



## **An introduction to what LHS does**

### **Who we are:**

LHS is a not for profit Limited company that is wholly owned by 5 local authorities in West London and 3 large RSLs. They are Brent, Ealing, Harrow, Hillingdon, Hounslow and PCHA, Catalyst and Paradigm Housing. There is a Board of Directors that oversees what LHS does.

These organisations were successful in winning government funding to develop a pilot choice based lettings solution in 1999. They worked closely with our strategic IT partners, Sector-UK Ltd to develop a basic choice based lettings solution. The system has developed and evolved over time into a complex yet easily used solution for CBL and many other housing related activities.

### **What we offer:**

LHS has developed several housing options/advice solutions that allow housing officers to provide the most appropriate service to their applicants. All of these IT solutions have been specified by our practitioners and developed by our strategic IT developer – Sector-UK Ltd.

Additionally (and uniquely) LHS is set up to provide managed services that will free up housing staff to concentrate on what they do best – provide advice, support and housing to its citizens. This is a unique service not normally expected of a company that provides IT solutions, which is why we do not consider ourselves to be an IT provider – we expect to form a partnership with our new clients and to work alongside them to turn their vision into a scheme that works.

Our management services are diverse. We work closely with our new schemes from Day one, facilitating processes such as design and production of new marketing tools and supporting all users within their organisations to make the most out of the scheme. More of this later...

### **Our experience:**

LHS and Sector UK Ltd have over 40 years experience in the social housing market. We have supported and managed the first of the CBL pilot sites since it went live in 2001 and we work very closely with our practitioners to ensure that the solution is working the way they need it to work.

LHS has built some 17 CBL schemes – 9 stand alone schemes and 8 sub-regional schemes, each with more than 4 local authority partners. Some of these sub-regional schemes work with a common allocations policy, some work with individual policies and an overarching cross boundary policy and some work with variations of points and/or bands. Many of the more rural schemes have helped us to develop the CBL solutions further since we have included the functionality to store parish information.

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## **Our products**

These are just some of the developments we are delivering to our schemes. All of these solutions have been specified by practitioners and are hosted by us and you access these over the internet. These solutions work for single and/or sub- regional local authority areas and the data is kept in a central back office site so that staff with the correct security logins can work with the same applicant but not necessarily see all the data:

- Choice Based Lettings
- Housing Register
- Online application Manager
- Homelessness Manager
- Mutual Exchange Manager
- Low Cost Home Ownership Manager
- Supported Housing Referral Manager
- Private Landlords Manager
- Worklessness Manager (HELP)

## **Other products:**

- Data Cleansing module

## **How we help you build the whole solution:**

We assign a Senior Project Manager and a Project Manager to help build your scheme, using Prince2 methodology. The Project Managers work closely with your project team and agree a project plan. We ensure that the IT departments have direct access to our strategic partner, Sector UK Ltd so that they can develop any data streams that may be required.

When building a Choice Based Lettings solution, your scheme will be built around your policies and the way you want to work. We shall help you design the branding and marketing tools that you will require, such as a User Guide, a property list template and the public website as well as assist you in the marketing and training aspects of launching a scheme.

We shall help you identify the best bidding channels so that all applicants are included and can engage with the scheme. This can include a coupon so that those applicants who do not wish to use the internet, telephone or SMS or DigiTV can still make their own choices. If this option is chosen, LHS will purchase the PO Box address so that bids come back to our offices and are checked, scanned and uploaded to the CBL scheme, thus leaving your staff free to concentrate on looking after the most vulnerable.

Some schemes have opted to produce a professionally printed Property List and LHS will facilitate this process on behalf of you or your partners. Other schemes decide to print out property lists on demand in their offices, while others have chosen to send out personalised property lists to the most vulnerable applicants. The system will work with any combination of these options.

## **How we support new schemes through to Go Live**

Project meetings are the main activities and many decisions will be made at these. We will share best practice with you from other established schemes and help you design look, feel and content of the whole solution. We will also help you in the consultation processes for staff, external stakeholders, your Members and the public. We recognise that the implementation of CBL is a considerable change for all of these groups and it is always easier if you have support from people who have experience.

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There is a lot of testing to be done when the dataloads have been transferred over to Sector, so we will support your housing and ICT staff through this process over the telephone, by email and in person.

Full training is included in the set up costs. We train all users and provide full notes and captivate training videos to support each training session. As the systems are so intuitive to use, training takes no more than 2 days. We also provide handholding at point of go live for creating adverts in time for the first Advert Deadline, and for shortlisting of the first bidding cycle. A support desk supporting all users is available during working hours to offer help and support.

