

Devon Home Choice



Policy Document

www.devonhomechoice.com





Devon Home Choice Policy

This policy can be made available in different formats (such as large print) or in other languages on request. Please contact your local authority housing team:

East Devon DC	(01395) 517469	www.eastdevon.gov.uk
Exeter CC	(01392) 265726	www.exeter.gov.uk
Mid Devon DC	(01884) 255255	www.middevon.gov.uk
North Devon DC	(01271) 325757	www.northdevon.gov.uk
Plymouth CC	(01752) 305496	www.plymouth.gov.uk
South Hams DC	(01803) 861234	www.southhams.gov.uk
Teignbridge DC	(01626) 361101	www.teignbridge.gov.uk
Torbay Council	(01803) 208723	www.torbay.gov.uk
Torridge DC	(01237) 428700	www.torridge.gov.uk
West Devon BC	(01822) 813600	www.westdevon.gov.uk

Devon Home Choice Policy

Contents

Section 1 - Introduction

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Aims of Devon Home Choice
- 1.3 The scheme in brief
- 1.4 Statement of Choice
- 1.5 Equal opportunities – ensuring access to Devon Home Choice for all

Section 2 – Access to housing

- 2.1 How to apply
- 2.2 What properties are covered by Devon Home Choice?
- 2.3 Who can apply for housing?
- 2.4 Who is not eligible?
- 2.5 Applicants financial resources
- 2.6 Which Devon local authority will manage an application?
- 2.7 Who will make decisions about applications?
- 2.8 Dealing with exceptional situations

Section 3 – How is housing need assessed?

- 3.1 How is housing need assessed?
- 3.2 How is priority awarded?
- 3.3 Banding
- 3.4 No local connection to Devon
- 3.5 Households with more than 1 need
- 3.6 Received, Application Active and Band Start dates
- 3.7 Changes in circumstances
- 3.8 Moving bands following a change in circumstances
- 3.9 Deliberate worsening of circumstances
- 3.10 Notification
- 3.11 Size of property
- 3.12 How is health and wellbeing priority awarded?
- 3.13 How is priority awarded due to housing defects?
- 3.14 Review of applicants on the Devon Home Choice register
- 3.15 Cancelling applications
- 3.16 Rejoining Devon Home Choice

Section 4 – Applying for properties

- 4.1 Finding a home**
- 4.2 Moves between Devon local authorities**
- 4.3 Accessing information**
- 4.4 Advertising of properties**
- 4.5 Property descriptions**
- 4.6 Labelling properties**
- 4.7 Bidding for a home**
- 4.8 Deadlines for applications**
- 4.9 Automatic bidding**
- 4.10 Selection procedure**
- 4.11 Verification of eligibility**
- 4.12 Refusals**
- 4.13 Feedback**
- 4.14 Difficult to let properties**
- 4.15 False information**
- 4.16 Data protection**
- 4.17 Policy review**
- 4.18 Reviews**
- 4.19 Monitoring**
- 4.20 Partnership working**
- 4.21 Training**

Appendix 1 - Definitions

Appendix 2 - Partner contact details

Appendix 3 – Potential barriers to participating in Devon Home Choice

Section 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Devon Home Choice is a choice based letting scheme that covers the whole of Devon.

This Policy explains how local authority and housing association homes across Devon will be let. The Policy sets out:

- How to apply for housing
- Who is eligible for housing
- How applicants will be assessed and prioritised

Devon Home Choice is a partnership between the 10 Devon local authorities and housing associations working in Devon.

All applicants are assessed in the same way, using the rules set out in this policy to ensure fairness and consistency.

Whilst all applicants are assessed in the same way, some partner housing associations may have different criteria to let their homes (for example the number of people that can live in a home of particular size etc). Where this is the case any differences will be made available on the Devon Home Choice website.

1.2 Aims of Devon Home Choice

The aims of developing Devon Home Choice are:

- To provide choice for people seeking housing and the ability to move within Devon
- To develop a common scheme across Devon that is transparent, easy to understand and accessible to all

Under Devon Home Choice there will be a common:

- Application form
- Housing register
- Approach to assessing housing need and awarding priority
- Approach to advertising available properties

1.3 The scheme in brief

Local authority and housing association homes available to let will be advertised every week. People with applications on the housing register can look at details of the homes. They can then 'bid' for homes that they are eligible for.

The successful person will be selected from those that applied for a property based on:

FINAL Devon Home Choice Policy (May 2009)

- The band in which they have been placed which reflects their housing need ([see Section 3.3](#))
- Their band start date within that band ([see Section 3.6](#))

Devon Home Choice will enable people to move within the county. This will greatly help people who need to move to get work or to benefit from support.

1.4 Statement of choice

The Devon Home Choice partnership believes in offering people seeking housing as much choice as possible. There is very high demand for social housing in Devon and the provision of choice has to be balanced with the need to ensure that housing goes to those with the greatest need.

Devon Home Choice has been developed to enable applicants to view the details of available properties across Devon, choose between them and bid for those properties for which they are eligible.

Whilst the aim of Devon Home Choice partners is to provide choice in the allocation of social housing in Devon, there will be a number of exceptional situations where this will not be possible. For example, where a landlord needs to make an urgent management move (see Appendix 1 – Definitions). In such cases the home will be let as a direct offer rather than being advertised through Devon Home Choice.

Devon Home Choice will provide people seeking housing in Devon with an understanding of:

- Their level of priority
- The availability of accommodation which is suitable for them
- The level of demand for social housing in Devon
- Their likelihood of being successful
- Whether to seek alternative housing solutions

1.5 Equal opportunities – ensuring access to Devon Home Choice for all

There are many benefits of Devon Home Choice to people seeking a home, but it does require them to be proactive. People will need to:

- Find information on available homes
- Choose between homes
- Bid for homes

Evidence from some of the early Choice Based Letting schemes found that vulnerable applicants (for example older people or people with mental health problems) could lose out.

A range of people may be vulnerable and need support to participate in Devon Home Choice. Vulnerability can be a variable state, and can occur at particular points in life such as bereavement. It can be temporary, or episodic and recurring due, for example, to mental distress, it can be ongoing or can increase over time.

FINAL Devon Home Choice Policy (May 2009)

For this reason every applicant will be considered as an individual. Their needs will be assessed so as to identify the barriers they may face in participating in Devon Home Choice. Having identified the barriers we will then be able to put solutions in place. The potential barriers are set out in Appendix 3.

A range of measures will be put in place to ensure that everyone can share in the benefits that Devon Home Choice offers, and that applicants who are vulnerable do not miss out. These measures are set out throughout this Policy.

Due to the high demand for housing in Devon, we can only ensure fair access to Devon Home Choice. Even though some applicants may be classed as 'vulnerable' and need support to participate in Devon Home Choice, this will not necessarily reflect a high level of current housing need. Therefore, in reality, they may not have a high chance of securing a home.

Devon Home Choice must comply with a range of legislation. This includes the following legislation designed to ensure equal opportunities:

- The Race Relations Act 1976
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- The Sex Discrimination Act 1975
- The Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Freedom of Information Act 2000
- The Data Protection Act 1998

An Equalities Impact Assessment will be undertaken on the proposed Devon Home Choice scheme in December 2008/ January 2009.

Each of the organisations involved in the Devon Home Choice Partnership has an Equal Opportunities Policy to ensure that:

- Everyone has equal access to services
- No one is discriminated against on the grounds of ethnic origin, disability, age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or for any other reason

Information on ethnicity is asked for as part of the allocation process. This will be used to monitor diversity and equality in the operation of the policy. Information on disability is collected in order that future needs for adapted homes can be assessed and that any home offered is suitable for the needs of the applicant.

Any allegations or concerns that an organisation has not acted appropriately have to be made directly to that organisation. All partner landlords have a complaints policy and an independent Ombudsman.

The following sections set out:

- How to apply for housing
- How applications will be assessed
- How properties will be advertised
- How applicants can bid for available properties

FINAL Devon Home Choice Policy (May 2009)

- How the successful applicants will be identified

Section 2

Access to housing

2.1 How to apply

Anyone wishing to bid for a home must apply to join the Devon Home Choice housing register. An applicant can register by any of the following methods:

- Online via our website at www.devonhomechoice.com
- By completing a paper application form, available from any of the Devon local authorities

An advocate (for example family, friend or support agency) can complete the application form on behalf of a vulnerable person. The applicant's signature will always be required. Where forms are completed online, the signature will be required when an applicant goes to view a property they are being offered.

Applicants will be asked if they would like any support to complete the application form. The application form will be available in different formats, for example large print upon request.

The form will include a question on whether applicants need any support to participate in Devon Home Choice.

Please note that some partners may require applicants to undertake a housing options and assessment interview before completing an application form.

Advice and information on applying for housing is available from local authority housing offices. See the list in appendix 2 for contact details.

2.2 What properties are covered by Devon Home Choice?

Most local authority and housing association homes will be advertised for let through Devon Home Choice. This will include:

- General needs housing
- Sheltered homes
- The majority of disabled adapted properties.

The only exceptions may be some highly adapted homes, which may be directly offered to a household with matching needs.

A number of participating Housing Associations are subject to nomination agreements with local authorities. These agreements will effectively be replaced by the introduction of Devon Home Choice. This will be subject to agreement that a Housing Association makes at least the same number of homes available through Devon Home Choice as would previously have been covered by nomination rights, and that these homes are allocated according to the eligibility and lettings criteria set out in this Policy.

FINAL Devon Home Choice Policy (May 2009)

Staff who occupy accommodation belonging to partner landlords of Devon Home Choice as part of their employment who need to move once they retire will be allocated accommodation outside Devon Home Choice as a direct let.

However the scheme does not apply to the following types of tenancies:

-

Non-Secure tenancies or 'temporary accommodation' – Any accommodation that is provided to meet an interim duty under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996.

Specialist supported accommodation – Accommodation providing support to particular groups of people, for example for young people or people with mental health problems

Mutual exchanges – If local authority or housing association tenants exchange properties with each other. Permission to undertake a mutual exchange is dealt with separately by individual partners.

Temporary decants – Secure or introductory tenants of a local authority or assured or assured shorthold tenants of Registered Social Landlords who need to be moved temporarily whilst major work is carried out on their home.

Demoted tenancies - Following a successful application for a demotion order under sections 14 and 15 of the Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003.

Succession – Where the secure tenant dies, the tenancy is a periodic one, and there is someone who qualifies for the tenancy by succession.

Assignment – Where tenancies are 'assigned' to another person or to a person who would be qualified to succeed to the tenancy

Court order – Where a court orders a tenancy to be disposed of/transferred to someone else under:

- The Matrimonial Causes Act 1973, s.24 (property adjustment orders in connection with matrimonial proceedings)
- The Matrimonial and Family Proceedings Act 1984, s.17(1) (property adjustment orders after overseas divorce)
- The Children Act 1989, Schedule 1, paragraph 1 (orders for financial relief against parents)
- The Civil Partnership Act 2004, Schedule 8 (property adjustment orders in connection with civil partnership proceedings or after overseas dissolution of civil partnership, etc)."

Introductory or probationary tenancies – Where an introductory/probationary tenancy becomes a secure or assured tenancy, applicants do not need to re-apply.

Family Intervention Tenancies – Introduced by the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008, Family Intervention Tenancies are a form of residential tenancy without security of tenure. They may be offered by either a local housing authority or a housing association to anyone who is a tenant of a

secure (or assured) tenancy subject to a possession order on the grounds of anti-social behaviour or domestic violence or anyone who (if they had a secure or assured tenancy) could have had such a possession order made against them.

2.3 Who can apply for housing?

Anyone over 16 years of age who is eligible may apply. This includes people who are already secure, assured, introductory or assured short-hold tenants of any of the member partner landlords.

Partner landlords may have different policies in dealing with persons under the age of 18 and for more details please contact the individual landlord. A common approach to dealing with 16-18 year olds is sought. If landlords have different approaches to dealing with people under 18 this will be included in the Policy

2.4 Who is not eligible?

The Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) states that accommodation can only be allocated to people who are eligible.

Certain people from abroad with limited rights to remain in the United Kingdom are not eligible to be allocated housing. These groups of people are set out in 'The Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (England) Regulations 2006' (as amended). People who are in doubt about whether they are eligible should seek detailed advice from their local authority's Housing Advice Team.

People assessed by Devon local authorities as being guilty of unacceptable behaviour will be denied the right to register with Devon Home Choice. This will apply where a Devon local authority is satisfied that the applicant, or a member of their household, have been guilty of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make the applicants unsuitable to be a tenant and who, in the circumstances at the time their application is considered, are unsuitable to be a tenant because of the unacceptable behaviour. This behaviour must normally have occurred in the previous two years (see below).

Behaviour is unacceptable if it is behaviour that would, if the applicant had been a secure tenant, allow the housing authority to obtain an outright possession order under section 84 of the Housing Act 1985 in relation to Grounds in Part 1 of Schedule 2 other than Ground 8.

