

Mid Devon District Council

HOUSING SERVICES

ALLOCATIONS

POLICY

September 2011 v2.6

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PART 1: Statement of Policies

GENERAL

Full details of the Devon Home Choice Scheme are available on Mid Devon District Council's (MDDC's) website.

This policy has been written in line with relevant current legislation. Unless there are changes to such legislation beforehand, the next review of this policy is due June 2015 and every four years thereafter.

BACKGROUND

Introduction

MDDC had a housing stock of 3082 dwellings as at 1 April 2011. In addition to this, there are a number of Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) operating within Mid Devon who have in excess of 1440 dwellings.

Social housing is a valuable resource and MDDC must ensure that it makes the best use of its stock.

Devon Home Choice (DHC) is the model of Choice Based Lettings adopted by MDDC and the majority of RSLs operating within Mid Devon have agreed to allocate housing through this jointly operated Choice Based Lettings Scheme.

RSLs will label (give preference to certain applicants where necessary) and let their own properties and will also verify the applicant making sure they are eligible for an offer. They have their own allocation policies and will verify applicant's details to ensure they meet the criteria.

The DHC Based Lettings Scheme has been introduced in the whole of Devon.

MDDC will co-ordinate DHC within Mid Devon and will maintain the Housing Register operating within the area. MDDC will co-ordinate the allocation process and provide, where appropriate, RSLs with the nominated household following the bidding process.

This policy offers an explanation of when the preference labels will be used and methods for validation of the label. Each of these labels has a definition.

Some properties may be excluded from the DHC Scheme for management reasons as listed in this policy.

This policy will ensure the procedures of MDDC are adhered to in line with the DHC Policy Document and should be read in conjunction with it.

COMMON POLICIES

The Devon Home Choice Policy Document

By joining the DHC Partnership all partners have agreed to the DHC Policy.

The policy sets out in detail how the scheme will operate, how applicants will be prioritised and how properties will be let.

The DHC Policy forms the main part of MDDC's Allocation Policy, being the document that sets out the fundamental principles upon which the scheme is based.

A copy of the DHC Policy Document is attached at Appendix "A" and can be found on MDDC website.

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL SPECIFIC POLICIES

MDDC has specific duties to meet local housing needs. This section sets out MDDC's principles in this respect and how they operate alongside the DHC Policy.

Labelling of Property

The property may attract a preference label. The preference label seeks to reflect the different needs within the community and supports good management of the housing stock.

Household Eligibility in relation to property size

To ensure that our stock is utilised to its full potential, the Council will place certain preferences on some of its properties to ensure the most suitable applicant and family make-up is considered for the particular size of accommodation. Therefore this could mean applicants in a higher band are bypassed in order to achieve this, but housing need will always be taken into consideration.

Local Preference Label for MDDC Properties

Whilst choice has been extended as widely as possible, MDDC reserves the right to label some of their properties, giving preference to those with a local connection to the town or village and neighbouring towns and villages (in bands A – D).

What does the label mean

Preference will be given to those with a local connection to 'state town or village', or the neighbouring parishes.

An applicant fulfilling the local preference criteria will be the same as the one used in the DHC Policy (3.4).

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

- Normally be resident in the parish or neighbouring parish. Local Government Association (LGA) guidelines define this as having resided in the area for six out of the last twelve months, or three out of the last 5 years, where residence has been out of choice. In line with the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008, service personnel who have been based and living in that parish or a neighbouring parish will be considered to have a local connection.
- Work in the parish or neighbouring parish. The LGA guidelines define this as employment other than that of a casual nature. For the purposes of this policy this will be defined as having 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 a family connection in the parish or neighbouring parish. The LGA 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.

When will this be validated

The information will be validated at the verification stage.

When will the label be used

This label will be used when advertising properties where very few vacancies arise.

Reason for label

By using the local label to some properties in the district, it will give all applicants the ability to apply for properties within these areas whilst ensuring local needs are met. The first property becoming vacant in the financial year will be given the preference to local applicants defined above. This will mean in small communities that may only have one vacancy a year, the first opportunity will be local applicants.

