

**Teignbridge District Council  
Full Council  
23 April 2024  
Part i**

**Devon Home Choice Policy Review Report**

**Purpose of Report**

1. To seek approval for the policy changes to Devon Home Choice, the Social Housing Register for Teignbridge and Devon local authorities.

**Recommendation(s)**

The Council RESOLVES to:

- (1) Approve the proposed policy changes

**Financial Implications**

There are no financial implication to this policy change.

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**Legal Implications**

There are no specific legal implications arising out of this report save that the Council has a statutory duty to allocate accommodation pursuant to Part 6 Housing Act 1996 and to administer the Housing Register.

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**Risk Assessment**

Report author to comment on the Risk Assessment  
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There is medium risk to these changes. Any change to the policy will impact some applications either currently active or applications made in the future through changes to priority, banding or time on list and the likelihood of being offered a

tenancy through Devon Home Choice.

The housing register has increased from approximately 1000 active applications with a housing need pre-pandemic to around 1500 at the time of this report. The policy changes will not increase the number of properties available or being developed but looks to try to adapt the policy to meet the housing needs most effectively.

## **Environmental/ Climate Change Implications**

Low - There is no identified environmental or climate change impact in this report.

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## **Report Author**

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## **Executive Member**

Lin Goodman-Bradbury

## **1. INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND**

### **1.1 Devon Home Choice**

Devon Home Choice (DHC) is the choice-based lettings scheme for Teignbridge District Council social housing register. The DHC partnership includes East Devon District Council, Mid Devon District Council, North Devon District Council, Torridge Council, Exeter City Council, Torbay Council, South Hams & West Devon Council and Plymouth City Council and all the housing associations who provide homes in Devon for social rent.

We complete an annual review of the Devon Home Choice policy to ensure it continues to meet the needs of the partners, applicants and the housing providers. Legal changes to the policy are implemented when introduced. There are no legal changes in this policy review.

The DHC Board has compiled a list of recommended changes to the policy to commence April 2024. These policy changes have been voted for by each local authority and housing provider as a recommendation to update the policy. Also included in this report is details of the changes the board has not voted in favour of at this review.

Any local authority may make the decision to not support all recommendations by the board but any differences to the overall policy may require amendment to reflect Teignbridge's position or a separate allocation policy to cover our variance.

Full Council is required where the policy changes are beyond procedural or mandatory lawful requirement.

Proposals made are from any partners within the DHC Board and then voted upon. Recommended proposals have board approval to change.

## **1.2 Recommended Proposals**

### **1.2.1 Proposal 1:**

That care leavers (as defined in The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000) who are in a care placement, residential care or supported accommodation and are confirmed as being ready to move on to independent living may be awarded Band B through the Move On procedure. When ready for move on and have an ongoing support plan from social care will be offered Band B for 3 months. It will be reviewed at the 3 month point to ensure the young person is bidding appropriately, has not unreasonably declined a property and is proactively engaging with searches for private rented accommodation where deemed appropriate.

*This extends our definition of care placements to expressly include placements in young persons supported accommodation. Teignbridge already adopt this approach and therefore no change directly to us. If other Local Authorities have not adopted this approach there may broadly be some increase to the number of Band B households across the county. We intend to consider the development of a multi-agency move on panel including representatives from each local authority to ensure consistency in approach.*

*This will be subject to a 6 month trial and full impact assessment across the county.*

### **1.2.2 Proposal 2**

We extend the backdate of applications for care leavers to include care leavers who have moved from care into supported accommodation to their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday unless they have lived independently in between. The current policy only offers the backdate to the 16<sup>th</sup> birthday for care leavers leaving a care or residential placement. This approach is to free up scarce social care placements and supported accommodation provision.

The overall impact of this change would see approximately 44 care leavers from across the County, be awarded additional time on list (from their 16<sup>th</sup> Birthday). Care Leavers are considered to have a “local connection” to all areas of Devon so could bid on homes in any district with same level of priority/preference awarded.