Examples of unacceptable behaviour could include:

- Significant rent arrears or breach of tenancy obligations where no attempt is being made to repay the debt or remedy the breach (as a minimum it would be normally be expected that applicants had agreed and kept to a repayment schedule and/ or not breached their tenancy obligations for at least 3 months)
- Conduct likely to cause serious nuisance, annoyance or harassment to neighbours
- Using accommodation or allowing it to be used for immoral or illegal purposes
- Serious damage or neglect of a property by the tenant or other occupants

FINAL Devon Home Choice Policy (May 2009)

- Committing domestic abuse
- Knowingly giving false or misleading information or withholding information that has been reasonably requested
- Threatening, or perpetrating violence or abuse against members of staff of a Devon Home Choice partner organisation.

Cases will be considered on an individual basis. The following criteria will be applied in determining whether an individual or household should be denied the right to register with Devon Home Choice, because of their behaviour:

- There must be reliable evidence of violent or anti-social behaviour, or domestic abuse
- The behaviour need not have led to possession, prosecution or other enforcement action by a statutory agency, provided there is reasonable probability that, had the applicant been a tenant, an outright possession order would have been granted because of that unacceptable behaviour.
- In normal circumstances the behaviour concerned should have occurred within the last two years. In cases of a more serious nature, for example, those involving criminal prosecution, a longer time-scale may be appropriate.
- There must be reasonable grounds for believing that the behaviour could continue or be repeated. For example, the applicant may have issued threats or there might be a history of repeat offending.

Applicants with rent arrears to any social landlord, that were accrued in the previous two years on their current or a previous tenancy, will not normally be offered a property. Those applicants with rent arrears above £500 will be placed in the No housing need band (E). Both will apply unless there are exceptional circumstances or until:

- They clear their debt, or
- The landlord is satisfied that the applicant is entitled to an amount of benefit sufficient to clear the arrears, or
- The applicant has shown a clear intention to pay. That payments are made in accordance with an agreed repayment schedule during a period of at least 3 months. In exceptional circumstances that period may be reduced with the agreement of the local authority, or
- If there are exceptional circumstances relating to need

Partner social landlords within Devon Home Choice have different policies relating to applicants with rent arrears. Whether a bid for home is accepted will therefore be subject to the policies of the each partner social landlord. More information is available from each Devon Home Choice partner.

Applicants with rent arrears to a private landlord will be considered on a case-by-case basis by Devon local authorities. Applicants who have rent arrears to a private landlord over £500 who have been (or would be) assessed as having accrued these rent arrears intentionally will be placed in the No housing need band (E). 'Intentionally' means that the applicant deliberately did something (or failed to do something) that resulted in the rent arrears. An act or omission in good faith on the part of the applicant will not be treated as deliberate if they were unaware of any relevant fact.

Applicants who have been denied the opportunity to register with Devon Home Choice or have had their priority reduced within Devon Home Choice will be informed in writing of:

FINAL Devon Home Choice Policy (May 2009)

- The decision and the reasons behind it
- Their right to appeal and how to do this

Partner local authorities in Devon Home Choice will review applications on request following the receipt of further information. This may include an applicant being able to demonstrate that there has been no further instance of such behaviour, and/or that they can show that they are engaged with support that will enable them to maintain a tenancy.

2.5 Applicants financial resources

Local authority and social landlord homes provided through Devon Home Choice are for people who are considered to have insufficient resources to meet their housing need.

The resources available to each household will be assessed to determine whether they are sufficient to meet their housing need.

Household Income

Applicants with a household income more than five times higher than the relevant Local Housing Allowance level prevailing in Devon at the time will normally be considered to be able to meet their housing need, through either renting privately or owner occupation. Such applicants will therefore be placed in the No housing need band (E).

Further information on the financial assessment and the Local Housing Allowance rates that apply across Devon is available from local authority housing teams (contact details provided in appendix 2).

The following types of income are fully disregarded:

- Attendance Allowance
- Disability Living Allowance

Capital, Savings and Equity

The capital, savings and equity available to an applicant's household will be assessed. If it is determined that, given:

- The applicant's capital, savings and equity
 - The size and composition of the applicant's household
 - The local housing market (for example prices to buy or rent privately)
- an applicant can resolve their own housing need within their local housing market they will be placed in the No housing need band (E).

Applicants can contact their local authority housing teams for details of how this assessment is made.

An exemption from the financial assessment will apply if the applicant or partner, where applicable, has been (or would be) accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need by a Devon local authority.

Partner social landlords within Devon Home Choice have different policies relating to levels income and other assets of those households that they will accommodate. Whether a bid for home is accepted will therefore be subject to

FINAL Devon Home Choice Policy (May 2009)

the policies of the each partner social landlord. More information is available from each Devon Home Choice partner.

Applicants may be required to demonstrate that they can afford the rent on any prospective tenancy before being allowed to sign for it.

2.6 Which Devon local authority will manage an application?

When an applicant applies to Devon Home Choice one of the Devon local authorities will be responsible for assessing their application and managing their

case. This will include:

- Issuing all correspondence
- Addressing any enquiries
- Assessing any health/ wellbeing or housing defect issues
- Managing any reviews

The local authority that will manage an application will be determined by asking applicants which local authority area they would prefer to live in. Whichever local authority is indicated will manage the application. It will be made clear that this will not restrict where applicants can bid, or their chances of being housed in other local authority areas.

Where a Devon local authority has accepted a homelessness duty towards an applicant they will manage their application, regardless of which local authority area the applicant would prefer to live in.

2.7 Who will make decisions about applications?

Applications to join the Devon Home Choice register will be managed by the local authority housing team. This will include organisations that have been formally appointed to carry out this function on a local authority's behalf. For example Riviera Housing Trust in Torbay.

The local authority housing teams will be responsible for:

- Processing applications
- Ensuring that all the required information is supplied
- Undertaking an initial verification of the information
- Assessing and awarding priority for some applicants seeking priority due to health and wellbeing and/or housing defect grounds (see Sections 3.12 and 3.13)
- Carrying out financial assessments of applicants (see Section 2.5)
- Notifying applicants of the outcome of their application
- Receiving review requests and processing these in accordance with the Policy
- Making enquiries necessary to make homelessness decisions
- Assisting applicants who are homeless to bid
- Setting up automatic bidding for homeless applicants who have not been bidding for homes (see Section 4.8)
- Discharging homelessness duties in accordance with the legislation and guidance

FINAL Devon Home Choice Policy (May 2009)

- Labelling properties to be advertised, working together with Housing Associations (see Section 4.5)
- Putting in place appropriate support for vulnerable applicants to participate in Devon Home Choice. This will involve working with a wide range of partner agencies,
- Monitoring the Devon Home Choice register to identify those applicants who, given their priority within Devon Home Choice, may soon be successful in bidding for a home, but who require a support package to enable them to live independently. It will be vital that such a support package is put in place, or can be arranged in an appropriate timescale that will enable an applicant to take up an offer of housing. This will require close partnership working between local authorities, housing associations and partner agencies.
- Reviewing details of applicants who have applied for homes and notifying the landlord of the applicant in the highest band who has the earliest band start date (**Note:** some Housing Associations may undertake this role. This will be set out in the Policy)
- Explaining the reasons why an applicant has not been selected for a home (when a local authority is the landlord of the home)
- Taking a decision to depart from the published policy due to exceptional situations (see Section 2.8)

Local authority Environmental Health teams will responsible for:

- Assessing and awarding priority for some applicants seeking priority due to housing defects

When an applicant bids for a home the landlord (either a local authority or Housing Association) will be responsible for:

- Undertaking a detailed verification of the information the applicant has supplied in order to ensure that they are eligible
- Providing the applicant with an opportunity to view the home (if it has been determined that they are eligible)
- Making a formal offer to an applicant
- Explaining the reasons why an applicant has not been selected for a home

Multi-agency panels will be responsible for:

- Assessing some applicants whose health and wellbeing is affected by their current housing, and awarding priority
- Assessing whether applicants are ready to move-on from supported accommodation (see Definitions set out in Appendix 1)

2.8 Dealing with exceptional situations

In exceptional situations the Devon local authorities reserve the right to depart from any aspect of this Policy. As set out above, any decision to depart from the Policy will be taken by a local authority housing team.

The exercise of such discretion will be monitored to ensure that it is properly exercised within extremely limited bounds.

Section 3

How is housing need assessed?

3.1 How is housing need assessed?

Once an application has been received it will be placed in 1 of 5 bands detailed below depending upon the applicant's level of housing need, and whether or not they have a local connection to Devon ([see Section 3.4](#)).

3.2 How is priority awarded?

Whilst offering choice to applicants wherever possible, allocation schemes must still ensure that reasonable preference is given to applicants who fall into 1 or more of the following groups over those who do not:

- People who are homeless (within the meaning of Part 7 of the 1996 Housing Act as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002). This includes people who are intentionally homeless and those who are not in priority need
- People who are owed a (homeless) duty by ANY local authority under section 190(2), 193(2) or 195(2) of the 1996 Act (or under section 65(2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985) or who are living in accommodation secured by ANY housing authority under section 192(3). The letter detailing the outcome of a homeless application will specify whether 1 of these sections applies
- People occupying unsanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions
- People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds including a disability
- People who need to move to a particular locality in Devon, were failure to move would cause hardship to themselves or others

The scheme should take into account those who qualify under more than 1 category when assessing housing need.

3.3 Banding

The following section provides details of the five bands. The band in which an applicant is placed will be determined by their housing need as set out below. Further details of the criteria are provided in the [Definitions](#) section below.

Emergency Housing Need (A)

Applicants will be placed in the Emergency housing need band (A) if their need for housing is assessed as so exceptional that they take priority over all other applicants.

Any application for an applicant to be placed in the Emergency housing need band (A) must normally be submitted by an agency and not the applicant themselves. For example, if an applicant wants to move due to threat of violence, the police or an appropriate agency must contact a Devon local authority with evidence to support the request for an urgent move.

Individual local authorities will assess Emergency applications. Substantial evidence must exist before such priority is awarded.

The following are examples of the type of situations that would qualify:

- Urgent health/ wellbeing need
[Defined below](#) in Section 3.12
- Emergency disrepair
[Defined below](#) in Section 3.13
- To escape violence or threat of violence, serious harassment or a traumatic event
Where there is immediate and serious risk to a household living in Devon. The Police or another appropriate agency will usually provide supporting evidence that the risk exists. The person at risk may be the applicant, or another person who might be reasonably expected to reside with them.
- Witness protection scheme
Where a Devon local authority has accepted a household being referred under the Witness Protection Scheme.

Applicants will be given this priority for 4 weeks. If an Emergency housing need band (A) applicant does not make bids for suitable homes available through Devon Home Choice (or refuses a suitable offer of a property) they will have their status reviewed and may be placed in 1 of the other bands dependent on their need. In very exceptional circumstances an applicant will be allowed to remain in the Emergency housing need band (A) for longer than 4 weeks.

The decision to extend or remove the Emergency housing need band (A) status will be made by the local authority and will be based upon: -

- Whether a vacancy occurred during the 4-week period that met the declared needs of the applicant.
- The reasons why the applicant failed to apply for the property and whether the reasons were valid.

All decisions will be reported to the next available Devon Home Choice Project Group meeting.

High Housing Need (B)

- Statutorily Homeless Households
Where a duty has been accepted by a Devon local authority towards an applicant under Part VII of The Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 (the duty towards households who are in priority need and unintentionally homeless)
- Prevention of homelessness for applicants within Devon
Where this will avoid the applicant becoming homeless, and where they would be accepted as being unintentionally homeless and in priority need
- Lacking 2 or more bedrooms
Applicants who currently lack 2 or more bedrooms given the size of their household
- Under occupying by 2 or more bedrooms
If the applicant is a tenant of a Devon Home Choice partner and moves to property at least 2 bedrooms smaller. Please note that a tenant who is under occupying by 2 or more bedrooms will be classified as being in the Medium housing need band if they apply for a property that is only 1 bedroom smaller.
- High health/ wellbeing need
[Defined below](#) in Section 3.12
- High disrepair
[Defined below](#) in Section 3.13
- Ready for move on from supported accommodation within Devon
Where the applicant is living in supported accommodation in Devon and a multi-agency Move-On Panel has confirmed that they are ready to move on. This will include young people leaving care who are assessed by the local authority or a multi-agency panel as ready for independent living. Note: Applicants living in supported accommodation who are not assessed as being ready to move-on to independent living will remain in the No housing need band, as they are adequately housed, unless they qualify for another band due to other needs (for example health and wellbeing needs).
- Social need or to support the delivery of another service
This applies to applicants who, for exceptional reasons, fall outside of the rest of Devon Home Choice Assessment Policy, and need to be found secure alternative accommodation. This may include child risk or concern issues where children would otherwise be accommodated by social services.

