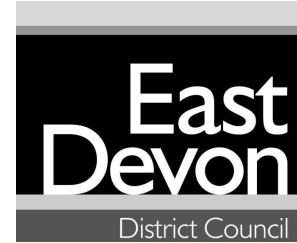


Agenda Item: 09

Housing Review Board

25 June 2009

JG/DB



Mutual Exchanges – HomeSwapper

Summary

This report sets out a proposal to join **HomeSwapper** – a national mutual exchange system to replace the current mutual exchange register administered by the Council. The Devon Home Choice scheme will provide an opportunity to advertise properties for tenants who wish to mutually exchange. All Devon District Councils, except for EDDC belong to **HomeSwapper**. To enable EDDC tenants to benefit from a Devon wide mutual exchange register I am recommending that the Council should enroll with **HomeSwapper**. The annual cost is £2,150 which can be funded through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

Recommendation

1. Members are asked:

- a. To approve the Council enrolling with HomeSwapper to administer future mutual exchanges for Council tenants.
- b. To agree an annual budget of £2,150 to register as a landlord with HomeSwapper.

a) Reasons for Recommendation

To ask the Board for approval to register with **HomeSwapper** to replacing our existing mutual exchange register.

b) Alternative Options

To not approve the recommendation and continue with the Council's online Mutual Exchange Register. This option limits the opportunity for tenants to move outside East Devon area.

c) Risk Considerations

None.

d) Policy and Budgetary Considerations

These are set out in the report

e) Date for Review of Decision

An annual report will be submitted to the Board.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Council currently administers a mutual exchange register for East Devon Council tenants. The register is exclusive to East Devon Council tenants and it enables tenants to exchange home with other tenants in the district.
- 1.2 The introduction of Devon Home Choice will enable the district councils/unitary authorities and RSL's in Devon to allocate empty properties using a common housing register and a common computer system – Abritas system, to administer the letting of properties to new tenants.
- 1.3 Devon Home Choice will also allow the co-ordination of other lettings functions such as mutual exchanges. All the district councils in Devon, except EDDC are registered with Home Swapper to administer all mutual exchanges from existing tenants.
- 1.4 The Government's preferred mutual exchange register – HOMES scheme, stopped operating in early 2008

2. HomeSwapper

- 2.1 **HomeSwapper** is the largest mutual exchange service for council and housing association tenants wanting to swap homes. It is easy to register on-line. Tenants can do this from their own home or using a computer at the Council offices.
- 2.2 The service is free to tenants of landlords who have registered with **HomeSwapper**; otherwise there is a small membership fee.
- 2.3 The annual cost for EDDC to register with **HomeSwapper** is £2,150.
- 2.4 Tenants will be able to register with **HomeSwapper** and avoid paying a fee. A tenant will need to register with **HomeSwapper** online at www.homeswapper.co.uk. The tenant will need to give details of where they live now and where they want to move to, and the type of property they are looking for. **HomeSwapper** then looks for 'matches' and informs the tenant by email or by mobile phone text about new matches as and when they occur. The tenant's home details are added to the website so other tenants who wish to swap can view. Once a match has been found then the Council's normal mutual exchange arrangement/rules apply and tenants need to contact Housing Needs team to progress the exchange.
- 2.5 There is a useful frequently asked questions page on the website which addresses a wide range of questions on the scheme. These include advice on the need for landlord's permission, personal safety when viewing homes and a complaints procedure.

3. Benefits to tenants and Council issues

3.1 The perceived benefits are:

- Access to a national database of properties available for mutual exchange.
- Able to tailor demand for exchange and receive automatic alerts by email or text when a match is found.
- If the Council registers as a landlord then our tenants will not be required to pay a fee.
- Links with Devon Home Choice and the other Devon district council/unitary authorities.

- The Council's current mutual exchange register is a basic tool for tenants to register their own property and identify their exchange requirements. Tenants outside the East Devon area are currently unable to swap with our tenants through our existing mutual exchange arrangements.

3.2 The HomeSwapper service claims the benefits to landlords include:

- Reduce void costs – Empowering tenants to find themselves a new home means they find us a new tenant, saving a potential void cost.
- Improve occupancy – Increase stock utilisation through under-occupancy and overcrowding alerts and management functionality.
- Offer more tenant choice – A national service allowing tenants to move across the UK.
- Improve audit results – Ensuring landlords have a modern and efficient mobility service which provides tenants with housing options.
- Simplicity – Easy to use and quick to implement.

3.3 Officers will monitor the site and be able to obtain statistics to show mutual exchange activity in East Devon. The current rules regarding processing a mutual exchange will apply. Tenants will need to meet the essential criteria such as no rent arrears and obtain the Council's written permission prior to the exchange taking place.

4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 The annual cost to join this scheme is £2,150. This can be funded from the Housing Revenue Account if the Board wishes to participate in the scheme.

5.0 Conclusions

5.1 **HomeSwapper** gives the Council and tenants a wider opportunity to swap homes with other tenants using a single mutual exchange register. **HomeSwapper** is used by other district councils in Devon and to be registered will help with the implementation and future operation of the Devon Home Choice scheme. Members are asked to approve the proposal to register as a landlord with **HomeSwapper**.

Legal Implications

There are no legal implications requiring comment.

Financial Implications

There is no budget available in 2009/10 for the joining fee of £2,150 although this amount can be found from savings elsewhere within the HRA.

Consultation on Reports to the Executive

None.

Background Papers

- **HomeSwapper** website frequently asked questions.