

# Tenant's Incentive Scheme

## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 There is a shortage of affordable housing, particularly family housing, available in the West Devon area. This situation is clearly evidenced by both Borough wide and Parish housing needs surveys.
- 1.2 One of the priorities of the Housing Strategy is to meet affordable housing needs. To maximise the use of the existing social rented housing stock is a key element within this, as seen in other Council Policy e.g. the allocations policy and banding under the Devon Home Choice policy.
- 1.3 It is recognised that moving house, particularly for the elderly, can be difficult, stressful and costly and that barriers to moving to more appropriate accommodation can often be emotional as well as practical or financial.

## 2 Key Objectives

- 2.1 To maximise the use of the existing social rented housing stock in the West Devon area. There is an acknowledged, but largely unquantifiable level of under occupation within the stock and work to better identify the level is critical to the scheme.
- 2.2 To free up family sized units within the existing social rented housing stock by offering an incentive to move to smaller accommodation. The incentive to include a package of support where appropriate.
- 2.3 To increase the amount of family sized accommodation available.
- 2.4 To find out more about barriers to tenants moving from large accommodation. To find out more about their rehousing needs.

## 3 Policy

- 3.1 The Council will offer the Tenant's Incentive to households seeking to move within RP (Registered Social Landlord) housing stock who meet the following criteria:
  - Are an existing Housing Association tenant on an Assured tenancy, living in the West Devon Borough area and whose Housing Association landlord confirms that the nomination rights for the property being vacated will be given to West Devon Borough Council.
  - Are in a family sized house – 2 bedrooms or larger
  - Want to move to a property that is at least 1 bedroom less
  - Are registered on Devon Home Choice

- Where the move will not result in overcrowding

3.2 The Scheme will be administered via the Housing Register. Those tenants indicating that they wish to move to a smaller property will be awarded a high housing need or medium housing need band dependent on the number of bedrooms being released, to enable them to apply for suitable properties advertised with Devon Home Choice. It will be made clear that the band will only apply if they bid for appropriate smaller properties.

3.2 The Incentive will be set at a standard rate of:

- £1,000 fixed payment, and
- £500 per bedroom released

For example:

- Household A who moves from a 3 bedroom house to a 1 bedroom property will receive £2,000 in total. This is made up of the £1,000 fixed payment and £1,000 for releasing 2 bedrooms.
- Household B who moves from a 2 bedroom house to a 1 bedroom property will receive £1,500 in total. This is made up of the £1,000 fixed payment and £500 for releasing 1 bedroom.

3.3 Where recognised local pressures on existing housing stock exists discretionary payment may be offered to increase the award total to up to £5000. The decision on whether a tenant is offered this discretionary top up will be agreed by two officers.

3.4 These incentive payments could be used by the household in any way they wish but are intended to help with removal expenses, carpeting, furnishing or to clear outstanding rent arrears..

3.5 All units freed up by the Tenant's Incentive Scheme will be advertised via Devon Home Choice. West Devon Borough Council will advertise these properties in accordance with their assessment of housing needs within the Borough. RPs may not add any restrictions to the advert that will make it difficult or impossible for the property to be let to a family in housing need unless agreed by the Borough Council.

3.6 Payment can only be made once to any tenant. If a tenant downsizes and then wishes to downsize again (i.e. if they downsize to a two bedroom property and then downsize at a later date to a one bedroom property) they are only eligible for payment of the incentive following the first move. If an applicant requires a larger property within two years of having received a payment for downsizing they will

normally have to repay the incentive in full. The Housing Advice Team Leader may agree that repayment be waived in exceptional circumstances. This must be fully documented in the applicants file.

- 3.7 The Scheme will be marketed locally and within RPs to maximise take up from existing tenants who are under occupying. It will be made clear that this is a limited offer until the remainder of the budget is spent.

#### **4 Monitoring**

- 4.1 Outcome monitoring will take place in order to meet the objective of learning about the barriers to moving, especially for the elderly – feedback to be sought following the move by a housing officer.
- 4.2 The scheme is financed through the Social Housing Grant capital allocation and will be monitored quarterly.

#### **5 Policy Review**

- 5.1 The policy will be reviewed annually.
- 5.2 Feedback will be sought from RPs and the support agencies.

#### **6 Diversity and Equal Opportunities**

- 6.1 West Devon Borough Council is committed to reflecting the full diversity of the community it serves and to promoting equality of opportunity for everyone.
- 6.2 This policy and all associated documentation and leaflets can be made available in large print, Braille, tape format or in any other languages, on request.

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