Exceptional cases may also be considered where there is a combination of factors or special circumstances, which make the overall effect disproportionately worse than any of those factors might normally be assessed as being.

FINAL Devon Home Choice Policy (May 2009)

- Effective management of social housing within Devon
This priority will be awarded in a number of situations set out below to aid the efficient management of social housing stock. Further detail is provided in Appendix 1.
 - **To release high need properties**
As social rented housing is a scarce resource there will be times when it is not being used to its full potential. Re-housing will enable a 'high need' property to be released or to aid the wider management of the social rented housing stock.

This might include where applicants have no particular priority, but are occupying a property that is of a type in very limited supply and is needed to be returned to the stock of social housing for letting to meet an immediate and pressing need.
 - **As a management tool to resolve issues affecting a block or estate**
This priority may also apply where it was agreed as an appropriate solution to resolve an issue affecting a block or estate, but where all other tools available to the Social Landlord had proven ineffective.
 - **Demolition**
This need is recognised where there is a programme of regeneration which will require the re-housing of households whose homes will be demolished. This will be awarded once the demolition plans have been confirmed by the applicant's social landlord.
 - **Major works**
Applicants in social housing who require permanent alternative accommodation as a result of major works needing to be carried out on their home.
 - **Staff of Devon Home Choice partners who occupy tied accommodation**
Staff of Devon Home Choice partner local authorities and housing associations who occupy tied accommodation and need to move upon retirement.
- Agricultural workers needing to move-on from tied accommodation covered by the Agricultural Dwelling Housing Advisory Committee
Where:
 - o The applicant is an agricultural worker living in tied accommodation
 - o Their employer has applied under the Rent(Agriculture) Act 1976 for them to be re-housed
 - o The Agricultural Dwelling Housing Advisory Committee has confirmed the agricultural need and urgency of the rehousing request

Medium Housing Need (C)

FINAL Devon Home Choice Policy (May 2009)

- Medium health/ wellbeing need
[Defined below](#) in Section 3.12
- Medium disrepair
[Defined below](#) in Section 3.13
- Lacking 1 bedroom
Applicants who currently lack 1 bedroom given the size of their household.
- Under occupying by 1 bedroom
If the applicant is a tenant of a Devon Home Choice partner and moves to a property that is 1 bedroom smaller. Please note that a tenant who is under occupying by 2 or more bedrooms will be classified as being in the Medium housing need band if they apply for a property that is only 1 bedroom smaller
- Children over 3rd floor under 8
Where the applicant's household includes a child under the age of eight, offers of accommodation would not normally include properties above the third floor. This priority is awarded to reflect the difficulties that may be faced by applicants with young children who are living in accommodation above the third floor
- Moves for work
Applicants who need to move to work in Devon, where they would otherwise need to travel more than 30 miles (each way) from home to their place of work. Work will be defined as having permanent employment with a minimum of a 16-hour contract per week. Proof of employment will be required.

Low Housing Need (D)

- Non Statutory Homeless Households
Households who are homeless (as set out in Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996) but where a duty **has not** been accepted by a Devon local authority towards an applicant under Part VII of The Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 (the duty towards households who are in priority need and unintentionally homeless), and do not qualify for another band due to other needs (for example health and wellbeing needs).
- Low health/ wellbeing need
[Defined below](#) in Section 3.12
- Low disrepair
[Defined below](#) in Section 3.13
- Shared facilities (for example toilet, bath, shower or kitchen)
Where an applicant has accommodation but shares facilities with other persons. This will include applicants living with family that are not part of their household on their application, lodging or renting a room in a shared house with communal facilities.

FINAL Devon Home Choice Policy (May 2009)

- Staying access to children outside of the travel to work area of each Devon local authority

If the applicant has parental responsibility for a child or children staying regularly, and the child has permanent accommodation outside of the Devon local authority travel to work area in which the applicant lives. No additional bedroom eligibility will normally arise in such cases.

- Notice to quit

Where a private tenant has been served a valid notice to quit by their landlord. Evidence of the notice will need to be provided to demonstrate that the landlord genuinely intends to seek possession and the applicant will need to have been seen by a housing advisor.

This will only apply to households who would be assessed as non priority homeless and/or intentionally homeless under Part VII of The Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002. Households who would be assessed as unintentionally homeless and in priority need who have been served a valid notice to quit will be placed in the High housing need band (B), under the 'Prevention of homelessness' category.

- Households with a housing need but no local connection to Devon

[See 3.4 below](#)

- Households who have been assessed as having deliberately worsened their circumstances

[See 3.9 below](#)

No Housing Need (E)

Applicants with no housing need at the time of assessment. This will normally include the following:

- Applicants who live in a property that is adequate to meet their housing need in terms of property type, size and facilities.
- Applicants who do not meet the housing need criteria within any of the other bands (Emergency, High, Medium or Low housing need)

3.4 No local connection to Devon

Applicants who have no local connection to Devon will be placed in either:

- The Low housing need band (D) if they are assessed as having a housing need (whether this be high, medium or low need), or
- The No housing need band (E) if they are assessed as having no housing need

However exceptions to this will include where:

- They have been accepted by 1 of the Devon local authorities as statutorily homeless, and local connection has been waived for specific reasons such as the applicant is fleeing domestic violence
- They need to move to Devon to give or receive support where failure to do so would cause hardship
- There are special circumstances such as health or support needs that are only available within Devon
- An applicant has no local connection in any district within the United Kingdom, then they will be deemed to have a local connection to Devon

In such circumstances applicants will be banded in line with the above policy, regardless of the fact that they have no local connection to Devon.

To demonstrate a local connection (defined in Part VII of the Housing Act 1996) with Devon applicants will:

- Normally be resident in Devon. Local Government Association guidelines define this as having resided in the area for six of the last twelve months, or three out of the last five years, where residence has been out of choice. In line with the forthcoming Housing and Regeneration Act (2008) service personnel who have been based and living in Devon will be considered to have local connection with Devon.
- Work in Devon. The Local Government Association guidelines define this as employment other than of a casual nature. For the purposes of this policy this will be defined as having had permanent work with a minimum of a 16 hour contract per week for the previous 6 months, and without a break in the period of employment for more than three months.
- Have family connections in Devon. The Local Government Association guidelines define this as immediate family members (parents, siblings and non-dependent children) who have themselves lived in the area for five years.

Applicants will be required to provide proof of their local connection to Devon before their banding is assessed.

A number of housing associations with homes in Devon operate across a wider regional or national area. Tenants of such associations may on occasion wish to transfer to Devon from outside the county, but will not meet the local connection criteria (e.g. they do not have a local connection to

FINAL Devon Home Choice Policy (May 2009)

Devon). In such cases the local connection to Devon criteria shall not be applicable. In such circumstances the tenant will be placed in the band determined by their housing needs, in the same way as applicants with a local connection to Devon. They will then be able to bid for homes in the same way as other applicants.

If a home is subject to more specific local connection to Devon criteria however these will still apply. For example Section 106 planning conditions that mean the home can only be let to someone with a local connection to a specific local area.

3.5 Households with more than 1 need

Where an applicant is assessed as having only 1 need they will be placed in the band that this relates to. However if an applicant has more than 1 need in either the High, Medium or Low housing need bands this will be recognised in the following way.

Two or more needs from different bands - Where an application has more than 1 need from different bands, the application will be placed in the highest band.

Two needs from same band - If an applicant has two needs from the same band they will receive a six month advance on their 'band start date', to recognise the additional need. This will mean that their band start date is 6 months earlier than their application active date ([see Section 3.6 below](#)). As a consequence the application will be placed higher in the band by 'time'.

Three or more needs from same band - Where there is a combination of three or more needs in any 1 band, that application will be placed in the next higher band to reflect their circumstances.

Applicants assessed as having no housing need cannot be placed any higher. Applicants in the Emergency band cannot be placed higher, as this is the highest band.

Please note that an applicant who has been accepted as being unintentionally homeless and in priority need (as set out in Part VII of The Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) will be placed in the High housing need band (B) as set out above. Such applicants will not have the cause of their homelessness recorded as an 'additional' need.

3.6 Received, Application Active and Band Start Dates

All applicants will have a received date, an application active date and a band start date.

The received date records the date their application was first received by one of the Devon Home Choice local authority partners. The received date will never change, unless their application is cancelled and they re-apply to Devon Home Choice.

The application active date records the date the application was confirmed as complete by one of the Devon Home Choice local authority partners and activated on the Devon Home Choice IT system. The application active date will never change, unless their application is cancelled and they re-apply to Devon Home Choice.

There may a difference between the received and application active dates if the submitted application is not complete, and a local authority has to request further information.

The band start date records the date they moved into a particular band, and/or whether they have received an advance on their application active date due to having two needs within the same band.

For those applicants whose circumstances have not changed and who do not have more than 1 need from the same band, their application active date and band start date will be the same.

If a client has more than 1 need in the same band or moves into a higher band, because of a change of circumstances, their band start date will change as set out above and below.

At the launch of Devon Home Choice applicants who were on the housing register of 1 of the Devon local authorities or partner housing associations (including transfer lists) will have their previous recorded date transferred across to Devon Home Choice register. Where an applicant is on more than 1 housing register or list within Devon the earliest date will be the one that is transferred across to Devon Home Choice. All applicants will have their priority re-assessed in line with the Devon Home Choice Policy.

Applicants who have bid for properties will be prioritised:

- Firstly by their band. For example those applicants in the High housing need band (B) will be listed above applicants in the Medium housing need band (C), and
- Secondly **within** each band in order of their band start date, with the applicant with the earliest band start date at the top.

If 2 applicants within the same band apply for the same property, it will be awarded to the 1 with the earliest band start date. In case two or more applicants within the same band have the same band start date, the applicant recorded as having the earliest time on that date on the Devon Home Choice register will be put forward.

Band start dates that will apply are as follows:

Homeless applicants accepted under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996:

- The date the applicant applied to the local authority as homeless.
Once a local authority has completed their enquiries and accepted that an applicant is unintentionally homeless and in priority need, the applicant will be placed in High housing need band (B). Their band start date will be backdated to the date they applied as homeless.

Whilst the local authority is carrying out enquiries the applicant will be placed in the Low housing need band (D), unless their circumstances would place them in a higher band. For example if the applicant had been assessed as having a medium health/ wellbeing need they would be placed in the Medium housing need band (C).

Note: If the homeless applicant was already placed in High housing need band (B) as a result of some other need (for example due to a high health/ wellbeing need), their band start date remains the same and does not change to the date they made their homeless application.

General applicants (including existing local authority and housing association tenants)

- The date the housing register application was received for assessment, or the date which was transferred at the launch of Devon Home Choice (see above)

Move on applicants (from Supported Housing):

- Applicants living in designated 'supported' accommodation within Devon who have been assessed as ready for 'move-on' into independent accommodation will have their band start date backdated to either the date that they moved into the supported accommodation or the date they first became a homeless prevention case to a Devon local authority, whichever is the earliest.

Young people leaving care

- Young people leaving care who are assessed by the local authority or a multi-agency panel as ready for independent living will have their band start date backdated to their 17th birthday

3.7 Changes in circumstances

Applicants must provide information about their current housing situation so that the following can be assessed:

- The band they are placed in
- What size, and where appropriate, what type of property they can bid for

Applicants must inform their local authority housing team of any changes in their circumstances straight away. This includes any change that may affect the priority which has been afforded to their application. Applicants must notify

their local authority of any change of address or change in the composition of their household”.

Applicants have the right to apply for their priority to be reviewed if there is a material change of circumstances.

If a person successfully bids for a property and it is later found that the housing situation was different from the details provided when the application was made the offer might be withdrawn.

3.8 Moving bands following a change in circumstances

Applicants whose housing need changes will be reassessed. This may change the band their application has been placed in.

Those moving to a lower band because their need for housing has reduced will keep the same band start date to determine how high up that band they will be.

Those moving to a higher band because their need for housing has increased will have their band start date changed to the date their change of circumstances request was received. This is so that applicants who have been in this high level of need for a long time will remain above applicants who have recently joined this band.

If it is accepted by 1 of the local authorities (or an organisation working on their behalf) following a review that an applicant should have been placed in a higher band, their band start date will be backdated.

3.9 Deliberate worsening of circumstances

Deliberate worsening of circumstances will arise where local authorities decide that an applicant has given up accommodation that was suitable for their needs where there was no requirement or obligation to do so. To reduce the likelihood of applicants moving into poorer accommodation in order to qualify for higher priority and quicker re-housing, applicants who are deemed to have deliberately worsened their circumstances will normally be placed in the Low housing need band (D).

This decision can be reviewed after 12 months.

