures to which they will be held accountable. However, if you decide on centrally-based administration you will need to set procedures to which all partners agree. There are complexities around right of redress for the applicant regardless of the method of administration and it is recommended that you consult with the public ombudsman prior to implementing your CHR to ensure that you meet all your statutory obligations.

### **Health assessment process**

The agreed process for health assessments should be included within the legal agreement, particularly where this involves contracting work.

**Budget**

The budget for ongoing revenue costs should be written in as a schedule to the legal agreement. The model of CHR will to a large extent influence what is included in the budget. For example, where there is a central administration unit, it will incur running costs including staffing, recruitment and training, accommodation, and office facilities. Equally, where the CHR is based on shared administration, there will have to be agreement as to how costs will be redistributed if the burden of administration falls unfairly on some organisations. Other costs which all CHRs will need to include in their budget are printing and distribution of application forms.

**Performance and delivery of reports**

The legal agreement should identify the detail and frequency of all reports to be produced by the CHR, as well as arrangements for provision of *ad hoc* reports.

## **Management structure/constitution**

A schedule explaining how the CHR will be managed on behalf of the partnership should be included. If there is a board or committee made up of representatives of the partnership, a constitution should be agreed and included in the legal documentation. This should cover:

- Membership and role
- Secretariat
- Meeting cycles
- Voting rights
- Standard agenda for meetings
- Mechanisms for reporting back to other parties within the partnership

## **Standing orders**

The partnership will be required to abide by standing orders. You may wish to consider using the standing orders of one of the CHR partner organisations rather than start from scratch on drawing up new orders. It may be sensible to amend “borrowed” standing orders to cover the early days of the operation, and then create a new set that meets the specific needs of the CHR partnership once these have become clearer after implementation.



# chr guide

building a **common housing register**  
© Crown copyright 2009

ISBN: 978-0-7559-9111-2 (Web only)

RR Donnelley B59201 10-09

[www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk)