

Teignbridge District Council
Full Council
25 February 2025
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 low risk to these changes. Any change to the policy will impact some applications either currently active or applications made in the future through

Committee
Date of meeting

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 1700 at the time of this report. The policy changes will not increase the number of properties available overall 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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Executive Member

Richard Buscombe

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. We have not included word changes that are solely alternative wording (i.e. care leavers changes to care experienced young people) as these are not policy changes.

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. We have included one proposal we are not supporting (1.2.4 Proposal 4).

1.2 Recommended Proposals

1.2.1 Proposal 1: An additional clause to be added that in exceptional circumstances and high value deliberate deprivation of capital or assets, households will be assessed as Band E or removed from the housing register where it is determined to be deliberate or criminal.

The current policy would award Band D as a restricted banding for 12 months and then the deprivation of capital would be disregarded and a higher banding, dependent on housing circumstances, would take effect. By amending the policy, we are disincentivising households knowingly and wilfully taking actions to reduce their capital to access social housing.

The board voted to agree this change but ensure there is a right of review in this decision making.

1.2.2 Proposal 2: To expand the definitions within the health and wellbeing framework to include explicit consideration for ‘Where a diagnosis of exceptional degenerative condition(s) with rapid deterioration’ under the Band B High Health matrix.

Health assessments are completed on an applicants or member of their households’ current impact of their housing on their health. For example, where medical reports indicate a person may lose ability to use stairs in the future, we focus on whether the applicant is currently able to do stairs. The explanation of the definition allows us to consider very rapid decline in health that would impact current or future housing needs.

1.2.3 Proposal 3: To expand the wording relating to the definition of a care leaver to state explicitly that a care experienced young person is defined as being 18 years of age until their 25th birthday.

The definition of a care leaver was historically noted in the policy as a care experienced young person between 18-25 years of age. For the purposes of clarity, the additional wording is being added as the legal definition is until the 25th birthday of the young person.

1.2.4 Proposal 4: For applications to be assessed as so urgent to require Band A, an offer of temporary accommodation deemed reasonable to be offered by the local authority, must not have been rejected by the applicant.

The purpose of Band A is to meet the most urgent needs in the County. There needs to be an identified risk of serious harm that would result in serious long-term disability or risk to life. Band A is only awarded where it is deemed unreasonable to offer temporary accommodation through a homeless application. The policy seeks to offer further clarity that if the application has been assessed as being suitable to be offered temporary accommodation to mitigate the risks posed, if this is unreasonably declined by the applicant, they would not qualify for Band A.

There is minimal impact of this policy change due to the very low numbers of applicants where partner agencies such as Police, Social Care or Domestic Abuse services make a Band A referral. The Housing teams are required to assess the suitability of any temporary accommodation within the law, with the applicant and their support services. A clear explanation of any offer is made to the applicant and implications of failing to accept the offer is explained verbally and in writing.

1.2.5 Proposal 5: To continue the policy change to provide care experienced young people to award additional band start priority to their 16th birthday if ready to move on from supported accommodation or care placement.

Since the introduction of this change in April 2024, 36 care experienced young people have been offered social housing through Devon Home Choice. The additional award of band start date allows places them highly on the housing register as part of the coparenting responsibilities of both Devon County Council, Unitary authorities in Devon and the local authorities.

We have at time of this report, 43 further applications from care experienced young people across the county ready for move on and in Band B.

We fully support this additional weighting and will review it annually.

1.2.6 Proposal 6: To continue with the additional award of 5 years backdated band start date for social housing tenants in Devon seeking to downsize a 3-bedroom home or larger.

Since the policy change in May 2024, 6 3-bed homes have been released by downsizers for reallocation within Teignbridge. Across Devon, 92 3bed or larger social tenancies have been released for reallocation. The policy change supports best use of the existing social housing stock across Devon and frees up larger family homes for other households in housing need more effectively.

We intend to retain this weighting and review annually.

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 amend the policy may further embed housing crises 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 existing 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.