Examples of deliberate worsening of circumstances might include:

- Selling a property that is affordable and suitable for an applicants needs
- Moving from a secure Assured Tenancy to insecure, overcrowded accommodation with family or friends, where there is no good reason for this move
- Where there is evidence that it was reasonable that an applicant could have remained in their original accommodation

Where an applicant has little or no control over their move to alternative accommodation, this should not be considered as a deliberate worsening of circumstances.

3.10 Notification

Once an application form has been entered online or received by a Devon local authority housing team it will be assessed and the information entered onto the Devon Home Choice register. The applicant will receive a letter confirming their application details within 20 working days of the local authority housing team receiving the application form.

This notification will include:

- The 'band' in which the applicant has been placed and brief details of why this decision has been made
- The size property the applicant is eligible for
- Their 'band start date'
- A unique reference number
- Information on how Devon Home Choice works, including where to find information on available homes and how to bid
- Information on sources of further advice and assistance
- A reminder of the need to notify any change in circumstances immediately
- Information on the review procedure

Applicants in the No housing need band, who require general needs accommodation and have no support needs, will be informed when they register that, unless their circumstances change resulting in them being placed in a higher band, they will be automatically removed from the register after 12 months.

Applicants will also receive notification of their application details within 20 working days if they have provided details about their change of circumstances.

3.11 Size of property

Applications will be assessed to determine the size of property that their household requires. A household is defined as "any other person who normally resides with the applicants as a member of his/her family or any other person who might reasonably be expected to reside with the applicant" (Housing Act 1996).

Household members living together as a couple will be assessed as requiring 1 bedroom, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Additional adults (defined as being 16 years old or over) living permanently in a household will require an extra bedroom.

FINAL Devon Home Choice Policy (May 2009)

The following assessments will normally be made under Devon Home Choice about the ages and sex of children (who are under 16) who can share a bedroom, or who need separate bedrooms (except in exceptional circumstances):

- 2 children of the same sex (regardless of age) can share a bedroom
- A boy & girl who are both under 8 years old can share a bedroom
- A boy & girl, where at least 1 is over 8 years old need separate bedrooms

Examples of the property sizes that households are able to bid for are set out below:

Size of Property	Who is eligible?
1 Bedroom	Single People or couples with no children Single People with regular access to children, but who do not normally live with them (see below)
2 Bedroom	Applicants with 1 child or who are pregnant Applicants with 2 children of the same sex (or different sexes but who are both under 8 years old)
3 Bedroom	Applicants with 2 children of different sexes, with at least 1 child over 8 years of age Applicants with 3 children Applicants with 4 or more children
4 Bedroom	Applicants with 4 or more children (where at least 1 of the children is a different sex to the others and, either that child or the youngest of the other children is at least 8 years old)

Please note: This is not an exhaustive list. Applicants with a large number of household members may require larger properties.

Please note: Individual landlords letting policies or local planning policies may affect the size of households that may apply for particular properties. Any such restrictions will be included in the property advert.

These property sizes will not apply to existing tenants of a social landlord who are seeking to move to a home that is at least 1 bedroom smaller. For example a single person living in a 4 bedroom local authority or housing association home will be able to move into a 2 bedroom property. This is to make the most effective use of social housing and free up family accommodation.

Where households have particular needs (for example due to health issues) these will be taken into account in determining the size of property that they are eligible to apply for. For example, where the local authority or multi-

FINAL Devon Home Choice Policy (May 2009)

agency health and wellbeing panel agree that an applicant requires a regular overnight carer they will be eligible for an additional bedroom.

Because of the very high demand for properties within Devon, additional bedrooms cannot be given to applicants who do not have children who normally live with them or who might reasonably be expected to live with them. This will normally be a permanent or regular arrangement and not a temporary agreement.

Such decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis and will be determined by the local authority's decision as to which parent or guardian the child is dependent on in terms of their primary day-to-day care, and with whom the child would therefore be expected to ordinarily reside. One indication may be drawn, for example, by checking circumstances such as which parent receives the Child Benefit.

3.12 How is health and wellbeing priority awarded?

If an applicant needs re-housing because their health or welfare is being affected by their current housing they must complete a health and wellbeing assessment form.

Health and wellbeing priority is only awarded if a Devon local authority (or appropriate agencies working on their behalf) has determined that:

- An applicants health and/ or wellbeing is made worse by their current home, or lack of a home
- An applicant's health means that their current home is unsuitable e.g. they cannot manage stairs up to the bedroom or bathroom

Health and wellbeing priority **will not** be awarded in the following circumstances:

- Health problems that are not affected by housing or cannot be improved by moving
- Disrepair problems that can be rectified
- Neighbour dispute
- Threatened with homelessness or homeless
- Overcrowding
- Time-related medical problems (e.g. pregnancy-related problems or a broken leg)
- Disability of someone who is not on the Devon Home Choice application
- If the situation can be resolved by equipment or minor adaptations which are immediately available

Health and wellbeing priority will only be given if the applicant agrees to move to a more suitable home. For example, if they cannot manage stairs they can only be considered for a ground floor flat or a bungalow.

Applicants who require housing support to live independently will only be placed in the Emergency or High housing need bands as a result of a health and wellbeing assessment if an appropriate package of support has been put in place.

FINAL Devon Home Choice Policy (May 2009)

Each local authority, working together with partner agencies, will use the following guidelines for assessing health and wellbeing applications. This process can recommend access to a property size or type outside of the normal rules if there are special health or wellbeing needs.

Applicants are informed in writing of the outcome of their health and wellbeing assessment, and brief reasons explaining why the decision was made. If they disagree with the assessment there is a right to review but they must state the reasons for review in writing and provide any additional health and wellbeing evidence so the case can be reconsidered. The review procedure is set out below (see 4.17).

Each individual on the application with a health or welfare problem will be assessed. If there is more than 1 member of the household whose health and/or wellbeing is being affected by their housing, their application will be awarded the need relating to the severest problem. Where 2 or more members of a household are assessed as having the same level of health and wellbeing needs, this will be treated as in section 3.5 to ensure that households with more than 1 need are recognised.

Where an individual has more than 1 health and wellbeing need (for example physical and mental health problems), an assessment will be made of whether the combination of these factors should result in the person being placed in a higher band.

Where:

- Applicants have been placed in the Emergency housing need band as a result of a health and wellbeing assessment, this will be reviewed every 3 months
- Applicants have been placed in the High housing need band as a result of a health and wellbeing assessment, this will be reviewed every 6 months

The review will determine whether the level of priority is still appropriate. The review may involve a phone-call to the applicant and/ or support agency, or a home visit.

Applicants must inform their local authority housing team straight away of any changes in their circumstances, which mean that their health/welfare is further affected by their current housing. This includes any change that may affect the priority that has been afforded to their application. A further health and wellbeing assessment will then be undertaken.

A network of multi-agency panels will be developed across the county. These panels will provide the assessments on cases referred by housing officers. These cases will either be those that are likely to result in the award of high priority (e.g. either Emergency or High housing need bands) or require specialist input.

The make-up of the panels will not be prescribed but guidance will be developed on the types of agencies/ specialisms expected as a minimum. The panels will use the framework, criteria and examples to make an assessment,

FINAL Devon Home Choice Policy (May 2009)

thereby ensuring consistency across the county. The panels will be able to co-opt people from particular specialisms to help decide particular cases

FINAL Devon Home Choice Policy: May 2009
Health and Wellbeing Assessment Framework

Please note: ‘Health’ refers to both physical and mental health, people with learning disabilities etc.

Urgent/ Emergency	High	Medium	Low	No
The current accommodation is so completely unsuitable that should the applicant remain or return to it the affect on their health would be critical. This can only be averted by a move to alternative accommodation in the shortest time possible.	The housing situation is so severely affecting the applicant’s health and well being that it is resulting in them being completely housebound, at risk of injury, relapse or unable to live independently. Alternative housing is required within a reasonable time frame to prevent serious risks to their health and wellbeing.	The housing situation is seriously affecting the applicant’s health and wellbeing and is having an unacceptable impact on their ability to live independently. Alternative housing is required to prevent a significant and serious deterioration to their health and well being in the short/ medium term (within 2 years).	The housing situation is having a negative impact on the applicants well being but it is not causing any significant deterioration to their health or ability to live independently.	Whilst it is recognised that there may be a health and wellbeing issue, this is not affected by the current accommodation. The applicant’s health and wellbeing would not be improved by a move to alternative accommodation. Therefore no housing need actually exists.

FINAL Devon Home Choice Policy (May 2009)

Criteria by which to make an assessment:

Urgent/ Emergency	High	Medium	Low	No
<p>Will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Where there is a significant threat to life - Where there is a significant risk of serious and permanent injury and/or permanent disability - Where someone cannot be discharged from hospital because their home is, and will remain, permanently impossible to live in. 	<p>Will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Someone who's housing has rendered them housebound and has little or no support available - Where a move would avoid the need for another service (e.g. Social Services) from having to provide a significant level of support. This might include for example residential care; overnight care provision, or other support with similar resource implications - Where a move would avoid the continued inappropriate use of residential care - Where someone is unable to return home (due to it's unsuitability) from residential care or supported housing 	<p>Will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Would be housebound, but where a sufficiently high level of support is available to enable them to get out of the house and reduce to a significant degree the impact of their circumstances 	<p>Will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can access their home, but is unable to do so without appreciable difficulty, pain or other discomfort. Not completely housebound but there will be a significant reduction in the person's frequency of leaving and entering their home due to these circumstances. Often these cases may involve liaison with the Social Services team dealing with adaptations. Where adaptations are later provided and this improves the circumstances of the person concerned, then any earlier health/ wellbeing award should be removed and a new assessment carried out 	<p>Will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mobility issues (regardless of severity) where current property and locality unlikely to be bettered in terms of accessibility. - Where there is no perceived link between the current accommodation and a person's condition.

FINAL Devon Home Choice Policy (May 2009)

Criteria by which to make an assessment (Continued):

Urgent/ Emergency	High	Medium	Low	No
<p>- Where the applicant is prevented from having access to kidney dialysis, respiratory, or other similar essential equipment. This will normally apply where these circumstances are likely to prevent someone from remaining in their home for all or most of the time. Such a condition would be likely to be ongoing, rather than a temporary condition</p>	<p>Will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Where it is impossible for the person to use essential facilities within the home and no adaptation is possible - Inability to cope is solely and directly related to the housing situation. It is causing a breakdown in essential relationships and/ or is requiring urgent mental health intervention - Where someone suffers with epilepsy or other conditions that cause frequent and unpredictable falls and all medical interventions to prevent them have been investigated. The layout of the accommodation, for example the number and nature of steps, stairs or other hazards is a major factor in increasing the risk of serious injury 	<p>Will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can access their home, but is unable to access normal day-to-day facilities within it (e.g. bath/shower/toilet) without experiencing significant difficulty, pain or other discomfort. Where an adaptation is possible and practical this should always be pursued before any health & wellbeing priority is sought. If the adaptation is possible but will not be undertaken in the short term, this priority will be awarded in the interim. (The priority would be removed once the adaptation is undertaken) - The person is suffering from a mental illness and that situation has existed for a significant period of time, and is being exacerbated by housing. There is usually not only GP involvement, but also other specific mental health intervention. 	<p>Will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mobility issues - where current property is suitable, but location is likely to have detrimental effect upon the individual, e.g. unable to access any transport, shops, or other essential services. - Mental health - where the layout, location, or environment around home is a contributory factor. These will frequently be less severe conditions. They are likely to be prescribed medication, but not often be in receipt of ongoing support other than from their GP. 	

Criteria by which to make an assessment – People needing to move to give or receive support:

Note:

- These criteria apply to the person requiring to move to receive support and/ or the person who would be providing the support
- Each case would need to be reviewed to assess which areas are appropriate for an applicant seeking to move to give/ receive support to bid for. They will only receive any priority for this need for homes in the agreed area(s).

Urgent/ Emergency	High	Medium	Low	No
	<p>Will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Applicant's or their immediate carer's health or safety are at risk unless they move to a location that enables family (or other significant support network, such as a support service, hospital or long established friend) to provide vital and support at least 3 times a week to minimise their risk. This support will avoid the need for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - residential care - hospital admission - a large use of social care - a breakdown in essential relationships and/ or urgent mental health intervention - The support is not available in their current location. 	<p>Will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Applicant's independence would be significantly improved by living in a location that enables family (or other significant support network, such as a long established friend) to provide support at least 3 times a week to enable this. - The support is not available in their current location. 	<p>Will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quality of life would be greatly enhanced by living in a location that would allow family (or other significant support network, such as a long established friend) to provide social support at least 3 times a week. The support will enable for example the person to access transport, shops, or other essential services - The support is not available in their current location. 	

3.13 How is priority awarded due to housing defects?

An Environmental Health Officer may be asked to investigate the defects that are in your home where the problem might lead to the award of Emergency or High housing need bands. The main objective of the Environmental Health Officer is to help bring sub standard homes up to an acceptable standard.

