1 Purpose of Report

1.1 This report aims to advise Members on the revised draft Allocations Policy which will be implemented as part of the Choice Based Lettings scheme. Members will recall that this report was brought to Council on 22nd June, however, following issues raised regarding the proposed Local Lettings Policies for the allocation of rural properties, it was agreed that further consultation would take place which is discussed later in this report.

1.2 If the policy is approved and adopted by Members, it will form the basis by which the authority will allocate social housing in the borough. It is anticipated that the Choice Based Lettings Scheme will be launched in the spring to early summer of 2010.

1.3 This report relates to the following Council objectives:

(a) Reducing Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour
(b) Improving life chances for young people
(c) Delivering efficient and responsive services

2 Executive Summary

2.1 The Government's housing policy places considerable emphasis on the themes of choice and responsibility. One element of this agenda is changing the mechanisms by which households' access social housing. Social housing has traditionally been let using bureaucratic allocation systems administered by housing officers. The Government office (Communities and Local Government) requires that allocations policies for social housing should provide for applicants to be given more say and greater choice over the accommodation which they are allocated. At the same time, these policies have to ensure that the primary purpose of social housing is to meet those in greatest housing need for social housing while giving reasonable preference to certain categories, for example, statutory and non-statutory homeless, those lacking suitable sanitary facilities. The new allocations policy seeks to meet these needs.

3 Appendices

### Proposed Action:

4.1 The Committee is invited to **RESOLVE** that the new draft Allocations Policy is adopted and implemented to enable the launch of choice based lettings in the spring/summer of 2010.

4.2 The Committee is invited to **RESOLVE** that the Local Lettings Policy in respect of Rural Properties be adopted as part of the Council’s Allocations Policy.

4.3 The Committee is invited to **RESOLVE** that a review of the scheme is conducted after six months of operation and that the findings of this are brought back to the Committee for consideration.

### Background

5.1 In September 2008 Members approved the introduction and implementation of a Choice Based Lettings Scheme for Wellingborough which will be a sub-regional scheme working in partnership with Kettering and Corby Councils. In order that the scheme can be implemented, the authority is required to adopt and publish a policy by which social housing in the borough will be allocated.

### Discussion

6.1 The implementation of choice based lettings for the Borough Council of Wellingborough has necessitated the review and re-drafting of its existing policy governing the allocation of social rented homes for which the Council has nomination rights and agreements. The draft allocations policy (appended) has been drawn up to ensure full compliance with the latest legislation governing social housing allocations, and following full consultation with housing association partners and a wide range of other stakeholders.

6.2 Under the new policy, it is proposed that each housing application will be placed in one of four bands to ensure that those with the greatest housing need are given the highest priority to secure a new home. Therefore, applicants with an emergency need for re-housing will be placed in the highest band (Band A) and those who are adequately housed with no housing need will be placed in the lowest band (D). The property will normally be offered to the applicant who has bid in the highest band and has been waiting the longest.

6.3 Key changes made to the allocations policy are:

- Change from points to a band led assessment of housing need.
- A policy document which provides a far more comprehensive guide on the allocation of social housing in the Borough, and sets the foundation for a common approach to allocations with local housing association partners.
• Applicants applying to transfer from Council or housing association homes are banded and able to bid for properties in the same way as other applicants.
• Additional priority will be given to existing social housing tenants under occupying family homes to make better use of the existing housing stock.
• The Local Lettings Policy applies only to villages and local connection will not over ride housing need.
• Additional clarity is given to the eligibility of applicants for different types and sizes of dwellings based on their household composition to ensure best use of available homes.
• The policy will be adopted by the sub-regional group, namely, Wellingborough, Kettering and Corby. Wellingborough has always operated an open register, however, the sub-regional scheme with its common systems and application form, make it easier for customers to apply for housing in each of the local authority areas.
• Kettering Borough Council’s scheme, which is called Kettering Keyways, went live in January last year and in line with the sub-regional theme and in an effort to eliminate customer confusion, the Wellingborough scheme will be known as Wellingborough Keyways.

