

N E W S R E L E A S E

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One Stop Property Shop Official Opening PHOTOCALL with Cllr John Lines 10:00 hrs Monday 27 February, 138 Hamstead Road B20

Public sector housing in the West Midlands moves into a new era on Monday (27 February) with the official opening of a new lettings service for residents, the first of its kind in Birmingham.

Urban Choice, a Choice Based Lettings project, is a partnership of Birmingham City Council and four housing associations: Family, Focus, HAMAC and Midland Area. It is funded through Urban Living, the Birmingham Sandwell Urban Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder and by the individual partnership members.

The scheme introduces a broad range of housing options for people looking for a home to rent. In future it will also include advice on a range of affordable housing options, to help people on the property ladder.

Councillor John Lines, Cabinet Member for Housing said: "Urban Choice is an excellent example of truly effective partnership working, improving the housing services available to Birmingham's residents. This is a big step forward for everyone looking to rent a home from the council or local housing associations.

"The number of people coming through the door each week to access housing choice has doubled since we set up at the end of August. In just six months, we've helped more than 160 customers and their families find their ideal home. On average, we now let empty properties much quicker than we previously did."

Housing customers are now very proactive when looking for a new home to rent. Urban Choice offers advice and support and quick access to an Internet database. More than 95 per cent of their clients use the web to find a new home.

For customers without Internet access, Urban Choice offers text messaging and email as well as a front line service at the One Stop Property Shop.

The target set by the government is for all councils to have a Choice Base Lettings scheme by 2010. Over the next 12 months Urban Choice is due to expand the area covered by the project, increasing housing available to customers.

More follows.....

Urban Living Acting Co-ordinator Rod Griffin says, "We have supported the setting up of Urban Choice because it offers an innovative approach for residents wanting to access a property for rent or shared ownership. By using new technologies, this estate agency style service has brought looking for a new home into the 21st century."

In addition to the innovative website www.urbanchoice.org.uk, there is a weekly newsletter with updates on properties to let which is available at all Neighborhood Offices.

The One Stop Property Shop is at 138 Hamstead Road, near Villa Road, Lozells.

ENDS

Notes to the Editors

Urban Living - The Birmingham Sandwell Pathfinder

- Urban Living is one of nine Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders areas in the UK set up and funded by the Government's Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). The other eight areas: Manchester and Salford; Merseyside; Newcastle and Gateshead; South Yorkshire; East Lancashire; North Staffordshire; Rochdale and Oldham, and Hull and the East Riding of Yorkshire.
- In July 2004, ODPM awarded Urban Living £50 million housing market renewal funding to start its programme of delivery across Birmingham and Sandwell for the period 2004-06. The setting up of Urban Choice forms part of this programme.
- The area covered by Urban Living is a typical inner-city area with a population of around 150,000. It extends from the edge of Birmingham city centre in a northwesterly direction over the boundary with adjoining Sandwell MBC, specifically: Greets Green, West Bromwich, Smethwick, Handsworth, Winson Green, Lozells, Newtown and Aston.
- The Pathfinder area contains 60,000 dwellings largely of older terraced housing and local authority accommodation intermixed with traditional, often derelict or underused industrial areas. High levels of deprivation are evident throughout.
- The aim of the 15-year programme is to stimulate the housing market by replacing obsolete properties with modern, sustainable accommodation, through demolition, refurbishment and new building. It will also ensure that other essential requirements of sustainable communities are addressed – such as good quality services, good design, and delivery of clean, safe, healthy and attractive environments in which people can take pride.

Urban Living contact

Tess Randles on 0121 580 6740 Email tess_randles@sandwell.gov.uk