The map of Mid Devon showing the individual parishes together with the matrix of neighbouring parishes will apply.

During the consultation process Members and applicants identified that in some areas preference should be given to local applicants who live or work within close proximity of vacant property. Local preference labels also re-enforces our commitment to create sustainable rural communities.

Applicants will lose their local connection if:

- Since applying to join the register they have moved outside of Mid Devon and no longer meet any other local connection conditions
- They had a local connection through a close relative but the relative no longer resides in the area
- They had a local connection through their employment, but this no longer applies

Exceptional Circumstances

Cases of exceptional circumstances will be decided by the Head of Housing and Property Services.

Supported Housing Preference

What does the label mean

Preference will be given to those over 60 with a medical need eligible for the size/type of accommodation advertised, but those over 45 may also apply. In some cases we will stipulate that those with a 1-bedroom need may also apply where we have a 2-bedroom property available. However, where an applicant is in receipt of higher rate disability allowance (for mobility) and is under the age of 45, they will also be eligible to apply.

If there are no applicants meeting these criterion then it will be allocated to an applicant over 60 with no medical need before considering those over 45 with no medical need.

If it is a 2-bedroom bungalow, MDDC reserves the right to allow those with a 1-bedroom need to also apply. In those instances, those with a 2-bedroom medical need will be considered followed by those with a 1-bedroom medical need, before considering general needs applicants.

When will this be validated

The information will be validated at the verification stage.

When will this label be used

This label will be used for all 1 and 2-bedroom supported properties throughout Mid Devon.

Reason for the label

Sheltered accommodation is proving to be difficult to re-let in most areas of Mid Devon, therefore to extend the number of applicants that can apply for this type of accommodation; the age has been reduced to 45.

Preference to those with a medical need for a bungalow (non warden)

What does the label mean

Preference will be given to those over 45 with a medical/housing need (bands A – D) in the first instance when allocating 1 or 2-bedroom bungalows that are not sheltered or supported, together with those who are under 45 years of age but in receipt of higher rate disability allowance - for mobility.

If it is a 2-bedroom bungalow, MDDC reserves the right to allow those with a 1-bedroom need to also apply. In those instances those with a 2-bedroom medical need will be considered followed by those with a 1-bedroom medical need before considering general needs applicants.

When will this be validated

The information will be validated at the verification stage.

When will this label be used

This label will be used for all 1 and 2-bedroom non-sheltered/supported bungalows throughout Mid Devon.

Reason for the label

To ensure bungalows are allocated to those who require level accommodation for medical reasons.

Preference to those who require an adapted property

What does the label mean

When a property has been adapted, preference will be given to those with a medical need for that type of accommodation in the first instance.

An adapted property may contain one or more of the following:

- Level entry shower
- Wet room
- Ramps
- Stair lift
- Lowered kitchen
- Ground floor kitchen and bathroom extensions

A direct let or management move will also be considered before allocating an adapted property to someone with no need for this type of accommodation, even if the property has been advertised through Devon Home Choice. The decision will be made by the Head of Housing and Property Services in conjunction with the Housing Portfolio Holder.

When will this be validated

The information will be validated at the verification stage.

When will the label be used

This label will be used when a property has been identified as having adaptations suitable for someone who would benefit from them.

Reason for the label

The reason for the label is to ensure that adapted properties are used to their maximum potential. We will not normally reinstate a property to its original condition if we have made adaptations within it; the property should then benefit an ingoing tenant by allowing for a better enjoyment of the property and save money by not needing to complete similar alterations at another address.

UPCOMING CHANGES IN LEGISLATION

The Localism Bill is likely to introduce many changes which are relevant to this policy. One of the main aims of the Localism Bill is to decentralise power. Local authorities are likely to have greater freedom in setting policy as to who should qualify to go on the waiting list for social housing in their areas. It is probable that MDDC will be obliged to ensure that social homes go to the most vulnerable in society and those who need it most.

Proposals in the Bill are subject to parliamentary debate and may only be put into practice when Parliament agrees to the proposals.

There is currently a Devon-wide strategy being developed which makes reference to DHC.