



Housing Allocation Policy Review

Consultation Report January 2014

Method Online & Paper	Number of questionnaires returned
Online	45
Paper	3
Total	48

The survey was open from
9th December 2013 to 17th January 2014

Appendix 2



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1. Introduction

Consultation has been undertaken by Torbay Council on the review of the Housing Allocations policy.

The Localism Act 2011 introduced changes in relation to both homelessness and allocations, which mean local authorities are no longer required to keep an open housing register, but, are able to restrict access to their register for social housing. In Torbay we have an average of only 350 - 370 homes available for re-let per year. At least a third of these are Sheltered homes for those aged 55 and over.

We are seeing an increasing demand in the use of emergency/temporary accommodation and high cost adult and children's social care intervention services provided by the authority. This combined with the need to achieve significant budget savings, has led the Mayor, Executive Lead and members to request a further review to ensure that we are providing the best opportunities for local residents and making the most appropriate use of our social housing stock. Our approach should reflect local circumstances that are understood by local people.

2. Methodology

The survey was conducted by means of an online Questionnaire on the Council website, a background document providing an analysis of potentially affected households on the Housing Register was also made available.

Letters were also sent out to all of those currently registered on the Housing Register (Devon Home Choice).

The tables below were constructed, along with the numbers of responses and the calculated percentages, from the set of responses received. All of the tables in the report use the overall number of complete answers to each proposal in the total of returned questionnaires as the denominator unless otherwise stated.

3. Quality Assurance

To ensure the quality of data provided, all of the information received and extracted from the online survey returns was verified and quality checked. This provides the assurance that the results based on them present an accurate representation of the respondent's views.

4. Summary of results

- 52% all respondents answered “No” to the proposal to apply a minimum 5-year residency requirement.
- Almost a third (29.2%) answered “No” to proposal 2 (the removal of those who had not bid on any properties for a year)
- and nearly a quarter (22.9%) answered “No” to proposal 3 (the removal of those who had refused three reasonable offers of a home);
- Two thirds of all respondents (67%) answered “No” to proposal 4 to removal from the list of all persons/households now in Band E, (52.1% and 66.7% respectively);
- Those saying “No” were just slightly over a fifth (20.8%) giving greater priority on the list to low income households,

5. Results

Qu1) The Council is proposing applying a minimum 5 year length of time living in Torbay as a residency test to all applicants as the new qualification criteria for the housing register. Do you agree with this proposal?

Do you support this proposal?	Number	Percent
Yes	22	45.8%
No	25	52.1%
No response	1	2.1%
Total	48	100.0

Of the 25 respondents who selected 'No' they do not support the proposal, 23 respondents made comments related to the proposal. These have been summarised into themes below:

Category	Examples of comments– where respondents said 'No' above
Five years is too long	<p><i>"Five years is a long time. Families with children will be established within the area long before this time."</i></p> <p><i>"It is too general and there may be circumstances where this will disadvantage people who are in real need."</i></p>
Fails to take individual circumstances into account	<p><i>"Some people have moved to the area legitimately (i.e.. private tenancy and/or employed) and due to unfortunate circumstances become reliant on social housing. Under the new proposal they would not be entitled to housing"</i></p> <p><i>"Every person or persons applying have to have their circumstances and welfare taken into account."</i></p>
Discriminates against some types of people	<p><i>"It is too general and there may be circumstances where this will disadvantage people who are in real need."</i></p> <p><i>"It discriminates against people wishing to move to the area for employment or caring responsibilities"</i></p> <p><i>"Some people have moved to the area legitimately (i.e. private tenancy and/or employed) and due to unfortunate circumstances become reliant on social housing. Under the new proposal they would not be entitled to housing"</i></p>
Existence of problem / ownership of social housing	<p><i>"...this proposal is trying to 'fix' a problem that does not exist. The vast majority of social housing lettings already go to local people and it is likely that all this will do is unfairly restrict housing for people that might not be quite as 'local' as others."</i></p> <p><i>"Torbay Council does not own any social housing properties and therefore it can only apply restrictions on lettings after agreeing them with the social landlords operating in Torbay."</i></p>

Qu 2) The Council is proposing removing applicants who have not placed a bid for a property in over a year. This would be applied based on the housing register information at 1st October 2013. Do you agree with this proposal?