Where a housing defect exists applicants are expected to have already raised the problem with the landlord in writing before an Officer visits. This will give the landlord the opportunity to carry out the necessary improvements before involving the local authority and possible enforcement action. Applicants should be made fully aware that if an Officer visits and identifies serious defects (Bands A and B) the officer is under a statutory duty to take appropriate steps to remedy the defects and this will involve contacting the landlord and/or agent.

Where applicants are living in a property in a poor condition where defects are a potential risk to the health and safety of occupants, priority will be awarded as follows. Please note that applicants will not receive any additional priority if remedial action is planned to rectify the defect(s). In such circumstances applicants may be re-housed temporarily if necessary until any works are complete. Priority will only be awarded where remedial action is not possible (or not possible within an appropriate timescale)

It should be noted that overcrowding is dealt with by other sections of the Devon Home Choice Policy (see Section 3.3: High housing need band & Medium housing need band) and is not covered by this section.

Emergency housing need band (A)

This will only be given in an emergency, on the recommendation of an Environmental Health Officer following a site visit. This will cover any defects in the property that cannot be remedied within an appropriate timescale, and where the most appropriate course of action would be to serve a Prohibition Order, Emergency Prohibition Order or to carry out emergency remedial works.

High housing need band (B)

This will only be given where an Environmental Health Officer has inspected the property and identified serious health and safety issues within the property and the most appropriate course of action would be to serve an Improvement Notice. These are most likely to be a Category 1 hazard and the Officer has a statutory duty to take appropriate steps to rectify the problem and will contact the landlord and/or agent.

Medium housing need band (C)

This will be assessed by a local authority officer, who will usually have carried out a home visit to assess the problem. However in some cases it might be determined by having regard to information supplied by the applicant and others as appropriate. Medium disrepair will cover items which might be considered to be significant by both the officer and applicant, but where the risk is not one that presents a serious health or safety issue.

Low housing need band (D)

This will normally be assessed by a local authority officer, who will take account of information supplied by the applicant and others as appropriate. Low disrepair will be taken to cover items that do not affect health and safety, and do not have a significant impact on the peace and comfort of the applicant.

Local authority and Registered Social Landlord tenants

Tenants of local authorities and Registered Social Landlords will not normally be given any additional priority due to disrepair. There are other policies and procedures that will be used by the individual landlord to assist where there is disrepair in these properties.

3.14 Review of the Devon Home Choice register

All local authorities in Devon will review the applicants on the housing register at least once every 3 years in order to:

- Confirm that the details on the register are still correct
- Check whether there have been any changes in an applicant's circumstances
- Confirm that the applicant wants to stay on the housing register.

Applicants in the No housing need band, who require general needs accommodation and have no support needs, will be informed when they register that, unless their circumstances change resulting in them being placed in a higher band, they will be automatically removed from the register after 12 months.

If an applicant not identified as being vulnerable does not reply to a review it will be assumed that housing is no longer required and the application will be cancelled. The applicant will have to apply again if they later want re-housing. In such cases an applicant will lose their previous band start date and their band start date will be determined by their fresh application.

Where applicants who have been identified as vulnerable do not reply to a review request, the local authority will seek to contact them again and/or any advocate (e.g. family, friend or support agency) working with them. This is so that that vulnerable people are not removed from the

register inappropriately. If this final attempt to contact the applicant and/or their advocate fails their application will be cancelled.

Only in exceptional circumstances will an application be reinstated with the previous band start date. For example an applicant was in hospital and missed the review letters.

3.15 Cancelling applications

An application will be cancelled from Devon Home Choice in the following circumstances:

- At the request of an applicant
- Where an applicant does not respond to an application review, within the specified time limit
- Where a local authority or a Registered Social Landlord has housed the applicant
- When a tenant on the housing register completes a mutual exchange
- Where the applicant moves and does not provide a contact address
- Where the applicant has died
- Where the applicant has not supplied the relevant information requested within 28 days
- Applications in the No housing need band will be cancelled 12 months after registering, unless their circumstances have changed resulting in them being placed in a higher band

When an application has been cancelled, the applicant or their representative will be notified in writing.

Applicants in the No housing need band, who require general needs accommodation and have no support needs, will be informed when they register that, unless their circumstances change resulting in them being placed in a higher band, they will be automatically removed from the register after 12 months. These applicants will not receive an additional letter to confirm that their application has been cancelled.

Where an applicant has been highlighted as potentially vulnerable, the local authority will contact the applicant, or agency that they are working with if appropriate, to check their circumstances before cancelling the application.

Any applicant whose application has been cancelled has the right to ask for a review of the decision.

3.16 Rejoining Devon Home Choice

Where an applicant wishes to re-join Devon Home Choice at a later date their new band start date will be determined by the date they re-apply. Their housing need will be reassessed and they be placed in the appropriate band as set out above.

Section 4

Applying for properties

4.1 Finding a home

Once applicants have received notification that they have registered with Devon Home Choice they can start applying for homes for which they are eligible.

4.2 Moves between local authorities in Devon

A key aim of Devon Home Choice is to provide people seeking housing with choice and the ability to move within Devon. For example to access work or move closer to support networks.

As set out below (see 4.5), some homes may only be advertised to certain groups of applicants. For example where planning conditions apply, or a home has particular adaptations. Any restrictions as to who is eligible for a particular property will be clearly set out in the advert. To maximise choice and potential mobility for applicants within Devon, anyone registered with Devon Home Choice will be able to apply for the remaining properties for which they are eligible (e.g. according to the number of bedrooms they need) .

In order to ensure that moves between local authorities do not adversely impact on 1 or more local authority areas, these moves will be monitored regularly by the Devon Home Choice board. In particular the following will be monitored:

- (A) The number of households moving into a local authority area who have no local connection with that area
- (B) The number of households moving out of that local authority area
- (C) The balance between these figures (e.g. A – B)

Where the balance of these figures (C) accounts for 2% or more of the lets made within that local authority area in that period, homes in that local authority area may be labelled in the following period(s) so as to provide preference to applicants with a local connection to that particular local authority. If no applicants with a local connection to the local authority bid for a home, applicants from other areas will be put forward.

When the number of people moving out of the local authority area is again the same as the number of people without local connection moving into the area, properties in that local authority area will again be advertised without being labelled as preference to applicants with a local connection (unless this is required for another reason set out above or below).

The aim of Devon Home Choice is to gradually increase the limits on cross border mobility. This will ensure that people can move within Devon to take up work or support an older relative etc. A timetable will be developed for the review of the cross border limit. This will be informed by careful monitoring of moves between local authorities.

4.3 Accessing Information

We will:

- Write out to everyone on the housing register in each local authority area to explain what Devon Home Choice is, how it will work and what it means for them
- Develop a comprehensive publicity campaign to reinforce the information sent out and ensure that the wider public are also aware of the changes
- Provide awareness raising sessions and training for councillors, parish councillors and partner organisations

We will ensure that any information produced (for example the summary booklet and leaflets explaining how Devon Home Choice works) is easy to read and available in different formats. These will include:

- Large print
- Braille
- Information in a range of community languages
- Audio tapes
- Use of symbols, pictograms and photos
- The Devon Home Choice website will be accessible to people with disabilities.

Research has found that even though help and information was available in community languages in some choice based letting schemes, some applicants were unaware that it existed. We will work closely with both the Devon and Plymouth Racial Equality Councils, and other community organisations to ensure that we publicise the availability of information in a range of community languages and language line interpretation services appropriately and effectively.

We will test information with different groups of people to ensure that it is easy to use and understand.

We will produce a DVD for applicants to explain how Devon Home Choice works and provide details of support available.

Information will be available from a wide range of sources. For example:

- Local Authorities
- Housing associations
- Support agencies
- Parish councils

As well as advertising available local authority and housing association homes, other housing options such as low cost home ownership opportunities and private rented homes will be included in Devon Home Choice. The tenure of a property will be made very clear. Information will be provided on people's rights in different tenures.

The key barrier preventing people in Devon from accessing social housing is the overall shortage of homes. Choice Based Letting in itself will not increase the number of available homes. However it is clear that Devon Home Choice will improve the way that homes are let. It will be made clear in all the

information provided on Devon Home Choice that there is very high demand for social housing in Devon and that most of the people who register are unlikely to be successful and should therefore consider other housing options as well.

Despite this some applicants may have their expectations raised about getting housed (for example due to the fact that they will be able to see the available homes to let). This may impact on some groups who are encouraged to access the scheme, but do not have enough priority to be housed. Some applicants may find this more difficult than others, and may lack the knowledge or capacity to find other solutions to their housing need. All of the local authorities across Devon have developed a housing options approach to help such people. Staff will be able to discuss a whole range of options with applicants including private renting and low cost home ownership, as well as sources of support.

4.4 Advertising of properties

Homes will be advertised each week in the following ways:

- Online at the Devon Home Choice website
- On freesheets that will be widely distributed across Devon. Details of where freesheets can be collected are available from local authority housing teams
- Personalised information will be sent to applicants who have been identified as vulnerable and who are in either the Emergency housing need, High housing need and Medium housing need bands
- On Digital TV

All documentation, adverts and the website will be fully accessible to all community groups within Devon.

Homes will be advertised on a weekly cycle. Within the cycle, the property will be advertised for 6 days, from 12.00 a.m. on Wednesday to 11.59 p.m. the following Monday.

4.5 Property Descriptions

Properties advertised will include a photograph of the home (where possible) and a full description. The description will include:

- Type of property
- Any age restrictions
- Any special criteria (e.g. local letting plans/ sensitive lets)
- Number of bedrooms
- The maximum size of household that can apply (for example '3 bed, maximum 5 person house')
- Location of property (street & city/town/village)
- Floor level (if appropriate)
- Any adaptations (for example disabled facilities)

- Access to the property (for example the number of steps, whether there is a ramp or lift)
- Type of parking (if any)
- Heating type
- Rent charged per week (& number of rent weeks per year)
- Any service charges
- Type of tenancy
- Information about the surrounding area (for example whether local shops and public transport are easily accessible)
- Services provided (for example warden, caretaker, cleaning)
- Expected tenancy start date (it will be made clear that this is an estimated date and could be subject to change)

4.6 Labelling Properties

In some cases homes may be advertised to certain groups of applicants, or to provide preference to certain groups. For example:

- Where a home has been adapted for disabled people only applicants who require this type of home will be allowed to bid for it
- Where, due to planning restrictions or a local authority's Allocation Policy, applicants are required to have a local connection to a particular area within Devon
- Existing tenants who wish to transfer, including those who wish to move to a smaller property
- Households who have been accepted as homeless by a specific Devon local authority (also see below – Section 4.9)

There may also be occasions where 'local letting policies' need to be applied by Devon Home Choice partners.

Local letting policies may include a system to ensure a mix of household types, for example the number of children in order to ensure that there are not too many within a particular area. Where agreements have been reached adverts will clearly state how such schemes will be allocated and the applicants eligible to bid.

Local letting policies may be introduced where a new estate has been built in order to help create a new community. Alternatively, a local letting policy may be required where there are issues that have occurred within an established community, and action is required to assist that community to become sustainable.

The decision to undertake a local letting policy will be made by the partners involved including the local authority's housing department.

Whilst being designed to reflect local needs, local letting policies will still be compatible with the aim of meeting housing need in Devon as well as the requirements of relevant 'Codes of Guidance.'

The use of local letting policies should not lead to vulnerable households being disadvantaged but lead to increased tenancy sustainability.

Further information can be obtained from the relevant local authority.

Sensitive letting – individual properties

Occasionally there may be a requirement to assist in dealing with issues that impact on a small, specific location that may be only 1 dwelling within an estate. This may be to:

- Reduce the concentration of certain needs groups which is impacting on housing management
- Promote a more balanced community by seeking to select/not select households with particular characteristics

This will be agreed by a process between the local authority housing department and the housing association (where the local authority is not landlord itself).

The decision to apply particular requirements will be undertaken by the relevant Devon Home Choice Partners.

The success of this will be the sensitive matching of a household to the vacant home where some flexibility has been identified.

4.7 Bidding for a home

Where an applicant meets the criteria for a home set out in the advert they may bid for that home within the deadline given.

Applicants may bid for homes:

- Online at the Devon Home Choice website www.devonhomechoice.com
- Using the telephone service, available in English and a range of other languages
- In person at the offices of any of the Devon local authorities
- On Digital TV

The staff within the Local authority housing offices will be available to explain to applicants how to bid. They will also encourage applicants to make use of all the bidding options available to them, so if their circumstances change, and one method will no longer be available to them, they will be able to use another. For example, if an applicant goes abroad on holiday, they may not want to use the automated telephone line as usual, but will be able to bid online through the website.

