

Evaluation report: Sheltered Housing 'Hard to Let' Survey

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1.0 Aims of the report

- 1.1 To report on the qualitative findings from four specific questionnaires distributed to a targeted sample of sheltered housing applicants.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Since 'Choice Based Lettings' was introduced in June 2005, there has been no formal research into how applicants and potential applicants to sheltered accommodation rate the process to both register and bid on properties. This research activity sought to focus on specific groups of applicants to see if conclusions might be given as to why some sheltered housing properties are harder to let than others.

3.0 Methodology

- 3.1 The research activity focussed on qualitative structured questionnaires and sought to understand potential reasons that might lie behind four main scenarios, as detailed below.
- 3.2 One postal and three telephone questionnaires were created and approved by the corporate Performance, Analysis and Research team:
- 3.3 [Questionnaire 1](#) sought to understand the reasons why some older people apply to go on the general housing register, but do not apply for sheltered housing even though they qualify for it on the basis of their age.
- 3.4 [Questionnaire 2](#) focussed on why some sheltered housing applicants have never placed a bid on sheltered accommodation.
- 3.5 [Questionnaire 3](#) sought to understand why some schemes attract fewer bids and was intended to target individuals aged 60 and over who had placed at least one bid for sheltered housing accommodation within the last twelve months.
- 3.6 [Questionnaire 4](#) sought to understand what factors lead an individual to accept an offer of BHCC sheltered housing and was sent to all (215) new BHCC sheltered housing scheme tenants who had moved into their accommodation within the last two years, 2011-2013.
- 3.7 Upon advice from the corporate Performance, Analysis and Research team, questions were structured so that answers were consistent, with the format being 'tend to disagree / neither agree nor disagree / tend to agree' and the agreement that each survey to take no more than ten minutes to complete.

- 3.8 The customer data set used with Questionnaire 1 was taken from Locata and is available [here](#). The selection criteria applied consisted of - age range 60+, on general housing needs waiting list, not on the SHWL, and randomised ethnicity. This criteria yielded 1413 matching applicants which were then sorted by a randomised number. The target number of completed questionnaires was 5% of this list (70 applicants) but this was not achieved. A total of 18 completed questionnaires were returned and recorded as part of the data.
- 3.9 The customer data set used for Questionnaire 2 was again taken from Locata. The criteria used to obtain the selection was age range 60+, on general housing needs waiting list, on the SHWL, randomised ethnicity, and no bids within the last 12 months. This selection yielded 256 applicants which were again randomly sorted. The target number of respondents was 10% (26) and 25 completed questionnaires were achieved.
- 3.10 The data set used for Questionnaire 3 was not produced because the telephone questionnaire approach was abandoned after questionnaire 2. This was because of a very low contact/response rate being achieved and the length of time it was taking to complete questionnaires.
- 3.11 The 215 recipients of postal questionnaire 4 were taken from the New Tenancies Log Book for Q4 supplied by the Sheltered Housing Team and is available to view [here](#). In total, 91 completed responses were returned which was 42% of the total number of surveys sent (215).

Evaluation of qualitative research

4.0 Questionnaire 1 - Why some older people on the general housing waiting list do not apply for sheltered housing

- 4.1 The full results of questionnaire 1 (Understanding why some older people do not apply for sheltered housing) are available [here](#).
- 4.2 As expected, a substantial majority of respondents stated that they were on the joint housing register, that they had completed the application forms themselves and they were not on the register for sheltered housing (Questions 1, 2 & 3). This confirms the validity of the customer data set used.
- 4.3 50% of respondents said that they had not considered registering for sheltered housing (Question 4) and over half of these said that they either did not know or were not sure how to apply for sheltered housing (Question 5).
- 4.4 33% of respondents to Question 4 said that they had previously considered sheltered housing. Question 6 asked of all applicants so it could give some indication why sheltered housing might have been discounted or at least not actively pursued by this sub-group.

