

## Housing in Christchurch

For a number of years I have held the post of Housing Portfolio Holder at Christchurch Borough Council, and the last four years has seen a great change in the way people can apply for affordable homes i.e. homes that are owned by Housing Associations and let at a reduced rent.

In the past there were almost 2,000 households on the Housing Register, who wished to be considered for affordable housing. These applicants would be granted a number of points according to their circumstances and those with the highest number would be contacted and allocated a home by the Housing staff at the Council when one became available. The criteria for being added to the Register was varied and it soon became apparent that with the limited number of affordable homes being built or becoming available a large majority of these applicants would never be allocated a home.

In December 2013 a new Joint Housing Allocations Policy was adopted by Christchurch and East Dorset Councils that had a strong emphasis towards local connection – Christchurch Homes for Christchurch People.

Using the strict criteria set out in this Policy a massive review of all the existing applicants was carried out and everyone on the register contacted. A number of applicants were found to be no longer at the registered address or their circumstances had changed, and those who replied had their applications reviewed. As of last week there are now 182 households on the CBC register, following 18 being re-housed. In addition there are 122 outstanding applications to deal with following receipt of documentation on eligibility, of which 57 applied last week. The applicants are now “banded” according to their circumstances, the more vulnerable being in the highest band. From December 2014 applicants may view and bid (apply to be considered) for an available property on the Dorset for You website through the following link;- <http://www.homechoice.dorsetforyou.com/DorsetHomeChoice>, where details of the new Policy can also be found. For people without access to a computer the Housing staff are available to assist.

As you can appreciate the reduced Register is now far more manageable and realistic, and means that people can be contacted annually to ensure their application is still live, or should the Council staff feel a person should be applying for a certain property in view of their needs. It is likely that the number on the Register will increase but certainly not to the extent seen in the past.

During the last two years there has been a number of small Affordable Housing developments being built by Housing Associations in the Borough and there are a number of new developments planned for the coming years.

The Council have a duty to house the homeless households, which in the past often were placed in Bed and Breakfast establishments. Recently this figure has also dropped considerably as people have been placed in temporary accommodation which has meant a sizable decrease in the cost.

In addition the Private Sector Housing Department in Civic Offices, can provide advice and information for private home owners regarding grants and assistance towards home insulation, aids and adaptations available, depending on individual circumstances. They can also provide advice to tenants of private landlords. Please see the following link;- <https://www.dorsetforyou.com/MajorAdaptations>

This is only a brief summary of the varied services within my Portfolio, and should you have any queries on the above article or any aspect regarding "Housing", please do not hesitate to contact me.

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