

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE 4 FEBRUARY 2014

RESEARCH PROJECT TO INVESTIGATE HOUSING NEED IN EXETER

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report requests approval of the Executive to carry out a major research project into housing need in Exeter.
- 1.2 The findings from the research will inform the new Housing Strategy; the Council's Allocations Policy; and the systems thinking review which is currently being undertaken under the purpose heading "Find Suitable Housing". This review is concerned with the provision of solutions to people's housing problems.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 As part of both preparing a new Housing Strategy and carrying out the review of "Find Suitable Housing" we need to understand to a far more detailed level than we have up to now, the nature of housing need and housing demand in the City. To enable us to plan our response to the housing requirements of the people of Exeter we need to have an accurate idea of what those requirements are.
- 2.2 Some of the work necessary to discover this we are already doing ourselves, for example:
 - investigating and analysing our own Housing Register
 - carrying out a census of Exeter City Council tenants
 - employing consultants to update our Housing Market Assessment¹

However, all these activities are relatively limited (for example, although the Housing Market Assessment is an extremely useful document, it is principally composed of secondary data, including figures from our own housing register). Our housing register is not principally a measure of need (people can register even if they have no need and other people in Exeter may well be in need but have not registered) but is a record of people who wish to rent public sector housing. Council tenants are, by and large, adequately housed and only comprise an unrepresentative 10% of the population of the City.

¹ Exeter and Torbay Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2007, updated 2010

2.3 We need to be able to answer the following questions:

- What is housing need and housing demand in Exeter? How do they differ?
- How do we measure need not recorded on the Housing Register?
- How do we use that measurement to help us to provide the right housing in the right place?
- What are the housing issues and problems of the people of Exeter in whatever type or tenure of housing they live?
- What are their hopes and aspirations?
- What is the best way of meeting them?
- How is the housing market functioning in Exeter?
- What can we do to improve it?

3. THE RESEARCH PROJECT

3.1 We believe that the only way to answer these questions is to undertake original research of our own. As we have limited time and specialist staff capacity to undertake this work in-house, we have approached Exeter University for their help.

3.2 Following contact with Paul Cloke, Professor of Human Geography at the University, it was agreed that the research ought to cover:

- identification of need and demand
- identification of issues of affordability
- how many properties are required, where, and of what tenure mix

3.3 The research should address itself to the following key social groups affected by these issues, for example:

- homeless people
- unemployed people
- people who cannot work for any reason
- low paid people
- people who have been detrimentally affected by austerity-related welfare changes
- people whose rising household expenditure has jeopardised their housing status
- people needing secure and well serviced rental property
- households unable to afford mortgage costs (e.g. for first time home ownership)
- people forming new households because of relational breakdown
- elderly people with care needs
- other affected groups that may be more hidden

3.4 The University concluded that the best method to obtain the information needed was by way of a self-completing on-line survey for Exeter residents and workers. Such a survey would need

- **Extensive promotion and advertising** to make the survey opportunity known
- **A clear and easy-to-use survey instrument** that can be completed on-line via smartphone, tablet or computer, and subsequently assembled digitally for analysis
- **Access to residents not in conventional households**, such as homeless people. The research will need to undertake additional work within key agencies to enable the participation of these people
- **Access to people working in the city but living outside its boundaries**- this will require advertising through key employers, and /or visibility on radial transport routes

3.5 In practical terms the research will take the following form:

A team of experts from the University's Geography Department led by Professor Cloke will undertake the research itself and will carry out the necessary publicity. They will oversee and steer the project in partnership with the Council's Housing Development Team.

- 3.6 The mechanism for obtaining the necessary data will be an online survey using 'Survey Monkey' software. Following collection of data the researchers will undertake a full descriptive statistical analysis of the on-line survey findings, and will also provide a key-points analysis of qualitative text generated by the survey. They will also undertake strategic research with key institutions to enable people (such as homeless people) not in conventional households to complete the survey.
- 3.7 Following analysis, the researchers will provide the Council with a full draft report, and following consultation, a final report. They will also brief Councillors and Officers of their findings, and will include a question and answer session after the presentation(s).
- 3.8 The project from final agreement of the contract to the production of the Report is expected to take 5-6 months.
- 3.9 The budget for the research project including employment costs for university staff; publicity; design; carrying out the work; collecting data; analysing the results; preparing the Report and briefing interested parties has been capped at £30,000.

- 3.10 It is considered that the cost of this proposed project represents good value for money. The University, because it sets such high store on the value of the work itself and its partnership with Exeter City Council, has agreed not to charge us for the time of its principal two researchers. The only staff costs will be for a specially employed researcher who will carry out much of the day-to-day operational work. This will be in return for equal status in any resulting publicity.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The cost of the Research Project will not be funded from the Housing Revenue Account or the General Fund but will be met from Commuted Sums (that is, money received from developers in lieu of on-site provision of affordable housing). We are able to use such funding so long as we can demonstrate that it will contribute to the development of affordable housing. This the project will do as it will enable us to identify what kind of housing is required in which location – the first step towards accurate and efficient housing provision.

6 RECOMMENDED

- 6.1 That Executive approves the undertaking of a Research Project to investigate housing need in Exeter and, by extension, the functioning of the housing market in Exeter. This Research Project will inform the new Housing Strategy.**
- 6.2 That this research will be carried out by Exeter University in partnership with the Council's Housing Development Team. The total cost will not exceed £30,000 net.**

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Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

Titles of supporting documents: None