Advocacy bidding will be allowed to make use of existing networks of support from family, friends, neighbours, and support agencies. To bid an advocate will need the applicant's reference number and their consent to make a bid¹. As there will be no penalties for refusals of homes², there should not be any resulting problems unless it is due to an applicant's capacity to make decisions.

Applicants who are unable to bid will be offered the opportunity for bids to be placed automatically on homes they are eligible for. These applicants will be identified in a number of ways:

- through the application process
- analysis of bidding patterns amongst high priority applicants
- a request from the applicant themselves³
- representation from an agency.

Applicants can apply for 3 homes each week. Please note that normal weekly advertising cycle may be altered over Xmas and New Year. This will be clearly advertised.

However in the event that they have the highest band and earliest effective band for more than 1 home in any 1 week, applicants will be required to choose which home they wish to view. In order to ensure effective housing management applicants will not be able to view more than 1 home in any 1 week.

Applicants who apply and are put forward for sheltered housing will have their support needs assessed by a member of the local authority's or housing association's sheltered housing team.

4.8 Deadlines for Applications

Homes will be advertised each week. The advert will indicate the deadline by which time applications for homes must be received. Any applications received after the deadline has been reached will not be considered.

4.9 Automatic Bidding

Households who have been accepted as statutorily homeless by a Devon local authority, and those placed in the 'Prevention of homelessness' category (High housing need band) are expected to apply for all suitable homes advertised through Devon Home Choice each week. This will be monitored on a weekly basis by each of the Devon local authorities.

¹ When there is a formal advocacy role, for example from a Council team or another agency, a form will need to be signed by the applicant to ensure compliance with the Data Protection Act.

² Accepted statutorily homeless applicants will need to fulfil certain criteria (see Devon Home Choice policy).

³ Automatic bidding will only be available for those people who **cannot** apply themselves. It will not be available to those people who would reasonably be expected to bid for homes themselves (except for households who've been accepted as statutorily homeless and have not been bidding for homes).

Homeless applicants and those threatened with homelessness will be able to bid for properties across Devon, in common with other applicants.

Those households who have been accepted as statutorily homeless and/ or placed in the 'Prevention of homelessness' category, and have not been bidding for suitable homes will be contacted after six weeks. This will be to remind them of their responsibilities and to ensure that necessary support is in place to enable them to bid for homes. They will also be advised that if they are not bidding for all suitable homes after another six weeks (12 weeks in total) that automatic bids will be submitted on their behalf.

Those households placed in the 'Prevention of homelessness' category where it has not been possible to avoid them becoming homeless will remain in the High housing need band (B), if accepted as homeless by a Devon local authority. The 12 week period will be deemed to have commenced when they were placed in the 'Prevention of homelessness' category.

If after 12 weeks homeless households are still not bidding for all suitable homes, or are refusing offers of accommodation for which they've bid, automatic bids will be placed on their behalf. Before automatic bids are placed the relevant local authority will carry out an assessment as to what type of property would be suitable. This may include location. Automatic bids will be limited to the local authority area where the applicant has been accepted as homeless.

Homeless households who have been bidding actively during the 12 week period but have been unsuccessful will not have automatic bids placed on their behalf. As long as homeless households continue to bid for appropriate homes automatic bids will not be placed on their behalf. If however they stop bidding for 12 weeks or more automatic bids will be placed on their behalf.

If 1 of these automatic bids is successful the household will be expected to accept the offer of accommodation unless there is good reason why they should refuse a property. Any 'unreasonable' refusal of such an offer will lead to a local authority discharging their duties under the homelessness legislation.

This requirement and the associated procedure will be clearly set out in the decision letter sent to households when they have been assessed as being statutorily homeless.

Where a Devon local authority is seeking to reduce the numbers of homeless households in temporary accommodation within its area, it will be able to advertise certain properties in its area as 'Preference to households who've been accepted homeless by xxx Council'. Where the local authority is not the landlord this will be subject to agreement with the housing association.

4.10 Selection procedure

Applicants who have bid for properties will be prioritised:

- Firstly by their band. For example those applicants in the High housing need band (B) will be listed above applicants in the Medium housing need band (C), and
- Secondly **within** each band in order of their band start date, with the applicant with the earliest band start date at the top.

For each home advertised the successful applicant will be the one who is in the highest band and has the earliest band start date.

Each successful applicant's details will be checked to ensure they are eligible for the home and that there has been no material change of circumstances since their banding was assessed. Only those applicants who meet the criteria can be offered the home.

Before making a final decision on the offer, the applicant will be able to view the property. As set out above, where an applicant has the highest band and earliest effective band for more than 1 home in any 1 week, they will be required to choose which home they wish to view. In order to ensure effective housing management applicants will not be able to view more than 1 home in any 1 week.

Partners in Devon Home Choice will be able to offer advice to applicants to help them make an informed choice. It will be important however that any guidance offered does not override an applicant's own choices.

Applicants offered a home will normally be expected to make a decision whether to accept the offer within 48 hours. Where an applicant requires additional support or time to make such a decision this can be offered by the local authority and/ or housing association, or a support agency.

Where applicants have indicated that they are working with a support agency and are happy for information to be shared with the agency, the support agency will be informed if they are being put forward for a property. This will enable the agency to offer support to the applicant in deciding whether to accept an offer.

4.11 Verification of eligibility

Local authorities will undertake an initial check and verification of the information supplied by an applicant when they apply to join the Devon Home Choice register.

When an applicant has bid for a home and they are in the highest priority band and have the earliest band start date, there will be a further check on their application to ensure that they are eligible for the home. If the applicant is considered to be eligible they will be notified that they are being considered for the property and asked to confirm whether their circumstances are still the same as those recorded on the Devon Home Choice register.

If an applicant with the highest priority and earliest band start date is not considered to be eligible for a home this will be recorded on the Devon Home

Choice website, together with the reason for this decision. This information will only be accessible to the applicants themselves.

A more detailed verification and eligibility check will then be undertaken by the landlord of the home (either a local authority or Housing Association) before a formal offer is made.

There will be clear grounds for refusals or bypassing applicants by landlords agreed with partner landlords. A landlord will inform an unsuccessful applicant of the reason behind their decision. This may include suggested action that the applicant take in order to improve their chances of successfully finding a home through Devon Home Choice.

All offers of accommodation with landlords will be subject to the policies of the individual organisation. The landlord may require additional criteria to be met. Any additional criteria will be clearly set out in this Policy and in the advert.

Where it is found that an applicant's circumstances have changed from the information held on the Devon Home Choice register, their application will be re-assessed. If this re-assessment finds that their priority band is reduced they will not be offered the property if they are no longer the applicant with the highest priority band.

The detailed verification check will include assessing whether applicants have been guilty of unacceptable behaviour since applying to Devon Home Choice (or before if this was not identified at the initial verification). Applicants found to have been guilty of unacceptable behaviour since registering with Devon Home Choice will be removed from the register, and will not be offered the home. Details of unacceptable behaviour are set out above in Section 2.4.

The verification process will also involve a check on an applicant's rent account where appropriate. Applicants with rent arrears to a social landlord, that were accrued in the previous two years on their current or a previous tenancy, will not normally be offered a property. Those applicants with rent arrears above £500 will be placed in the No housing need band (E). Further details are again set out in Section 2.4.

Applicants with rent arrears to a private landlord will be considered on a case-by-case basis by Devon local authorities. Applicants who have rent arrears to a private landlord over £500 who have been (or would be) assessed as having accrued these rent arrears intentionally will be placed in the No housing need band (E). 'Intentionally' means that the applicant deliberately did something (or failed to do something) that resulted in the rent arrears. An act or omission in good faith on the part of the applicant will not be treated as deliberate if they were unaware of any relevant fact. Further details are again set out in Section 2.4.

If the verification process highlights issues (set out above) that lead to a reduction in an applicant's priority band, they will not be offered the property if they are no longer the applicant with the highest priority band.

Applicants who have their priority reduced within Devon Home Choice will be informed in writing of:

- The decision and the reasons behind it
- Their right to appeal and how to do this

Each applicant's circumstances will be considered on a case-by-case basis, for example if an emergency move is needed or serious harm would result then their priority may be maintained, enabling the move to progress. The tenant would be charged and expected to pay back the cost of any work needed to put right wilful damage or neglect.

Transfer applicants need to check with their landlords on the criteria they should meet before being offered a transfer to alternative accommodation. Social landlords can prevent a transfer in certain situations, for example if the applicant has outstanding rent arrears.

Partners in Devon Home Choice reserve the right to prevent an offer going ahead where the home is not considered to be suitable for the applicant.

This may include issues of public safety, risk, or sustainability of the tenancy. An offer may not be made or may even be withdrawn if the support needs of the applicant are such that the landlord, in consultation with the local authority deems that the applicant will be unable to maintain an independent tenancy. This decision may also be informed by the input from other partner agencies involved in a case.

In these circumstances there must be a sufficient care or floating support package available to ensure that the tenancy is likely to be successfully maintained.

The Sex Offenders Protocol

Most social landlords within the scheme have entered into an agreement with the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary to exchange information on any applicant convicted under the Sex Offenders Act 1997. Any applicant who has previous convictions of sex offences/is on the Sex Offender register, will be subject to the provisions set out in the information exchange protocol.

Before any known offender is offered housing, full consultation will be undertaken with the relevant support agencies to assess the risk involved.

4.12 Refusals

A refusal of a property is considered to have occurred if the applicant has viewed the property and that an offer has been, or would have been, made.

If an applicant decides to refuse an offer of a home it will be offered to the applicant who is eligible and has the next highest band and/or earliest band start date.

Applicants who have been accepted as statutorily homeless by a Devon local authority are also able to refuse an offer of a home that they have applied for a period of 12 weeks without penalty. Any refusal that they make during this time will not affect the duty owed to them by the local authority.

After this 12 week period applicants who have been accepted as statutorily homeless by a Devon local authority are still able to exercise choice through Devon Home Choice, to apply for those homes they feel meet their needs. However after 12 weeks, if they refuse an offer of accommodation, the refusal will be referred to the local authorities Homelessness Team. They will investigate whether or not the refusal is 'reasonable' and inform the Devon Home Choice team within 24 hours. If the refusal is 'reasonable' then the second placed applicant will be made an offer of the home. However, if the refusal is deemed 'unreasonable' then the applicant will be advised by the homeless section that their duty will be discharged and the applicant re-offered the home.

Homeless applicants will also be advised that if they refuse an offer, the home will be offered to another household with the next highest band and/or earliest band start date who applied. Rather than refusing an offer of accommodation, homeless households will therefore be advised to accept the offer and request a review of suitability once they have been accommodated. Further advice and information is available from each of the Devon local authorities.

If an Emergency housing need band (A) applicant refuses a suitable offer of a property through Devon Home Choice, they will have their status reviewed and may be placed in 1 of the other bands dependent on their need. In very exceptional circumstances an applicant will be allowed to remain in the Emergency housing need band (A) for longer than 4 weeks.

Applicants who refuse a number of homes that they have bid for and been offered will have their case reviewed by the local authority managing their case. They will be offered advice and assistance to take part in Devon Home Choice effectively. If it is found that they continue to refuse what are considered to be suitable homes they will have their priority reduced to the No housing need band (E).

4.13 Feedback

An important part of Devon Home Choice will be to provide feedback on properties that have been let.

The Devon Home Choice website and freesheets will provide information on all homes let through Devon Home Choice including:

- Property size and type
- Property location
- Any eligibility criteria placed on the property
- Number of applicants who applied for each property
- Band of successful applicant
- Band start date of successful applicant
- The date the property was advertised

Personalised feedback will also be available to each applicant on the 'My Account' section of the Devon Home Choice website to let them know the outcome of their applications for properties. This will help to inform any future choices they make about applying for homes. Feedback will also be available from local authority housing teams.

This information will help applicants understand where properties are more likely to become available and their chances of success.

4.14 Difficult to let properties

If a vacancy cannot be filled through Devon Home Choice then the property can be let in anyway deemed appropriate by the landlord. This may include re-advertising the property and removing any restrictions previously attached, or making a direct offer.

Details (for example the number, type and location) of properties that are difficult to let will be monitored each quarter. Information will be fed into the Devon Home Choice Project Group.

4.15 False information

Applicants who knowingly or recklessly make a statement which is false, or knowingly withhold information in connection with their application is guilty of a criminal offence. Anyone found guilty of such an offence may:

- Have their application refused
- Have any offers made withdrawn
- Be prosecuted by members of Devon Home Choice. This could lead to a fine of up to £5,000, and may also lead to legal action for the possession of any accommodation found to have been obtained by deliberately allowing false information to be used.

All landlords in this agreement are committed to taking legal action against any applicant found to have gained a tenancy based on false information in their application form.

4.16 Data Protection

In accordance with our responsibility under the Data Protection Act 1998, all Applicants should be made aware when they apply that their personal information will be held and may be shared with other Devon Home Choice Partners and Landlords for the purpose of consideration of an offer of accommodation being made.