- 4.5 It is not possible to draw robust conclusions from such a small survey sample but it is interesting that the majority of responses to the question 'If no, can you say why you haven't considered sheltered housing?' (Question 6) fall into the 'Other' category. The nature of these responses suggest a 'positive' decision not to apply for sheltered housing is being made by some respondents and these decisions are partly based around beliefs of how old, ill or dependent an applicant needs to be to qualify for sheltered housing.
- 4.6 The general tone of answers given to Question 7 seem to indicate that beliefs about sheltered housing are not necessarily fixed for this sample group and might be positively influenced by more information being provided in key areas; service charges, personal independence, and the differences between sheltered and general housing stock.
- 4.7 Equal numbers of respondents were both aware and unaware that eligibility for sheltered housing is based on support need requirements rather than age (Question 8), so it may be possible that the general understanding of eligible support needs and/or age is misunderstood.

5.0 Questionnaire 2 - Why some people on the sheltered housing waiting list are not actively bidding

- 5.1 The full results of questionnaire 2 (why some SHWL applicants have never placed a bid) are available [here](#).
- 5.2 Over half of the respondents to this questionnaire either thought that they were not or did not know if they were on the joint housing register (Question 1) and in a marked difference to the responses to questionnaire 1, substantially more of this sample group said that someone else had completed the application form for them (Question 2). On the face of it this might indicate that there are a number of waiting list applicants who are not aware that someone has applied for sheltered housing on their behalf but, the number of respondents who thought that they were on the sheltered housing list (Question 3) was higher than the number who thought they were on the joint housing register generally. This could indicate a perception that a separate list for sheltered housing is operated.
- 5.3 Also, less people said that they knew about the choice based lettings scheme (Question 4) than those who said that they were registered for sheltered housing.
- 5.4 Question 6 confirms the accuracy of the selection criteria used to produce the target sample group. The phrasing of question 7 is poor but in the telephone survey activity this question was asked of all respondents. The main reason why respondents had not placed a bid in the last year was because they did not know how to bid and the second highest reason was respondents did not know that they needed to bid. This could be indicative of a sub-group of applicants that needs additional help to participate in the scheme but has either chosen not to or is not able to access the additional help that they may need.

- 5.5 Other reasons given for not bidding within the last year were that the process was felt to be too complicated, it did not provide enough information about properties (although this may be because some respondents were not subscribing to the newsletter), and that individuals had difficulty accessing the scheme when they had no internet access or support with bidding.
- 5.6 More positively, some respondents stated that they had not bid because they had found suitable alternative accommodation, circumstances had changed or they had decided to stay put for some other reason (not given). This would indicate that the joint housing register is not a completely accurate picture of who is currently actively seeking alternative accommodation.
- 5.7 The majority of respondents said that they did not know or were not sure how easy it was to understand and use the bidding process (Question 8) and there was a similar response to Question 9 which asked about the adequacy of the information provided about individual lettings. This may indicate a lack of participation in the scheme, although it does not give an indication as to why this might be.
- 5.8 The response to Question 11 is of concern. A significant majority of respondents did not know that additional help with the bidding process was available. If it is accurate to say that there is a lack of engagement within the scheme, this may be because applicants who need more help with it are not aware that the help is available. So, publicising the assisted bidding scheme could make a positive difference for a number of applicants who might otherwise be unsupported.
- 5.9 When considering access to the internet, there is a notable difference between respondents to questionnaires 1 and 2. Most respondents to questionnaire 1 have access to the internet whereas the vast majority of respondents to questionnaire 2 do not have access to the internet. More research would be required to quantify the precise impact that the lack of internet access has had on an individual's ability to participate in the choice based lettings scheme but it does seem reasonable to assume that it would potentially be a significant obstacle for some applicants.

6.0 Questionnaire 4 - What prompted someone to accept an offer of sheltered accommodation

- 6.1 The full results of questionnaire 4 (what factors contributed to the decision to accept an offer of sheltered accommodation) are available [here](#).
- 6.2 The two most popular reasons why an offer of sheltered accommodation was accepted (Question 2) were its location and the size/layout of the accommodation. 9 respondents stated that already knowing someone in the scheme was one of their main reasons but 23 respondents stated that one of their main reasons for accepting the offer was the staff/scheme manager. This would suggest that the experience gained by the applicant in the initial contact with the scheme manager is an important factor for many applicants in

their decision making process. Of the 'other' main reasons given for accepting an offer, only one respondent specifically stated that ground floor accommodation was a factor and this may be explained by the relatively high (38) importance being placed upon lifts.