The current Devon Home Choice IT system did not ask applicants to identify if they are a care leaver, so we are unable to advise how many are currently registered. We requested this be added to applications and has recently gone live on our systems.

The impact on the housing register in Teignbridge is a particular area of concern which we wish to highlight. Teignbridge has proportionally the lowest number of general needs one-bedroom social tenancies advertised in the County. By awarding additional time on list this will prioritise care leavers over other households on the register seeking one-bedroom homes including, homeless households who may be in temporary accommodation.

To mitigate this, preference can still be awarded on adverts to support move on from temporary accommodation to balance the priorities proportionally.

In 2022/23, Teignbridge District Council awarded only 2 care leavers leaving supported accommodation Band B that would qualify for this proposed backdate.

Future planning of the impact of this change is challenging. It is not known how many current children in care may need supported accommodation in the future and therefore be impacted by this policy change, but this will remain under review. We have indicative figures below which we have collated through our own records and that of Devon County Council's but have requested from Devon County Council more accurate figures for future assessment.

**Estimated future financial impact**

Age profile	0 to 5	6 to 11	12 to 14	15 to 17	Total
East Devon District Council	30	18	14	39	101
Exeter City Council	19	17	19	55	110
Mid Devon District Council	16	15	13	21	65
North Devon District Council	15	28	22	32	97
South Hams District Council	11	13	7	5	36
Teignbridge District Council	27	35	28	36	126
Torrige District Council	16	20	24	14	74
West Devon Borough Council	10	10	3	10	33

We will be working with Devon County Council and other partners to try to support additional delivery of one-bedroom homes and pursuing alternative housing options such as houses of multiple occupation to increase the overall options for care leavers to live independently. We have also asked Housing Associations locally, to review their housing stock to ensure the demand for older person units is reflective of housing need in our area and whether any should be converted to general purpose homes to enable more care leavers to secure homes locally.

We agreed with the board that this proposal should be piloted for 6 months and reviewed monthly to ensure this change did not adversely impact other households on the housing register disproportionately.

***Our recommendation is to support this proposal. The rise in demand for care leaver placements in supported accommodation provision is increasing due in part to lack of move on opportunities. Care Leavers needing additional support from supported accommodation should be***

*afforded the same backdated preference as those that do not need additional support leaving care. A 6 month pilot will enable us to monitor closely the impacts before decision is made to continue permanently or for longer pilot.*

### 1.2.3 Proposal 3

Applicants who are downsizing from a home with 3 or more bedrooms will have their band start date backdated by 5 years. This is done to assist in freeing up scarce high demand larger accommodation and supporting in efforts to reduce the numbers each local authority has in temporary accommodation and waiting times for larger homes.

The board voted for a trial for 1 year with the numbers moving to be monitored.

Below is a breakdown by local authority of all applicants who have qualified for “under occupying social tenant” banding on Devon Home Choice with a 3bed+ size home and their new bedroom need. The backdate would apply to 43 cases in Teignbridge.

Local authority	Bedroom need				Grand Total
	1	2	3	4	
East Devon	19	34	4		57
Exeter	16	52	14	1	83
Mid Devon	5	13	1		19
North Devon	8	24	6		38
Plymouth	44	72	7		123
South Hams	13	41	3		57
Teignbridge	9	28	6		43
Torbay	12	22	2		36
Torridge	5	21	3		29
West Devon	5	18	3		26
Grand Total	136	325	49	1	511

We have reviewed of the 9 households needing one beds in our area and only 1 household would be expected to be bidding on general purpose homes that would benefit from additional time on list from this policy change.