All personal information will be processed in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998,

Applicants have the right to inspect personal information held about them under Section 7 of the Data Protection Act 1998. Applicants may also correct any inaccurate information held about them.

Personal information will not be shared with external individuals or organisations unless there is a legal obligation to do so.

4.17 Policy review

The Devon Home Choice scheme is reviewed annually and any changes to the Assessment Policy are implemented only after majority agreement amongst Devon Home Choice partners.

4.18 Reviews

Any applicant has the right of review of the following decisions:

- They have been denied the right to register
- The priority and band start date they have been awarded
- They have had their priority reduced
- A decision not to allocate a property for which the applicant has bid and has the highest priority and earliest band start date
- Their application has been cancelled
- That they have been assessed as having deliberately worsened their own circumstances

Once an applicant has been notified in writing of the band in which they have been placed, or their ineligibility, they will have a right of review against the assessment. Requests for reviews must be submitted in writing, to the local authority housing office within 21 days of the date on the notification letter and include the reason why the applicant believes their banding or ineligibility is wrong together with any additional information that the applicant believes is relevant.

Requests for reviews of a decision not to allocate a property for which the applicant has bid and has the highest priority and earliest band start date should be submitted to the landlord that has taken the decision.

All requests for reviews for any of the other reasons listed above must be submitted in writing to the local authority housing office.

Where an applicant requests a review of their priority awarded as a result of a health & wellbeing assessment:

- If the original decision was taken by the local authority, a senior officer in the local authority who played no part in the original assessment will carry out a review of the case and respond in writing, to the applicant within 56 days of the receipt of the request for review letter
- If the decision was made by a multi-agency panel, the review will be carried out by a multi-agency panel in another area of Devon. A response will be provided to the applicant in writing within 56 days of the receipt of the request for review letter

The local authority or landlord will acknowledge the review request within 7 days. A Senior Officer who played no part in the original assessment will carry out a review of the case and respond in writing, to the applicant within 56 days of the receipt of the request for review letter. Following the review, the applicant will be informed in writing of the outcome together with the reasons for the decision.

If an applicant is dissatisfied of with the merits of a decision on review they are advised to seek advice from a solicitor or the Citizens Advice Bureau etc.

Any complaints regarding the operation of the scheme should be directed initially to a local authority housing office. Details of applicants, allocations and complaints will be monitored in relation to diversity to ensure equality of access.

4.19 Monitoring

Effective monitoring will be put into place and will be regularly reviewed to ensure that Devon Home Choice is accessible, and is working as fairly and effectively as possible.

The comprehensive monitoring system will include information on:

- The participation and outcomes for vulnerable groups
- The number of applicants stating that they wish to be supported (for example with completing the application form or with bidding), why, and how this support was provided
- Applicants who have been awarded a high priority (for example Emergency, High or Medium Housing Needs Bands) but haven't been bidding or haven't been bidding effectively. This will be followed up to assess the reasons why and whether any additional support is required
- How applicants have accessed information on available homes
- How applicants have bid for homes
- How long applicants who have been accepted as statutorily homeless take to move into permanent accommodation

- The number of applicants who have been bypassed or refused by partner landlords, and the reasons for these decisions
- The occasions when, and reasons why local authorities have used their residual discretion to depart from of the Policy due to exceptional circumstances
- The number and type of homes diverted by partner landlords for lettings outside Devon Home Choice, and the reasons for this

A range of questions will be included on the application form that will enable equal opportunities monitoring. This information will help reveal whether there are certain groups within the community who are not accessing information about Devon Home Choice and not participating in the scheme.

As with any monitoring it will only serve a purpose if the results are used effectively to develop and further improve Devon Home Choice to ensure that applicants who are vulnerable do not lose out.

Similarly good practice from other schemes and guidance from central government will be incorporated into Devon Home Choice.

4.20 Partnership working

A wide range of agencies across the statutory and voluntary sectors work with people who may require support to participate in Devon Home Choice.

Local authorities will monitor the housing register to identify those applicants who, given their priority within Devon Home Choice, may soon be nominated for a property, but who require a support package to enable them to live independently. It will be vital that such a support package is put in place, or can be arranged in an appropriate timescale that will enable an applicant to take up an offer of housing. This will require close partnership working between local authorities, housing associations and partner agencies.

Research has shown that Choice Based Letting schemes have not always engaged well with partner agencies. Many support agencies have not been fully aware of how schemes work and therefore have not been well placed to support the applicants they work with to participate. It will be important that we work, on an ongoing and regular basis, with a wide range of agencies to raise awareness of Devon Home Choice in order:

- That partner agencies are aware of how Devon Home Choice works, and are able to support applicants to participate
- That understanding of the scheme is not lost with changes in staff
- That the scheme is developed taking on the views of applicants who may require support to participate and the agencies who work with them

We recognise that all agencies, statutory and voluntary, have pressures on their time and resources. As a result not all agencies will be able to assist in supporting applicants to participate in Devon Home Choice. However it is only through an open and honest discussion with partner agencies that this will become apparent. During the consultation stage agencies will be asked whether they have the capacity and/ or are willing to assist applicants to

participate in Devon Home Choice. Where this is not possible we will work to ensure that appropriate support is available.

As well as explaining how Devon Home Choice works it will be important to ensure that partner agencies are given a realistic view of the demand for social housing in Devon, and information on the full range of housing options. This will be achieved through briefing and training events, and information produced specifically for support agencies. This will help to make sure that applicants who may require support do not build unrealistic expectations that they will be successful, and that they are guided through all housing options.

Each week we will email or send out details of the available homes to partner agencies and advocates across the county.

4.21 Training

Ongoing training will be provided to ensure that staff in local authorities, housing associations and other partner organisations are:

- Able to identify applicants who may require support to participate
- Able to put in place the support required
- Fully making use of the resources to help vulnerable applicants

Appendix 1

Definitions

Efficient management of social housing stock within Devon (High housing need band [B])

This priority will be awarded in a number of situations set out below to aid the efficient management of social housing stock.

- **To release high need properties**

As social rented housing is a scarce resource there will be times when it is not being used to its full potential. Re-housing will enable a 'high need' property to be released or to aid the wider management of the social rented housing stock.

This will include:

- o 'High need' property
Where the re-housing of a tenant or household would assist with the better use of social rented housing. This might include where applicants have no particular priority, but are occupying a property that is of a type in very limited supply and is needed to be returned to the stock of social housing for letting to meet an immediate and pressing need. An example of this could be where someone occupies a property that is particularly suitable for someone with a severe disability, but has no need of that particular property.
- o Persons left in occupation
If a person is left in occupation after the death of a tenant, they will usually be expected to leave the property and find their own home. Where a tenancy is ended by the tenant it is the tenant's responsibility to ensure that the property is handed back to the social landlord.

There are some exceptions to this: -

- o Upon the death of a social tenant, if person(s) left in the home are legally entitled to be a 'successor', then the situation will be dealt with in accordance with the law. Sometimes this may mean that they are able to stay and in others it may mean that they are offered an alternative home
- o When a social tenant leaves the home and ends the tenancy, there are some cases in which a potential 'successor' may qualify as above
- o A 'Carer left in Occupation'. A person will only be seen as a 'Carer' when there is clear medical evidence of that care being essential and that the applicant has been providing care
- o Where the person left in the home has been living there for most, if not all, of their lifetime and has been dependant upon the tenant for support. If as a result they have become vulnerable and less able to find their own home, then they may

be made an offer of accommodation. The age, length of residence, life skills and experience of the person left in the home will be the deciding factors.

- **As a management tool to resolve issues affecting a block or estate**

This priority may also apply where it was agreed as an appropriate solution to resolve an issue affecting a block or estate, but where all other tools available to the Social Landlord had proven ineffective.

A decision on these grounds would normally only be made where leaving the particular household in their existing property would seriously and negatively impact upon the quiet enjoyment of the tenant or neighbouring residents. Where agreed it should normally be seen as part of a package of support measures for that particular household, but only rarely would it be the only support measure being employed to achieve a solution. Typically it will arise out of a multi-agency strategy.

It should not be used as an alternative to enforcement action for anti social behaviour, nuisance, or any other breaches of tenancy.

A completed Devon Home Choice application form will accompany all such requests. The applicant will be able to identify their own preferred housing solutions in the normal way, however it will need to be recognised that where restrictions are made as to the type or location of properties which may be acceptable, that this may well reduce the prospects of such accommodation becoming available.

- **Demolition**

This need is recognised where there is a programme of regeneration which will require the re-housing of households whose homes will be demolished. This will be awarded once the demolition plans have been confirmed by the applicant's social landlord.

- **Major works**

Applicants in social housing who require permanent alternative accommodation as a result of major works needing to be carried out on their home.

- **Staff of Devon Home Choice partners who occupy tied accommodation**

Staff of Devon Home Choice partner local authorities and housing associations who occupy tied accommodation and who need to move upon retirement. This will not apply to staff who need to move because they have found a new job, resigned or been dismissed.

This will only apply to those members of staff of Devon Home Choice partners who occupied tied accommodation on or before 31 December 2009 when Devon Home Choice goes live.

Escape violence or threat of violence, serious harassment or traumatic event (Emergency housing need band [A])

In exceptional circumstances it will be appropriate to support the removal of households from the risk that they are facing by remaining in their current home. This will assist in ensuring that the household does not become homeless for this reason. The decision will be subject to regular reviews and could lead to the status being withdrawn if there is a change in circumstances.

This need will be awarded to applicants where there is immediate risk to the household, and usually with evidence from the police or another appropriate agency. The person at risk may be the applicant, or another person who might be reasonably expected to reside with them.

The purpose of this need is the removal of applicants from the risk that they are facing.

The definition of this risk will be where the person concerned is suffering from violence or threats of violence that are likely to be carried out. This would need to be an **imminent** threat of significant physical or mental harm to the applicant or a member of their household.

Where the request relates to anti social behaviour, it will only qualify where there is a serious risk of physical or psychological harm to the applicants due to violence or anti social behaviour. It will also need to be clear that the landlord or appropriate agency have tried all approaches to prevent such behaviour within their anti social behaviour policy.

Harassment is defined as personalised, deliberate, unwanted acts of violence (verbal or physical) or other behaviour that is designed to cause harm or damage to people or property which is suffered by individuals or groups. This may include harassment on the grounds of age, disability (including HIV status) faith or belief, gender, race, ethnic or national origin, sexual orientation, or specific individual or family circumstances.

To achieve this level of priority there must be a significant assessed level of harassment and a consequent risk to the household, and that this cannot be reduced or resolved to an acceptable level within a reasonable timescale.

This is likely to arise where either there is an immediate risk to the household or where there has been prolonged harassment that is causing a serious impact on the well-being of the household.

Move-on from supported accommodation (High housing needs band [B])

Applicants assessed as ready to move-on (see below) from supported accommodation, and who have exhausted all other options, will be placed in the High housing needs band (B). This will include young people leaving care who are assessed by the local authority or a multi-agency panel as ready for independent living.

The Move-On Panels (see below) will have the flexibility to place an applicant in the Emergency housing needs band (A) in exceptional circumstances.

Applicants who are assessed as ready to move-on from supported accommodation will have their band start date backdated to either the date that they moved into the supported accommodation or the the date they first became a homeless prevention case to a Devon local authority, whichever is the earliest.

Applicants living in supported accommodation who are not assessed as being ready to move-on to independent living will remain in the No housing need band, as they are adequately housed, unless they qualify for another band due to other needs (for example health and wellbeing needs).

Young people leaving care who are assessed by the local authority or a multi-agency panel as ready for independent living will have their band start date backdated to their 17th birthday.

Applicants who have moved into supported accommodation from another local authority area will be deemed to have a local connection with their original local authority area.

A network of panels across the county will undertake the assessment of whether an applicant is ready to move-on from supported accommodation. Whilst there may be some variation in how these panels are made up, they will work to common criteria by which to undertake the assessment.

The criteria will include ensuring that supported accommodation providers and applicants have worked together to:

- Demonstrate that the applicant is ready for independent living, for example by meeting all the outcomes set out in the applicants support plan; the completion of a programme such as Personal Housing Units; and ensuring that an applicant is involved in meaningful activity (for example, employment, training, education, volunteering etc)
- Exhaust all other housing options (for example private renting)

Where required, it will need to be demonstrated that an appropriate package of floating support is in place.

Applicants living in supported accommodation who are not assessed as being ready to move-on to independent living will remain in the No housing need band, as they are adequately housed, unless they qualify for another band due to other needs (for example health and wellbeing needs).

Overcrowding (High housing need band [B] or Medium housing need band [C])

Overcrowding refers to the situation where there are not enough bedrooms to satisfactorily accommodate the number of people that make up a household.

Where a household is assessed as lacking 2 bedrooms given their household size, they will be placed in the High housing need band (B).

