

Homelessness Task and Finish Group – Responses from representatives of bodies and activists

<u>Date Received</u>	<u>From</u>	<u>Comments</u>
14 September 2022	Councillor D. Moore	<p>Submission for homeless T&F, comments form constituents used with permission.</p> <p>I'd suggest that the housing team are asked to submit their template letters they use, please.</p> <p>1. Letting agents rejecting people who are on benefits. I have had a number of casework situations where people who are homeless or about to be and are on benefits are told that a property 'is no longer available' etc once an agency is aware of this, see example below. 'No DSS' - type notices are not legal but is there a case and role for the council to act on this? See How to find landlords who accept benefits - Shelter England</p> <p>Comment: " We would like to share an experience both me and X had when we saw a property in Crediton about around a month ago. We were kindly invited to view the property one bedroom house. Upon arrival there was a que of two people before us and one behind us. We were able to actually hear the discussion of the previous visitors talking to the letting agent as it was quite loud and the door was open being a hot day. He said the words " look you have to look at it from a landlords perspective they will prefer people who are working". I acknowledge that people can have preferences of course but still this seems to not sit well when I see it from an equal perspective this in my opinion does not demonstrate an equal playing field. We have also noticed on some application forms they do not have a section for people who are unemployed just a section for employment references. This I personally feel is discrimination as again I feel it's reflecting a preference but more in a discreet way rather than saying outright we do not accept people who are unemployed even though they are aware of the law I feel.I feel since the law has come in which is good and positive I still feel that these agents are finding loopholes to accept only employed people as a preference I seem to be able to sense these loopholes both me and X. when seeing some advertisements before this is why we have found that many do not get back. Occasionally we have seen advertisements that have said we only accept working professional people. I know this will change in the future I have great faith that equality will rise and be the norm it's</p>

just getting that awareness out much further to the masses which is a process.”

2. Review of Band D: Devon Homechoice policy [devon_home_choice_policy_v10.2_september_2022.pdf](https://devonhomechoice.com/devon_home_choice_policy_v10.2_september_2022.pdf) (devonhomechoice.com) places, for example, people who are sofa surfing or sleeping in cars in Band D - and no permanent home as low housing need, alongside those with no local connection. The reasoning for this is not given in the guide for members [members_guide_faq_-_24.06.2022_0.pdf](https://devonhomechoice.com/members_guide_faq_-_24.06.2022_0.pdf) (devonhomechoice.com) I have had two separate cases, both women, in this situation resulting in them being a low priority for housing. Likewise, when someone is accommodated in temporary accommodation they can become Band D, however this brings greater expense to the council and is not a permanent solution. The range of criteria in this banding should be reviewed and either changed or clarified. Better explanation should be given in the guidance about what the implications of being in a certain band means when it comes to being able to bid for and being prioritised for housing under Devon Home Choice.

Comment from person in this situation. “With the council with sofa surfers in band D I think to have some advice so people can feel peace of mind will help people feel comforted with challenging times and calm their anxiousness regarding homelessness. Something clear and easily understood would really help them mentally, physically and emotionally during those times and support would massively help. I personally think that people in Band D definitely are in need of housing this moving sofa surfing too often can be challenging and exhausting for some and to have a place would be very rewarding for them a permanent roof over their head which I feel every person is entitled to equally“

3. Letters from the Council: the council has produced in the past some good guidance for people in particular circumstances. However when letters that are sent out which are a statutory requirement - what explanation is sent about what they mean, which legislation it relates to, how to respond and where to get help from (if its not the council). letters I've seen contain minimal information accompanying them.

28 September 2022	Councillor T Oliver	<p>I present the evidence below re impact of reduced mental health services, and social attitudes on addiction, which I feel both contribute to homelessness. Please pass on to group members and note I am happy for this to be in the public domain.</p> <p>In the 1980's I worked as a psychiatric staff nurse on an acute admission ward. Many patients were admitted to come off alcohol or other substances such as heroin. They would be supported by reducing doses of appropriate drugs such as diazepam or methadone, vitamin and mineral supplements, and were under the care of a consultant psychiatrist, with input from social workers, occupational therapists, with active nursing care throughout their stay, and further group and individual support offered as a day patient or outpatient after discharge.</p> <p>The law has changed and Mental health services no longer accept patients for admission to receive treatment, care and support as they come off substances they are addicted to. Addiction is an illness which is strongly associated with homelessness, sometimes arising from it, or being a factor leading to it. I strongly feel the loss of service provided in the 1980's is a significant factor leading to homelessness.</p> <p>Self medication using alcohol or drugs is widely used and accepted throughout western society. It is used to lessen anxiety, reduce emotional pain and dull depression, where it is effective in the very short term but can lead to other problems. Many functioning and successful individuals regularly use significant amounts of drugs or alcohol in this way. For those with a high income, this does not impact on their being able to eat well and sustain warm, safe, and comfortable accommodation. For people on a low income, significant self medication using alcohol or drugs impacts on their being able to eat healthily and sustain warm, safe and comfortable accommodation.</p> <p>Whereas the long term health problems of using alcohol, street drugs, and of course smoking, are well known, the social stigma of addiction seems to selectively apply to those who are poor. Education around addiction is needed, and attitudinal change to the selective stigmatisation of poorer individuals. Economically well off functional alcoholics can often sustain jobs successfully, are not stigmatised, and humorous encouragement to drink is socially acceptable in the UK, whereas abstinence from alcohol is frequently questioned. I think initiatives are needed at national and local levels, in a manner similar to the anti smoking campaign which has so markedly and successfully reduced smoking in public.</p>
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