Do you support this proposal?	Number	Percent
Yes	34	70.8%
No	14	29.2%
No response	0	0.0%
Total	48	100.0

Of the 14 respondents who selected 'No' they do not support the proposal, 13 respondents made comments related to the proposal. These have been summarised into themes below:

Category	Examples of comments– where respondents said 'No' above
Goes against "choice"	<p><i>"...sometimes there are no suitable properties in the area you wish to apply for"</i></p> <p><i>"...the right property might not have come up..."</i></p> <p><i>"...properties that are advertised are not always in the area that you require..."</i></p>
Doesn't account for "Why" no bids	<p><i>"Are we now saying take a property you do not want or be removed from the list. This would also apply to applicants waiting on properties which have been adapted for their physical disabilities."</i></p> <p><i>"...may be some reason for not accessing the account..."</i></p> <p><i>"...wasn't given the opportunity to bid as I was placed in band E."</i></p>
Not enough properties	<p><i>"There are approximately 300 vacancies every year in Torbay. So realistically we are not able to meet everyone's requirements in one year. Therefore applicants have a right to exercise their choice not to bid for properties they consider do not meet their needs. Equally a property of the right size to meet need may not have been advertised within one year."</i></p>

Qu 3) The Council is proposing removing applicants from the housing register if they turn down three reasonable offers of a home. This would be applied based on the housing register information at 1st October 2013. Do you agree with this proposal?

Do you support this proposal?	Number	Percent
Yes	37	77.1%
No	11	22.9%
No response	0	0.0%
Total	48	100.0

Of the 11 respondents who selected 'No' they do not support the proposal, 10 respondents made comments related to the proposal. These have been summarised into themes below:

Category	Examples of comments– where respondents said 'No' above
What is a "reasonable" offer?	<p><i>"The term "reasonable" is open to interpretation."</i></p> <p><i>"There may be a number of factors involved so an arbitrary decision as to what constitutes a 'reasonable offer' is not sufficient to meet the needs of individual clients."</i></p>
Choice is being very restricted	<p><i>"...difficult to make a decision on how appropriate a property is without seeing it and the area."</i></p> <p><i>"...choice of a new home is a very important decision. It can make all the difference to the health and well being of all the occupants and if the new home turns out to be unsuitable, it is a very expensive mistake to fix. It is not uncommon for Owner Occupier's to look at 25+ properties before finally deciding on the one that meets most of their needs and yet just because someone is poor, Torbay are proposing to take this important choice away from applicants. This is not a customer focused approach and again is trying to 'fix' a problem that doesn't exist. Choice is a good thing and the more choice an applicant has, the more likely they are to take responsibility for their decisions, good or bad."</i></p>
Should ask for reasons	<p><i>"...maybe more detailed reasons why housing is not suitable that is not captured on original application. Applicants should be asked to justify their refusals after three though so their needs can be reassessed."</i></p> <p><i>"...some people are on automatic bidding and don't have control on the properties bid on."</i></p>

Qu 4) The Council is proposing removing band E i.e. clients assessed as having no housing needs and its applicants. Do you agree with this proposal?

Do you support this proposal?	Number	Percent
Yes	16	33.3%
No	32	66.7%
No response	0	0.0%
Total	48	100.0

Of the 32 respondents who selected 'No' they do not support the proposal, 31 respondents made comments related to the proposal. These have been summarised into themes below:

Category	Examples of comments– where respondents said 'No' above
Being in Band E doesn't mean no housing needs	<p><i>"...sometimes people are wrongly placed in Band E..."</i></p> <p><i>"...many reasons why people in band E wish to move from their property, and home swapper does not work."</i></p> <p><i>"These people are applying to social housing for a reason and if they are prepared to wait for a property this should be their choice."</i></p> <p><i>"I disagree, as I myself am on the E band and I live in a home that is not suitable for my self and my husband. It is cold and damp in the winter and we sit with no heating as we can not afford to eat and heat the property."</i></p>
Band E people are often trying to downsize	<p><i>"Band E has persons in it who are desperate to downsize by transfer. They are having to pay for an extra money for bedrooms. They are not only trying mutual exchange routes....this is a large band made up of a variety of people many who have problems just explained.....to cull this and hope it will go away seems to bury your head in the sand. Needs much more thought this particular band."</i></p> <p><i>"...by removing band E you would be discriminating against those who you feel have adequate housing but if you actually look at individual cases such as myself, we have been forced into private housing and are actually struggling to afford the rent and building up a lot of debt..."</i></p>
Detrimental to clients	<p><i>"Devon Homechoice partnership is in danger of collapsing, as each Council appears to be introducing different policies rather than the existing Devon wide approach. This adds complexity, costs and reduces customer service."</i></p> <p><i>"There are applicants in band E who would accept properties that the other Bands have rejected and would happily apply for these."</i></p>

Qu 5) The Council is proposing giving priority to low income households. Do you agree with this proposal?

