

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – COMMUNITY

12 NOVEMBER 2013

DEVON HOME CHOICE

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 Following a request at the Housing Performance Review Committee, this report is intended to inform members of the bidding patterns of applicants registered in Exeter with the Devon Home Choice scheme and also the rate of refusals from people offered properties.
- 1.2 For members to consider what, if any, action or further consideration needs to be undertaken.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council joined the Devon Home Choice Scheme in 2009, and have operated a Choice Based Lettings system (as opposed to a traditional points-based allocation system) since 2005. A Choice- Based scheme allows applicants to 'bid' for advertised properties and those applicants who express an interest are put in order in terms of their priority in accordance with the assessment policy. Those applicants with the same level of priority are ordered by the relative times they have waited with that priority. The person with the highest priority who has been waiting the longest with that priority and is suitable for that home (e.g. family size, mobility requirements, age criteria) will then be offered the property. They can refuse without penalty and the property will be offered the second person and so on.
- 2.2 Devon Home Choice is a partnership of the 10 Devon Local Authorities, including Plymouth and Torbay and 33 Registered Providers (Housing Associations as they were formerly known). All available affordable housing properties in Devon are allocated through the Devon Home Choice system.
- 2.3 Devon Home choice has a common IT system, application form, assessment policy and website. Applicants are able to move across Local Authority boundaries but no one authority should exceed a 2% net migration into their area. Should this occur the Authority can then restrict the adverts for their properties for local applicants only until the balance is redressed.
- 2.4 Applicants are prioritised within 5 Bands, with Band A for the most extreme cases where there is a threat to life, Band B is high housing need (severe overcrowding, severe medical need to move, those under occupying and those in temporary accommodation), Band C is medium housing need, Band D is low housing need and Band E is no housing need.

3. BIDDING PATTERNS AND REFUSALS

- 3.1 The report attached at Appendix A shows a number of statistical reports. For the purpose of this report, members will wish to consider page 5 which shows that 12% of those applicants in Band B have not accessed the system. This figure compares favourably with the figure at this point last year of 29%. The Devon Home Choice team have been focused on making contact with applicants not using the system and supporting them to access it or revisiting the priority they have been awarded. The figure also compares favourably with other areas in Devon with Exeter and East Devon having the smallest percentage of applicants not engaging in the system.
- 3.2 Members may also wish to note the overall reduction in numbers (50% from Bands A-D since April 2011) registered in Exeter (page 2) which has been achieved through the redesign of our front line services, with a focus on tackling the real demand the customer has not just providing them with a Home Choice application form. Also we have been very realistic with applicants wishing to renew their application and have discussed alternative housing options if they are in a low band.
- 3.3 With regard to refusals; since 1st April 2012, there have been 931 properties allocated to Exeter applicants through Devon Home Choice. Of these, there have been 669 separate instances of refusal (some properties have multiple refusals). Of these 476 were refusals by applicants in Band B, which is given for people in high housing need. The refusal reasons given by applicants in Band were as follows,

Reason	Number of Refusals
No reason provided	101
Did not respond to offer	82
Did not like area	75
Not accessible / suitable for health needs	61
Applicant had change of circumstances since bidding	39
Property too small	39
Lack of nearby facilities	30
Garden not suitable	9
Condition of Property	7
Applicant had rent arrears so not able to move until paid off	7
Not affordable	6
Wrong heating type	5
Didn't like neighbours	4
Area deemed unsafe by applicant	4
No Support nearby	2
Property too large	1
Applicant was refused due to public safety concerns	1
No public transport	1
No Right to Buy	1
Couldn't afford rent in advance	1
Total	476

Please note that Band B contains 641 applicants with 227 of those being under-occupiers who (unless impacted by Social Sector Size restriction) would not have an urgent need to move themselves and will be more selective over properties.

It is also important to note that the address of the property and a map is included in all property adverts.

3.4 Since April 2012 754 properties have been allocated in Exeter but 931 properties in that time have been allocated to Exeter applicants, therefore it is clear we are a net exporter of applicants and have benefitted, in that respect, from being part of the partnership.

4. RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee notes this report and advises on where additional information and detail is required.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR CUSTOMER ACCESS

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)
Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None