Kettering report that the scheme and allocations policy has resulted in a reduction in homelessness applications and their void times. They also confirm that 98% of all bids are via the internet.

6.4 Each authority will have elements peculiar to its Borough, Local Lettings Policies are an example. Members expressed their concerns over the allocation of village properties and requested a half day seminar during which the subject would be discussed.

6.5 All Members were invited to attend a presentation on the new Choice Based Lettings process and to review and discuss, in particular, Local Lettings Policies. On 10th July, 5 members attended the seminar which, according to the feedback, was most informative and helpful. During the morning it was agreed that further consultation would take place with Members, parish councils and partner Social Landlords in connection with issues surrounding Local Lettings Policies and their use in the allocation of social housing. A further seminar took place on 20th October where Members were given the opportunity to discuss the draft policy and gain an update on the legal context and feedback resulting from the consultation period.

7 Legal Powers

7.1 The draft allocations policy (appended) has been drawn up to ensure full compliance with the latest legislation governing social housing allocations, and after full consultation with tenants, housing association partners and a wide range of other stakeholdersThe policy conforms to current Housing legislation – Housing At 1996 (revised 2002) Parts VI and VII.

8 Financial and Value For Money Implications

8.1 There are no financial implications related to the Allocations Policy, funding for
Choice Based Lettings System has been approved, however, the original estimate has reduced considerably due to procurement of the sub-regional option.

9 Risk Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of risk</th>
<th>Consequences if realised</th>
<th>Likelihood of occurrence</th>
<th>Control measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Failure to approve and adopt a legal Allocations Policy</td>
<td>The authority would be in breach of housing legislation</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>Adopt and implement a legal Allocations Policy in line with Choice Based Lettings Scheme and Housing legislation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10 Implications for Resources

10.1 There are no implications for resources as the Allocations Policy will be implemented as part of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme, the budget for which has already been approved. Following the ZBB process, it is anticipated that the scheme will be implemented with two allocations officers, one less than currently employed. The Choice Based Lettings project manager and the sub-regional project co-ordinator are working to ensure that the necessary IT systems are in place to meet the launch date.

10.2 Once launched, the new system will enable us to streamline our allocations process and deal with housing applications at a time of the applicant’s choice. Pilot schemes have also indicated that void times for dwellings let through choice based systems are significantly reduced as the number of refusals diminishes.

11 Implications for Stronger and Safer Communities

11.1 The Allocations Policy is considered to be an excellent way to promote community cohesion and safety by building settled viable and inclusive communities. Research results indicate that tenants who have been offered a choice of accommodation are more likely to be satisfied with their home and remain in that home for a longer period, furthermore, satisfied tenants are more likely to meet their tenancy obligations and maintain the property in a good condition and take pride in their community and environment.

12 Implications for Equalities

12.1 The initial screenings of the Allocations Policy and the Local Lettings Policy, identified a potential for inequalities in some areas, however, the action plan and Access Strategy sets out measures to mitigate the risk of discrimination against vulnerable, minority and disadvantaged groups.

12.2 There have been concerns raised over the Local Lettings Policy for villages, in
that there is a potential for discrimination against applicants living in the town areas. It was felt that there was a potential for discrimination against ethnic minority groups, as there is a disproportionate number of ethnic groups residing in the town areas. In fact anyone, regardless of their ethnicity, who has no local connection to one of the villages is less likely to secure a village property. However, as mentioned earlier the policy differs from the existing allocations policy, in that local connection will not override housing need. Furthermore, research has revealed that there are only 29 applicants on the housing register requesting villages only, (the profile of which is appended to the equalities impact assessment). 112 applicants have requested small towns only, 538 applicants requesting town only leaving 1,424 applicants requesting both town and villages.

12.3 On the basis of this research it is proposed to implement the scheme and then to undertake a review of its effectiveness after six months.

13 Author and Contact Officer

Sue Atkins – Housing Needs Manager.

14 Consultees

Terry Wright, Corporate Director
Geoff Hollands – Connect Law

15 Background Papers

Draft Allocations Policy
National research into Choice Based Lettings Schemes
Responses to consultation