

Report to: **Overview & Scrutiny Panel**  
Date: **9<sup>th</sup> November 2017**  
Title: **Devon Home Choice Annual Review & South Hams Allocation Policy Review**  
Portfolio Area: **Customer First**  
Wards Affected: **all**

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

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**Recommendations:**

**That Executive RESOLVES:**

1. That South Hams District Council continues as a partner of Devon Home Choice.
2. To continue the registering of applicants in Band E, no housing need for the purpose of Devon Home Choice
3. To accept the minor changes of updated wording to the South Hams Allocation Policy.

**1. Executive summary**

- 1.1 Following a review of Devon Home Choice attached at Appendix 1 Members are asked to approve the recommendations as set out above.
- 1.2 The report recommends that South Hams remains a Devon Home Choice partner. As a non-stockholding Local Authority it is essential to work with Registered Providers to ensure that allocations of social housing are targeted at local people in housing need and that these opportunities are maximised.

The report concludes that there is little value in a standalone system for households seeking social housing in South Hams and that the costs of any such scheme would likely be prohibitive to the Council at this time.

- 1.3 The report also recommends to retain Band E, for applicants with no housing need. This is based on evidence that 13.5% of the allocations last year went to households in this banding.
- 1.4 The South Hams Allocation Policy remains fit for purpose and lawful. This updated version changes some of the language but not the context.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 At the Overview & Scrutiny Panel on the 24<sup>th</sup> November 2016, it was agreed that a full review of alternative models to Devon Home Choice and Choice Based Lettings (CBL) should be completed within the next 12 months. Concerns were raised by Members that the scheme was overly bureaucratic, a perceived lack of transparency and that policy rules were not being adhered to. Also at this time some Local Authorities had started to indicate a move away from Choice Based Letting schemes and there were concerns over the future of Cornwall Home Choice, with a major provider leaving the partnership and setting up their own CBL scheme.
- 2.2 The report (Appendix 1) reviews the other options for housing allocations and concludes that although there were some indications that Local Authorities would move away from Choice Based Lettings this has not transpired with only a single council – Portsmouth using an alternative model. If the Council wished to pursue this model then it would require additional staff, additional IT and changes to working practices which currently encourage self-serve options.

The arrangements in Cornwall have continued in partnership and a recently conducted external review of Cornwall Home Choice gave options for the partnership to take forward. Devon will also be reviewing the arrangements to look into what may be able to be offered in the future, details of which are contained in the report.

As developments away from Choice Based Lettings did not materialise in other Authorities and a confidential review was under way in Cornwall which would help inform our position it was not considered essential to invoke a previous suggested Task and Finish group".

## **3. Outcomes/outputs**

- 3.1 Although Members have some concerns over Devon Home Choice, the report found these largely to be unfounded. The majority of applicants self-serve, with support for more vulnerable customers. The register has been reviewed and this is now on a rolling

programme. Our allocation policy still safeguards local interests and there is little truth in a large number of properties being allocated to people with no local connection to the area.

- 3.2 We have discussed the possibility of leaving Devon Home Choice with our largest landlord DCH. They have been clear that they are still committed to a Devon partnership, but would also like to assist Members in understanding local issues. As a non-stockholder it is essential that we continue to work positively with our providers, to not only ensure existing housing is allocated in a way that we agree with, but also to continue to attract providers to build in the South Hams.
- 3.3 There are opportunities for the Devon Home Choice Partnership to transform and simplify the process, and this is only achievable in partnership with our landlords.

#### **4. Options available and consideration of risk**

- 4.1 South Hams could choose to leave Devon Home Choice. This proposal with some indicative costings of additional staff and ICT is set out in the attached report. There appears little or no justification for this. It is likely that the Devon Home Choice partnership would continue without us, and that landlords would continue to advertise properties for which we have no nomination rights over, through DHC. Local applicants would be required to apply on both registers to ensure they were considered for all available properties.  
It is also unlikely that South Hams could make major changes to the reasonable preference criteria, as set out in the report and enshrined in the Housing Act 1996 (as amended).
- 4.2 Members could vote to stop registering Band E applications as is the case in Exeter, Plymouth & Teignbridge. The consequence being that when Landlords do not find applicants for their properties in Bands A- D that they are advertised by alternative means.

#### **5. Proposed Way Forward**

- 5.1 Members are asked to recommend to the Executive the three recommendations set out above.

#### **6. Implications**

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance	Y	Both the Devon Home Choice Policy, and the South Hams Allocation Policy meet the statutory requirement of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended)

Financial	Y	If Members do not accept officer recommendation and pursue a standalone allocation system for South Hams The cost will increase by at least £50k (Year 1) and is detailed in Appendix 1 This would be new expenditure for which there is no budget.
Risk		Devon Home Choice and the South Hams Allocation Policy are both robust enough to ensure they are statutorily compliant.  The data security is well managed and to a high standard, with involvement from IT Colleagues in Devon.  There is more to do to fully understand customer satisfaction and to continue to offer a safety net for people who need additional support to play an active part in their housing options.
Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality and Diversity		This data is collated by the Devon Home Choice Partnership and closely correlates with the ethnicity of householders in the South Hams.
Safeguarding		There are inbuilt processes and systems to ensure that the most vulnerable are appropriately supported.
Community Safety, Crime and Disorder		No direct implications
Health, Safety and Wellbeing		Both the Devon Home Choice Policy and the South Hams Allocation Policy give reasonable preference to people requiring housing due to health, safety & wellbeing
Other implications		

## **Supporting Information**

### **Appendices:**

Appendix 1 Report regarding Devon Home Choice and alternative models to Choice Based Lettings.

Appendix 2 Devon Home Choice Policy  
[https://www.devonhomechoice.com/useful-information-0#Policy\\_Procedures](https://www.devonhomechoice.com/useful-information-0#Policy_Procedures)

Appendix 3 South Hams Allocation Policy October 2017

Appendix 4 Devon Home Choice Monitoring Report 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017

[https://www.devonhomechoice.com/sites/default/files/DevonEditor2/dhc\\_monitoringreportapr2017.pdf](https://www.devonhomechoice.com/sites/default/files/DevonEditor2/dhc_monitoringreportapr2017.pdf)

**Background Papers:**

**Approval and clearance of report**

<b>Process checklist</b>	<b>Completed</b>
Portfolio Holder briefed	<b>Yes</b>
SLT Rep briefed	<b>Yes</b>
Relevant Exec Director sign off (draft)	<b>Yes</b>
Data protection issues considered	<b>Yes</b>
If exempt information, public (part 1) report also drafted. (Cabinet/Scrutiny)	