Do you support this proposal?	Number	Percent
Yes	38	79.2%
No	10	20.1%
No response	0	0.0%
Total	48	100.0

Of the 10 respondents who selected 'No' they do not support the proposal, 9 respondents made comments related to the proposal. These have been summarised into themes below:

Category	Examples of comments– where respondents said 'No' above
Income ought not to be the only factor	<p><i>"...should be on a personal needs basis not a financial one, there are enough procedures in place to help genuine cases..."</i></p> <p><i>"I think someone like me who has a permanent illness should be given priority even above low income households. I feel trapped as there is nothing I can do to improve my position."</i></p> <p><i>"You cannot only take into account the household income there are other factors that have an impact on a persons situation."</i></p>
Danger of promoting poverty	<p><i>"Social housing is already allocated to those people who are in most need, which can and usually does mean households with a low income. This proposal is in danger of giving a perverse incentive to be poor and it is also almost impossible to administer."</i></p>
If income is the main factor why should the cut-off point be so low	<p><i>"...the people on the next pay level should also be included.....I earn just too much to get any help from benefits etc all my money goes on rent (private) bills and food I have nothing left at the end of any month. I don't drink, I don't smoke, I don't drive, obviously, no car I am not classed as low income but I can't afford to live and there are many more like me so not just low income."</i></p>
Each case should be assessed on own facts/needs	<p><i>"Each case should be assessed on housing need regardless of income."</i></p> <p><i>"...social housing should be on a personal needs basis not a financial one, there are enough procedures in place to help genuine cases..."</i></p>

Qu6) Do you have any further comments?

There were 29 respondents who made additional comments related to the proposal. These have been summarised into themes below:

Category	Examples of comments– where respondents said ‘No’ above
<p>These issues should not be framed as Yes/No, Black/White</p>	<p><i>“These questions are black and white which allows no room for individual issues. Everyone is an individual and should be treated according to their needs.”</i></p> <p><i>“I am ashamed to live somewhere where the Mayor and the local council don't seem to care about individuals”</i></p>
<p>Priority should be based on need</p>	<p><i>“people on Band E appear to have no housing need, but I disagree as the property you are renting might be of poor condition and not maintained.”</i></p> <p><i>“I'm on a low income and paying a private landlord, I'm also in band "E" so where does that leave the hundreds of people in the same situation as mine.”</i></p> <p><i>“I don't think medical history is given enough consideration.”</i></p>
<p>Priority should be for locals</p>	<p><i>“...giving priority to local people with a true need...”</i></p> <p><i>“...people who have worked, lived and paid Council Tax etc in this area since they were born should also be given priority.”</i></p> <p><i>“Do more rigorous checks to make sure that only tenants who are fully entitled to rent them, do so. If tenants are antisocial, or don't look after the property properly, boot them out.”</i></p>
<p>Good housing would improve health</p>	<p><i>“The average house price is 12 times average income in the south west. This makes home ownership unaffordable for the majority of people in the Bay. Some of the private rented sector is highly priced and of very poor quality. Access to decent affordable housing is the bedrock to improving peoples health and well-being.”</i></p> <p><i>“...with two of us here in the home registered as disabled and receiving highest rate disability allowance I am classed as having no housing needs.”</i></p>
<p>Changes should be rethought</p>	<p><i>Torbay appear to be proposing changes that have not been fully thought through. The evidence provided with this consultation does not prove the case being argued or show how the changes will achieve the required outcome. Westward understands that the Council wants to make changes that will give additional priority to their residents but in doing so there is a real danger the Council will create confusion, increase costs, reduce customer service and raise expectations that are then not deliverable. Most importantly the Council seems to have forgotten that it doesn't own any social housing anymore and therefore needs to agree with all the Housing Associations working in Torbay a mutually agreeable way forward, rather than to change its policy in isolation.</i></p>

6. Respondent Profile

What best describes your work situation?

Employment Situation	Respondents	
	Number	Percent
Working Full-Time (30 hours plus per week)	16	33.3%
Working Part-Time (Under 30 hours per week)	5	10.4%
Wholly retired from work	6	12.5%
Unemployed and available for work	1	2.1%
Permanently sick / disabled	13	27.1%
On a government supported training programme (e.g. Modern Apprenticeship)	0	0.0%
Self employed full or part time	0	0.0%
Full time education at school, college or university	1	2.1%
Looking after the home	0	0.0%
Other	5	10.4%
Total	47	97.9%

Gender

Gender	Respondents	
	Number	Percent
Male	20	41.6%
Female	27	56.3%
Not given	1	2.1%
Total	48	100%

Age

Age Band	Respondents	
	Number	Percent
Under 16	0	0.0%
16 - 24	0	0.0%
25 - 34	6	12.5%
35 - 44	11	22.9%
45 - 54	10	20.8%
55 - 64	14	29.2%
65 - 74	6	12.5%
75 +	0	0.0%
Total	47	97.9%

Disability

Disability	Respondents	
	Number	Percent
Disabled	20	41.6%
Non-disabled	27	56.3%
No response	1	2.1%
Total	48	100.0%

For further information please contact the Policy Performance and Review team on 01803 207227 or email consultation@torbay.gov.uk

The information used to collate this report has been collected and processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act, 1998.