Local authority	Bedroom need				Grand Total
	1	2	3	4	
East Devon	3	9	4		16
Exeter	4	20	7	1	32
Mid Devon	1	5	1		7
North Devon		7	4		11
Plymouth	12	41	7		60
South Hams	2	21	1		24
Teignbridge	1	12	6		19
Torbay	4	5	2		11
Torrige	2	8	2		12
West Devon	2	9	3		14
Grand Total	31	137	37	1	206

Our current numbers in temporary accommodation reflect a need for 28 one beds properties and 14 two bed homes. We currently have 14 households in temporary accommodation needing 3bed + so any support to assist social tenants to downsize will enable those homes to be considered to homeless households.

We will manage the impact of this through offering preference to homeless households on some adverts to ensure that they are supported out of temporary accommodation when suitable homes are available.

We will monitor over the 12-month pilot of this to measure the impact of any households from other areas in Devon with local connection to Teignbridge to determine if this will policy change will continue.

**We therefore recommend this proposal is accepted.**

#### 1.2.4 Proposal 4

Remove the requirement for an interim accommodation duty to be triggered before offering Band B for households left in occupation of social tenancies with no rights to succeed the tenancy and would otherwise be eligible for Devon Home Choice.

The local authority may not have a legal duty to accommodate all households at risk of homeless. When a person is left in occupation of a social tenancy without succession rights and have lived there for 12 months or more, the housing provider could seek eviction through the courts. In most instances, the household left in occupation is left under occupying the property following the death of the tenant and therefore housing associations and local authorities wish to support the move to alternative accommodation effectively but empathetically.

Given the acute shortage of social tenancies, this proposal will enable us to move the person to a smaller home more effectively and free up larger homes.

#### **1.2.5 Proposal 5 (two part)**

The local authority to be permitted to choose if Band A applicants should be placed on autobid from the point of application, removing the current 4 week choice of bids.

**1.2.6** The local authority to be permitted to choose if Band B Homeless households owed the full duty are placed onto autobid, removing the current 4 week choice of bids.

This proposal allows local authorities to determine if they wish to remove the 4 week choice based biddings to be in place for these groups of applications. It is likely that some local authorities may adopt this and others choose not to.

**Our recommendation is to agree this policy change but Teignbridge will not be introducing this at this time. We believe that the fundamental principles of a choice-based lettings scheme should be available for 4 weeks of initial bidding to allow applicants to choose, from what is advertised, what they wish to bid on.**

**Forcing applicants to accept housing that is not of their choosing may impact how they treat their home, how they integrate into the area and their ability to sustain their tenancy. We wish to continue this element of choice for the initial 4 weeks of banding and monitor bidding, only enforcing bidding where the applicant is unable or unwilling to do so unreasonably.**

## **2. Implications, Risk Management and Climate Change Impact**



## **2.1 Implications**

The Devon Home Choice policy is reviewed annually. This enables local authorities and housing partners to assess emerging housing needs and demands effectively. Failure to make changes to the policy may further embed housing crisis' for individuals and not manage the lettings of social housing reflective of these needs.

## **2.2 Risk Management**

All changes to the policy will be monitored over the coming year to assess the impact and if the changes are effective at addressing key areas of housing need locally. The policy changes have been agreed by all 8 Devon local authorities and housing associations across the county and based on the available data contained within the exiting housing register, homelessness data and data from Devon County Council specifically regarding Care Leavers.

## **2.3 Environmental/Climate Change Impact**

There are no environmental/Climate Change impact linked to this report.

## **3. Alternative Options**

Teignbridge can choose not to adopt all policy changes or some but if the housing providers are not in agreement with our policy, they are not legally or contractually required to adopt any regional variations. Regional variations can also add additional layer of complexity for residents and housing providers so where possible, we only employ regional policies where absolutely necessary to meet local housing need that differs from other areas in Devon.

## **4. Conclusion**

**We support the recommended Devon Home Choice policy changes to better support emerging needs locally. We must however seek to increase delivery of one-bedroom homes on new developments to help meet the current need of over 750 households seeking this size of home on Devon Home Choice.**