Where a household is assessed as lacking 1 bedroom given their household size, they will be placed in Medium housing need band (C).

The best use should be made for the bedroom resources available so that, for example, a bedroom used for storage should be counted as a bedroom.

The number of bedrooms required for households of different sizes is set out in the [Size of property](#) section above. The following assessments will normally be made under Devon Home Choice about the ages and sex of children who can share a bedroom, or who need separate bedrooms (except in exceptional circumstances):

- 2 children of the same sex (regardless of age) can share a bedroom
- A boy & girl who are both under 8 years old can share a bedroom
- A boy & girl, where at least 1 is over 8 years old need separate bedrooms

No additional priority will be awarded for overcrowding if there is evidence that the overcrowding is deliberate.

Prevention of Homelessness (High housing need band [B])

This need is awarded in order to avoid the applicants becoming homeless, where this will lead to a full homelessness duty being made and potential use of emergency or temporary accommodation.

The household must meet the following criteria:

- They are eligible for assistance and social housing
- They have a live application held with Devon Home Choice
- They are threatened with homelessness within 56 days
- They have been interviewed by a Devon local authority's Housing Department and that their circumstances been verified
- The homelessness prevention approach has been followed and it has not been possible to either stop the loss of accommodation or to assist in the securing of alternative accommodation. **Note:** If there are other options that can be successfully used to meet their housing need then this need will not be awarded
- It can be shown that the applicants concerned would be owed a full homelessness duty were they to make such an application and by allowing this priority to be used it is clear that a Devon local authority will avoid the need to provide temporary accommodation, or incur other avoidable use of public funds

This may include people who have fled domestic violence and are resident in a refuge or safe house.

It may also include prisoners who are due to be released within 56 days, have no accommodation to move to and meet the above criteria.

There will be a time limit of 1 month placed on this need after which the application will be reviewed.

Social need or supporting delivery of another priority service (High housing need band [B])

This need applies to applicants whom, for exceptional reasons, fall outside of the rest of Devon Home Choice assessment framework, and need to be found secure alternative accommodation.

This may include child risk or concern issues where children would otherwise be accommodated by social services.

Exceptional cases may also be considered where there is a combination of factors or special circumstances which make the overall effect disproportionately worse than any of those factors might normally be assessed as being.

This should not be used to prioritise applicants who could be assessed under the Health and Wellbeing Assessment process set out above, or whose problems relate to such issues as overcrowding that are assessed and banded separately.

Requests for acceptance into the above need should be referred to a Devon local authority's Housing Department.

Urgent Management Move

In exceptional circumstances partner landlords within Devon Home Choice may need to make an urgent management move and allocate a home outside of Devon Home Choice. Situations when a landlord might need to make an urgent management move include:

- To escape serious violence or the threat of serious violence
- To escape serious harassment
- To resolve issues affecting a particular area or block

The situations will be such that an immediate move is required.

Appendix 2

Devon Home Choice Partners

Local authorities

<p>East Devon District Council Council Offices Knowle Sidmouth Devon EX10 8HL</p> <p>T: (01395) 517469 E: housingneeds@eastdevon.gov.uk W: www.eastdevon.gov.uk</p>	<p>Exeter City Council Civic Centre Paris Street Exeter Devon EX1 1JN</p> <p>T: (01392) 265726 E: housing@exeter.gov.uk W: www.exeter.gov.uk</p>
<p>Mid Devon District Council Phoenix House Phoenix Lane Tiverton Devon EX16 6PP</p> <p>T: 01884 255255 E: htenancy@middevon.gov.uk W: www.middevon.gov.uk</p>	<p>North Devon District Council Civic Centre North Walk Barnstaple Devon EX31 1EA</p> <p>T: 01271 325757 E: housingadvice@northdevon.gov.uk W: www.northdevon.gov.uk</p>
<p>Plymouth City Council Community Services Plymouth City Council Plymouth Devon PL1 2AA</p> <p>T: 01752 305496 E: housingneeds@plymouth.gov.uk W: www.plymouth.gov.uk</p>	<p>South Hams District Council Follaton House Plymouth Road Totnes Devon TQ9 5NE</p> <p>T: 01803 861234 E: customer.services@southhams.gov.uk W: www.southhams.gov.uk</p>

Local authorities

<p>Teignbridge District Council Forde House Brunel Road Newton Abbot Devon TQ12 4XX</p> <p>T: 01626 361101 E: housing@teignbridge.gov.uk W: www.teignbridge.gov.uk</p>	<p>Torbay Council Pearl Assurance House 101 - 107 Union Street Torquay Devon TQ1 3DW</p> <p>T: 01803 208723 E: housing@torbay.gov.uk W: www.torbay.gov.uk</p>
<p>Torridge District Council Riverbank House Bideford Devon EX39 2QG</p> <p>T: 01237 428700 E: housingoptions@torridge.gov.uk W: www.torridge.gov.uk</p>	<p>West Devon Borough Council Kilworthy Park Tavistock Devon PL19 0BZ</p> <p>T: 01822 813600 E: housing@westdevon.gov.uk W: www.westdevon.gov.uk</p>

Registered Social Landlords operating in Devon (Participation in Devon Home Choice to be formally confirmed)

<p>Cornerstone 18 Southernhay East Exeter Devon EX1 1QD</p> <p>T: 01392 273462 E: mail@cornerstonehousing.net W: www.cornerstonehousing.net</p>	<p>Devon and Cornwall Housing Association The Mount Paris Street Exeter Devon EX1 2JZ</p> <p>T: 01392 252566 E: Online form W: www.dcha.co.uk</p>
<p>Falcon Rural Housing Ltd Falcon House 3A South Street Wellington Somerset TA21 2NR</p> <p>T: 01823 667343 E: W: www.falconruralhousing.com</p>	<p>Guinness Trust Hillfields House (Ground Floor) Matford Court Sigford Road Exeter Devon EX2 8NL</p> <p>T: 01392 822900 E: W: www.guinnesspartnership.com</p>
<p>Hanover Housing Society Hanover House 1 Bridge Close Staines Middlesex TW18 4TB</p> <p>T: 01480 475069 E: W: www.hanover.org.uk</p>	<p>Hastoe Housing Association Ltd Fleur de Lis Middlemarsh Street Poundbury Dorchester Dorset DT1 3GX</p> <p>T: 0845 601 8865 E: southwest@hastoe.com W: www.hastoe.com</p>

Registered Social Landlords operating in Devon (Participation in Devon Home Choice to be formally confirmed)

<p>Housing 21 The Triangle Baring Road Beaconsfield Bucks HP9 2NA</p> <p>T: 0370 192 4000 E: customerservicesadministration@housing21.co.uk W: www.housing21.co.uk</p>	<p>Jephson 450 Woodlands Court Ash Ridge Road Bradley Stoke Bristol BS32 4LB</p> <p>T: 01454 618822 E: bristol@jephson.org.uk W: www.jephson.org.uk</p>
<p>Magna Housing Group Hollands House Poundsbury Road Dorchester Dorset DT1 1SW</p> <p>T: 01305 216000 E: hollands@magna.org.uk W: www.magna.org.uk</p>	<p>Methodist Homes Epworth House Stuart Street Derby DE1 2EQ</p> <p>T: 01271 379787 E: enquiries@mha.org.uk W: www.mha.org.uk</p>
<p>North Devon Homes Westacott Road Barnstaple Devon EX32 8TA</p> <p>T: 01271 312500 E: webresponse@ndh-ltd.co.uk W: www.ndh-ltd.co.uk</p>	<p>Plymouth Community Homes Midland House Plymouth Devon PL1 2AA</p> <p>T: 01752 305950 E: W:</p>
<p>Raglan Housing Unit 4 Vincent Court 89 Soundwell Road Staple Hill Bristol BS16 4QR</p> <p>T: 0117 9709281 E: hsc@raglan.org W: www.raglan.org</p>	<p>Red Devon Housing Brook House Church Street Dawlish Devon EX7 9AX</p> <p>T: 01626 863192 E: W: www.reddevonhousing.co.uk</p>

Registered Social Landlords operating in Devon (Participation in Devon Home Choice to be formally confirmed)

<p>Riviera Housing Trust Woodview House Torbay Business Park Woodview Road Paignton Devon TQ4 7HP</p> <p>T: 01803 696123 E: enquiries@rivierahousing.org.uk W: www.rivierahousing.org.uk</p>	<p>Sanctuary Leat House Tavistock Street Roborough Plymouth Devon PL6 7BD</p> <p>T: 0800 083 9283 E: Online form W: www.sanctuary-housing.co.uk</p>
<p>Sarsen 4-5 Russell Court Palace Street Plymouth Devon PL1 2AS</p> <p>T: 01752 827730 E: info@sarsen.co.uk W: www.sarsen.co.uk</p>	<p>Signpost Housing Sunrise Business Park Blandford Forum Dorset DT11 8SA</p> <p>T: 01392 361122 E: customerservices@sha.co.uk W: www.sha.co.uk</p>
<p>South Devon Rural Housing Association Ltd Forder Lane House Forder Lane Dartington Totnes Devon TQ9 6HT</p> <p>T: 01803 863550 E: info@southdevonrural.com W: www.southdevonrural.com</p>	<p>South Western Housing Society 504 Worle Parkway Weston-Super-Mare Somerset BS22 6WA</p> <p>T: 0845 290 3366 E: info.swhs.org.uk W: www.swhs.org.uk</p>
<p>Sovereign South & West Unit 2 Orchard Court Heron Road Sowton Industrial Estate Exeter Devon EX2 7LL</p> <p>T: 01392 888000 E: enquiries@sovereign.org.uk W: www.sovereign.org.uk</p>	<p>Tamar Housing Society Belgrave House 73 Mutley Plain Plymouth PL4 6JJ</p> <p>Tel: 01752 250902 E: W: www.tamarhs.org</p>

Registered Social Landlords operating in Devon (Participation in Devon Home Choice to be formally confirmed)

<p>Tarka Housing Limited Gammaton Road East the Water Bideford Devon EX39 4FG</p> <p>T: 01237 428080 E: W: www.tarkahousing.org.uk</p>	<p>Teachers' Housing Association Ltd Rugby Chambers 2 Rugby Street London WC1N 3QU</p> <p>T: 020 7440 9440 E: enquiries@teachershousing.org.uk W: www.teachershousing.org.uk</p>
<p>Teign Housing Templar House Templar's Wharf Collett Way Newton Abbot Devon TQ12 4PH</p> <p>T: 01626 322777 E: info@teignhousing.co.uk W: www.teignhousing.co.uk</p>	<p>Tor Homes Tor House St Peters Quay Totnes Devon TQ9 5SH</p> <p>T: 01803 869600 E: W: www.torhomes.com</p>
<p>Westcountry Housing Association Ltd Hatfield House Hatfield Road Torquay Devon TQ1 3HF</p> <p>T: 01803 200300 E: W: www.westcountryha.org.uk</p>	<p>West Devon Homes Limited The Quay Plymouth Road Tavistock Devon PL19 8AB</p> <p>T: 01822 813770 E: enquiries@wdh.org.uk W: www.wdh.org.uk</p>
<p>William Sutton Housing Association 12 Elstree Way Borehamwood Herts WD6 1JE</p> <p>T: 02082357000 E: south@williamsutton.org.uk W: www.williamsutton.org.uk</p>	

Appendix 3

Potential barriers to participating in Devon Home Choice

There are considered to be five key areas where applicants may face barriers participating in Devon Home Choice (these lists are not exhaustive):

Accessing information

Some applicants may have difficulty accessing information because they:

- have literacy problems
- don't speak English as their first language
- have a chaotic lifestyle
- have negative perceptions of the service and likely the outcome
- don't know about the scheme or where to find information or support
- are visually and/ or hearing impaired
- have learning difficulties
- have mobility issues
- are geographically isolated
- currently live outside Devon
- have mental health issues
- are suffering a crisis
- don't have access to the internet

Completing the Application Form

Some applicants may have difficulty registering for Devon Home Choice because they:

- have literacy problems
- don't know how to register and/ or where to get information
- are visually impaired
- don't have access to the internet

Bidding for homes

Some applicants may have difficulty bidding for homes because they:

- have a chaotic lifestyle
- have learning difficulties
- are visually and/ or hearing impaired
- are geographically isolated
- have mental health problems
- have literacy problems
- don't speak English as their first language
- don't have access to the internet

Decision making

Some applicants may have difficulty deciding whether to bid for a property or accepting an offer because they:

- lack general life skills
- lack confidence
- have a chaotic lifestyle
- have learning difficulties
- have mental health problems

Appeals

Some applicants may have difficulty in making an appeal (for example if they don't agree with the band they've been placed in) because they:

- lack general life skills
- lack confidence
- have a chaotic lifestyle
- have a learning difficulties
- have mental health problems
- don't know that they are able, or how, to appeal