### **How we manage services to free up your internal resources:**

LHS uniquely offers central lettings services during implementation and then on an on-going basis. These will free up your staff from having additional work to do during this demanding changeover. Some of these activities are:

- Welcome letters – each applicant on your register will need to receive a letter explaining to them what the new way of allocating homes will look like and giving them the guidelines so they can engage. LHS will do this on behalf of all new partners before go live – you merely provide us with letterhead and agree the text and we shall extract the contact details from the newly formed Locata back office and mail these out to applicants.
  - After go live, there will always be new applicants registering and LHS will continue to send out the welcome packs to each new applicant put LIVE on the system.
  - LHS hosts your back office site and also the public website. This means you do not need to commission your internal IT departments to support this solution. (However, you shall be able to edit content on the public website yourselves and this will be included as part of the training stage.)
  - Each bidding cycle, LHS and Sector work together to ensure that the latest list of applicants and the latest set of advert reference numbers are sent over to the bidding channel suppliers (such as the telephone supplier). LHS then checks to ensure that the bidding lines are all open on time and does a check randomly to see that they work throughout that bidding cycle.
  - Each bidding cycle LHS receives the coupon bids and scans these into the system.
  - Support desk access is available to all of your staff users during working hours so that you do not have to worry about giving two members of staff the job of understanding the whole of the system and being the main support for your internal users.
  - LHS shall send a message to all your users at the end of each bidding cycle and when the shortlists are ready.
  - LHS provide additional reporting services for any report you are unable to get from our extensive reporting section that is included within the Locata back office. No further software reporting packages are required. We work on the principle that this is your data and you should have full access to it at all times and for all members of staff who have the appropriate level of security
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- Standard IT support services are:
  - System Hosting – which includes the provision and management of hardware via active hardware performance monitoring, ongoing tuning and hardware upgrades; Domain and SSL registration renewal, purchase and administration of third party software licences (e.g. operating systems and databases). Application of both routine patches and major upgrades to operating software, active security / intrusion monitoring, penetration testing and application of security patches;

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- Database Administration and Support - including transaction logging, database backup, off site data security storage, subsequent data restore, database performance tuning and application of upgrades and patches to DBMS.

Technical Application Support – which covers monitoring and management of data transfers from HMIS and / or On line application forms, application fault and issue management and bug resolution, support of any customer specific enhancements – e.g. links to corporate CRM systems.

### **Key LHS CBL features to help you work smartly:**

All of our products have been built using specifications we have developed alongside practitioners. Therefore the IT software is very intuitive and follows the normal working pattern of a housing officer/manager. All of the following activities are included in the Locata CBL back office. Where it is an option, this has been stated.

### **Matching people to properties:**

In simple terms, what the CBL system does is to match people to properties. The matching process can reflect local connections to parishes, villages, local authority areas or any other criteria to ensure that Section 106 agreements or other local lettings criteria can be applied. At implementation stage, you send us your property lists and your applicant lists. The system is developed around your allocations policy – you tell us your rules and we build these into the final product. Then we make sure that the applicants assessment priority is matched against the criteria staff build into the advert (is it a sheltered property? How many bedrooms has it got? Is the applicant assessed for this number of rooms? Is it accessible to somebody with mobility issues? Etc.)

### **The Locata Back Office:**

This is the administration site and is accessed via the internet. All users have their own login and security password. All activity is saved as an audit trail so it is always possible to trace unusual activity.

### **Properties and Adverts**

Adverts look and feel is agreed at implementation stage as part of the project management phase. LHS develops the templates for adverts and property lists. Once the member of staff clicks on 'Ready to Advertise' the system will do the rest automatically. Staff need around 3-5 minutes to create an advert. This is done in the back office, where staff identify the void property details, click on it and open an advert wizard which takes them through simple screens to help them build up the advert.

Section106 properties can be identified in the advert. If the scheme has opted to use our Online application register, then we can collect all local connection information to use at shortlisting stage so as to ensure the applicant matches the criteria for S106 housing.

### **Reaching the applicant and supporting the vulnerable**

Some local authority areas contain urban regions and some are very rural. It is therefore essential to ensure that every citizen is able to engage with the scheme. This can be assisted through the system by:

**Bidding channels** – ensuring there are sufficient alternative methods for people to bid. Popular methods to date are by the public website; by automatic touch-tone telephone; by SMS messaging. We have also developed a toolkit for DigiTV and the Kent scheme is now using this bidding channel.

