

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE COMMUNITY 2 SEPTEMBER 2008

HOMELESS DECISIONS AFFECTING VULNERABLE PEOPLE

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To detail the housing options and advice provided to vulnerable homeless applicants to whom the Council have no duty under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Following discussion at the previous scrutiny meeting concerning the Homelessness Strategy, it was requested that a report be submitted outlining the process for assisting clients who receive a negative decision; predominantly those receiving a decision that they are considered intentionally homeless.
- 2.2 Prior to this request a new performance indicator designed to highlight positive outcomes for negative decision, was included in this financial year's basket of indicators. This figure will be reported on at the end of this quarter and considered at the housing performance review meeting. The target set is that 75% of all applicants receiving a negative decision are still then assisted to secure a solution to their housing need. As this is not something other authorities report on it is difficult to set a target but anecdotal information would suggest other authorities in Devon would be around 50% for such a target.

3. ASSISTANCE FOLLOWING A NEGATIVE DECISION

- 3.1 Following a formal homeless application the client will always receive written confirmation of the outcome of the application and the reasons for our decision. In the case of a negative decision, the letter contains a number of standard paragraphs to guide the client and includes details of a provisional housing options appointment where the client will be given specialist advice on finding suitable housing. The standard paragraphs are as follows:

"The Council will give you appropriate advice and assistance in any attempts you make to secure your own accommodation. In anticipation that you wish to take up this option I have provisionally made a housing options appointment for you for XXXX <date and time>

If you have not already done so you may apply to be registered on the Council's Housing Register, which is a waiting list of those in housing need who are seeking permanent housing. An application form is obtainable from the Civic Centre, Paris Street, Exeter if you require this.

You may also be entitled to Housing Benefit from the council to help you pay for a private rent if you are on a low income or are unemployed. Please contact the Revenues department at the Civic Centre if you require advice and assistance in this way.

If you have any new information, which you feel the Council should be made aware of and which may affect the above homeless decision, please contact your caseworker in the Housing Advice Team as a matter of urgency.

*Under s.202 of the Housing Act 1996 you have the right to request a review of this decision. Your request must be made in writing and must be submitted **within 21 days of receiving this letter**. You do not need to give reasons for requesting a review but it will help if you are able to state why you think the decision is wrong. Once we receive your request we will write to you and give you an opportunity to supply any additional information or documents you think will support your review request and ask whether you want to make any representations in person.*

If you do request a review and are unhappy with the outcome you may have the right to appeal to the County Court.

You may wish to seek independent advice from a Citizens Advice Bureau, Shelter or a Solicitor.

If you do not understand anything in this letter please ask your homeless caseworker to explain it to you. "

- 3.2 This section of the letter was drawn up in consultation with Shelter.
- 3.3 If a vulnerable client does require temporary accommodation during the review process then it will be provided dependent on their previous history in temporary accommodation. A risk assessment will be undertaken to ensure the temporary accommodation offered is suitable for the client.
- 3.4 Where the client chooses to attend the housing options interview the following issues will be discussed:
- Accessing the private rented sector – through Smartmove (the council funded service managed by Exeter Homeless Action Group (EHAG). The deposit is guaranteed to the landlord and the rent in advance required is covered by the scheme. Ongoing support is then provided by EHAG.
 - Assessing the amount of Housing Benefit entitlement the applicant may receive. This may help to increase the options available to them.
 - A referral to supported accommodation, (this will often have been done at the point of initial contact but can be chased up at this stage).
 - Use of HomeChoice to encourage bidding on a wide range of properties to maximise opportunity to move into permanent accommodation.
- 3.5 If the client does wish to challenge the decision we will signpost them to appropriate advice agencies, including EHAG, the CAB and local solicitors.

4 RECOMMENDED

That Members note the procedures that have been put into place.

HEAD OF HOUSING SERVICES

COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE

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