- 6.3 Of the 'supplementary' reasons (Question 3) health, security, central heating, access to transport and free laundry facilities were the most popular reasons stated. Where additional health details were provided as part of an answer depression was cited as a factor with some applicants anticipating that the offer of accommodation would help them deal with the illness. No applicants stated that treatment rooms were a factor in their decision making and a small number made additional comments about not knowing what this option referred to.
- 6.4 A substantial majority of respondents in this questionnaire stated that they found the choice based lettings approach to allocations either very easy or fairly easy to use. Respondents who said that they did not find it either very easy or fairly easy tended to raise similar points as to why this was as respondents to Questionnaires 1 and 2. It may be that the positive experience of successfully securing sheltered accommodation influences a perception of the easiness of the choice based lettings approach and vice versa, but it may also be possible that the likelihood of achieving a successful offer of accommodation is determined in part by how easy an applicant finds the approach.
- 6.5 A significant number of respondents stated that have not placed bids on alternative accommodation since moving into their current accommodation (Question 6). Unfortunately the subsequent question focussed on those who had placed bids in this timeframe so why so many respondents had not was not captured. However, it may be suggestive that the information provided during the offer process was a fair representation of the accommodation on offer and this seems to be born out by the responses to Question 7, with the majority of respondents stating that based on their own experience the Choice Based Lettings scheme did always provide enough information to help an applicant decide whether they want to place a bid or not. For those who did not feel the same way (Question 8), the missing information that they would have found useful tended to focus on the physical attributes of the locality within which the scheme was located and the services in that locality.
- 6.6 More respondents (60) completed Question 10 than the total of those who did not answer yes to Question 9 (37) which suggests that the wording of supplementary question 10 could have been clearer. But, because more people (32) said that they would have found the Choice Based Lettings scheme easier had they known extra help was available than those who said they did not know the extra help was available (29) might indicate that there are some applicants who know extra help is available but are not using it.
- 6.7 The majority of respondents who had already moved into sheltered accommodation knew that 'assisted bidding' help was available to them

whereas a greater proportion of those on the sheltered housing waiting list did not know that this help was available.

- 6.8 One resident of Evelyn Court would like to have a pet, but believes they are not allowed within the scheme. One respondent from Muriel House stated that they previously had a cat which they were not allowed to take into the scheme. One resident from Lindfield Court does not have any pets but is looking for one.

7.0 Recommendations

- 7.1 The overall result from the consultation activity indicates further work needs to be carried out to give definite conclusions. Some findings that may be helpful are outlined below.
- 7.2 Work could be done to improve awareness around qualifying criteria and the levels of support provided by sheltered housing schemes.
- 7.3 The sample for questionnaire 2 was taken from the joint housing register. Many respondents were not aware that they were on the joint housing register indicating a level of confusion about the status of individual applications. More information and advice may improve applicants understanding of the joint housing register.
- 7.4 It is striking how many people on the sheltered housing waiting list either did not know or thought they were not registered for sheltered housing and this may explain why some of them are not bidding for sheltered housing
- 7.5 The waiting list membership may be a little out of date. A review of the waiting list applicants should be carried out to determine whether applicants wish to remain on the register. Data abstracted from Locata on bidding activity showed that only 2,000 applicants out of a possible 17,000 registered applications had actively placed a bid in the past 3 months (Sept – Nov 2013).
- 7.6 Whatever the reasons for why, some sheltered housing applicants are not aware of the bidding process or do not fully understand that they need to actively bid in the scheme. Promotion of the assisted bidding scheme at an early stage of the registration process could ensure the support available can be accessed to prevent
- 7.7 Ensuring a lack of internet access does not block/hinder participation in the scheme. Further research should be carried out to understand the impact/s that no internet access has on the individual' ability to participate in the choice based lettings scheme and what more we should be doing to mitigate for these effects. Need to go through the process to get to know it, those who find the system easier to use are more likely to have a successful outcome.
- 7.8 There are also aspects that are location specific that require further investigation.

7.9 Also, more information about what life is like in a sheltered housing scheme generally as well as details about what may be happening in the specific scheme being offered would have been useful (repairs, social activities).

8.0 Conclusion

8.1 The consultation activity was carried out in March 2013 and any recommendations made in this report will be superseded by the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) review of Sheltered Housing.

8.2 It is hoped that the evaluation report provides a useful insight into the experiences of applicants both registering and bidding for sheltered properties. If any clarity or research is required on any aspect of this report please contact Satti Sidhu, Performance & Improvement Officer.