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**Coupon bidding** is a method that LHS strongly recommends. In all of our schemes, there are always applicants who prefer to use pen and paper and so we have devised a coupon bidding form. Statistically this counts for an average of 3-7% of all applicants in a scheme. But that is 3-7% that would not otherwise engage. As part of our management services, these bids are posted back to our offices and scanned into the Locata back office in time for close of the bidding cycle. Housing Officers never need to manually input these.

**Staff bidding** by proxy is a simple two step process in the back office. There is a function on the first page of an applicant's record, in our customer relations manager section, which simply displays all the properties the applicant is eligible to bid for. Staff click on the 'bid' button next to the description of that property advert and the system does the rest.

### **Personalised property lists**

If chosen, staff can tag applicants who are vulnerable and at the beginning of each bidding cycle they can run a quick report out of the back office that will produce the personalised property list for each of these applicants. They then print these out and pop them into an envelope (the applicant address has automatically been included). A journal entry is then automatically recorded for each applicant, attaching the property list that was sent.

### **Shortlisting**

Once the bidding cycle has been closed by the LHS support desk, all bids are collected from each of the bidding channels chosen. These are amalgamated and then shortlists of each advert are prepared. These order the applicants in any priority order that you have decided, eg by housing need, local connection and priority date. Ineligible bids received are also listed should staff wish to check them. Staff are only able to bypass an applicant if they give a pre-agreed reason why they are doing this. These reasons are chosen by you and we include them in the shortlist process.

Local Authorities can work with their RSLs in two ways: either they can give full access to their RSL so that the RSL creates property adverts and works their own shortlist; or the RSL can create the property and the Local Authority approves the advert before it is published and the local authority works the shortlist and sends nominations to the RSL through the system.

### **Letter Generation to offer or invite to view**

Staff can send an offer or viewing letter from this shortlist by clicking on an icon next to the applicant's name. The property information and applicant information fields required are automatically dropped into the letter. These letter templates are set up by the scheme super user (with our helpdesk's assistance if required).

### **CRM – Customer Relations Manager**

Journal entries (notes for other members of staff; scanned in documents such as birth certificates medical reports etc), personalised property lists, bids by proxy, assessment and contact details of the applicant, household members and their relationships to that applicant are all accessed from this front page that is displayed for each applicant record. This means that front line staff are able to help applicants at their point of contact but may or may not be given permission to change any of the applicant's details.

### **Reporting and Monitoring**

We believe that staff should be able to access reports in order to check and monitor at all times and without having to request reports from another person, or to learn how to use another software package. Locata back office includes a powerful reporting suite that allows staff to monitor activity and produce reports that are either standard or personalised. If required we will provide you with a complete database (updated on a regular basis) of all your CBL activity.

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## Online Application Form

The online application form can be configured to self-select out applicants who are ineligible for housing, promote a housing options approach and give an initial assessment to applicants. This is achieved by having many variable pathways through the form. Based on given answers, each applicant is presented with a relevant set of questions. For example, if an applicant has a medical need, they are taken through more questions to establish what their need is. If an applicant answers that they are not a British citizen, they are asked if they are from the EU or subject to immigration control. If their income is above a certain level, they can be taken to questions and information about shared ownership.

## Housing Register

LHS can manage your Housing Register in the hosted LHS Choice Manager back office. In this instance, the Online Application Form would be enhanced to include further assessment criteria as described in your Allocations Policy.

## Mobility across boundaries

We have unparalleled experience of developing schemes that enable applicants to bid across boundaries – all based on the criteria that you have agreed with your neighbours. Some of our schemes have common allocations policies that mean the system is completely open and some of our schemes have an additional over-arching policy to accommodate this. The system is able to extract a % of the properties advertised in each bidding cycle and automatically displays these in the property list under a separate heading for cross boundary lets. All schemes are provided with a comprehensive monitoring feature that allows them to monitor how many of their properties have been let across boundary and allows them to reverse the balance if they have uneven lettings compared to other partners in the scheme.

## How we help you develop into the future:

LHS is committed to encouraging its National User Group to help drive the future development of our solutions. The NUG meets on a quarterly basis and is hosted by the schemes themselves. The meetings are structured to include information on new developments; sharing of best practice; showcasing of a scheme; networking time.

LHS pricing policy is that it will share development costs with schemes who wish to participate. For example when we specify a new product with practitioners, we will share the cost of the development with those practitioners who have signed up to the development. Thereafter we sell on the product to other schemes as and when they are ready to take it up. LHS does not operate a software licence policy for either users or volume of activity.

In our view the housing market has moved more towards a housing 'portal' approach and we are keen to mirror that vision with our solutions. We are aware that Choice Based Lettings is only one of the housing options that are offered to applicants. We are always willing to help our schemes develop new functionality and modules to help them run an effective and efficient service.

For any further information please contact:

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