

Derby Homes: Our approaches to BME tenants

Social Housing in Derby is primarily allocated through the Choice Based Letting system – Derby Homefinder. When we consider the current waiting list of the Joint Housing Register we note that the percentage of BME individuals is greater than that of the general population of Derby. For 2006/07 around 22% compared to 12.6% at census (2001). In May 2004, 10 states joined the European Union, this has greatly increased the numbers of BME individuals living and working in the city as there are several long established communities of eastern European people within Derby, Polish, Bosnian and Serbian for instance.

A Choice-Based lettings system (Derby Homefinder) enables customers to express interest in properties which most closely meet their needs, in terms of provision for the needs of a truly multicultural community, only the Normanton area caters well. However, in that area we note a lack of social housing, suitable property types and often the facilities within properties are not always suitable. Allocations are dependant always on the actual supply of accommodation. This CBL system has led to a marked increase in applications for housing overall. In Derby there is a limited supply of social housing. As an organisation we are responsible for implementing the Allocations Policy and carrying out our landlord functions on behalf of DCC.

Data shows that BME communities are overrepresented in terms of applications for housing and allocations currently when compared to Census data. However, consultation with BME communities has evidenced that some people struggle to communicate their needs or misunderstand the system, mainly through language differences. Interpretation services – telephone (language line) and via interpreters are routinely used to ensure that people can explain their housing situation and understand advice given. A facility is available on-screen to translate information and applications into Derby's most frequently-used additional languages. Surgeries were held at Peartree Clinic to enable housing advice to be given more easily to people living in that area, where many people from BME communities are living.

Compounded Needs = Multiple Disadvantages

In addition to the simple dynamic of ethnicity and any possible communication difficulties, individuals' needs are often compounded by other factors, such as age. Currently, 29% of the housing register is made up of people aged under 40. This is often due to the inability, particularly for young people, to buy their own homes and to access the private rented sector. There is currently a particular shortage of larger properties; therefore there are particular pressures in regards to housing larger households which may comprise both young and older people.

There may be inherent difficulties with the Homefinder system and a less IT literate generation. Age Concern have conducted specific research in to the needs of older refugees in the UK and highlight disparities in the 'onset' of old age between resident and incoming populations; where individuals have had limited access to public health care and generally experience shorter life expectancies and poorer health outcomes in the later stages of their lives. Therefore consideration must be made when applying age bandings for supported accommodation.

A further dynamic is sexuality; although where identified vulnerable gay/lesbian/trans gendered applicants experiencing harassment or homophobic attacks are given additional housing need points within the system. In respect of gender as single young men make up a high proportion of the waiting list and they will often be treated as having lower housing need as single women are perceived as more vulnerable with women and children fleeing domestic violence, awarded additional priority.

Because disability can directly affect need for housing and there is a shortage of already adapted social housing properties, steps are taken to ensure that those with the most pressing need for adapted accommodation are given additional priority and attempts are made to match them to suitable adapted/adaptable accommodation. Social Services Community Care liaise with the Allocations Manager to ensure that the most appropriate solution is found.

In respect of Derby Homes and the support we offer high levels of in-house specialist tenancy support which are available upon allocation, these include; HIV/AIDS, Domestic Violence, Family Intervention, Homeless Families and the Single Homeless, Young People at Risk, Individuals with alcohol problems (Derwent NDC area only) and ex-offenders. Care Leavers are an area where we acknowledge more work is needed.

Partnership Working

A particular resolution may be for multi-agency case conferences to be held where compounded needs are identified ensuring that Derby Homes who have significant and pertinent experience can utilise the concrete arrangements already in place, coupled with the knowledge and involvement of partner agencies and capitalise upon existing strong links.

Derby benefits from the Derby City Partnership, which GOEM awarded a top rating for partnership. Also by working with our partners at the Derby Social Housing Forum, those major players in the social housing market locally who appreciate the opportunity to work together, proactively to best meet tenant's needs.

Social work interventions often form the backbone of those offered to families and individuals and Derby residents are offered a well evolved, efficient Social Care function provided by Social Services; Adults, Children's and Young Peoples Services other organisations such as voluntary groups and the private sector. Many of these services are provided in partnership with the National Health Service. Older people and people with mental health or learning disabilities or physical and sensory impairments, can live safely and independently in their own homes through the provision of home care services.

Social Services also provide support for those people that are caring for others. In offering support to families and working to promote and safeguard the welfare of children. They often look after children whose own families are unable to care for them, either during a temporary crisis, or until they become adults. Education for both children and their parents may be key in helping them realise their potential for calm, settled and secure tenancy and home-life. Through the broadening and deepening of existing collaborative links Derby Homes offers enhanced opportunities for children within households to engage appropriately and access the mainstream.

Derby Profile

Findings of particular relevance to Derby include difficulties with census categories and reporting and intelligence relating to new and emergent communities. In 2001 there was a perceived problem with the census data, with significant undercounting being suspected in some inner city wards. ONS (Office of National Statistics) have recently undertaken an exercise to remedy these figures. Some wards have higher concentrations of some ethnic groups – for instance Arboretum and Abbey, there are historical, social and financial reasons for this.

Research conducted (in 2002) by DCC to develop their BME Housing strategy indicated that although many BME individuals and families aspired to live in larger homes in Mickleover, for instance, their personal circumstances including lower household incomes meant that these aspirations were unlikely to be met. The research mirrored the findings of national studies

conducted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the CRE and others, in that BME households were the most likely to be in overcrowded accommodation, privately rented, although there are marked differences in the Black and Asian communities, with Asian households being 3 times as likely to be homeowners, although no less likely to be overcrowded.

ONS calculated that the entire population of Derby was undercounted and increased figures by 3.6% in 2003 in the Mid Year Estimates, as certain parts of the city were thought to be at risk in particular, due to the density of population and many registered and unregistered houses in multiple occupation or communal accommodation a special study was undertaken (2004/5). The areas at risk are those in the centre of the city, where we observe the highest concentrations of BME individuals historically, therefore it is very reasonable to assume that the undercounting in relation to the BME statistic, coupled with the A8 accession states will significantly increase the proportion of BME individuals at the next Census.

There was a reasonably large difference between the Census count of children, and child benefit records and analysis of Council Tax data shows that the Census estimated 2,700 fewer occupied households than are recorded on Council Tax. Some of the specific variables associated with undercounting are multi-occupancy, unemployment, country of birth (which is associated with language difficulty) and private rented accommodation. ONS used other datasets to validate and verify the revisions these included Council Tax records, Electoral Roll, NHS Patient Register, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Pensions data, Child Benefit and the Schools Census.

There is a wide range of national and regional developments that make the issue of BME housing needs timely and relevant. Over the last twelve months, there has been an increasing interest in meeting the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers, asylum seekers and refugees and migrant workers from the enlarged EU, which are often referred to as A8/A2 migrants. All public agencies involved in the funding of affordable housing and area based regeneration are obliged to ensure that equality impact assessments on policy are extended to include assessment of the impact upon cohesion and integration. For developers of social housing projects funded by the Housing Corporation in part or full a BME method statement must be submitted, in line with all areas where BME populations are $\leq 10\%$.

Summary

Whilst although once allocated a Derby Homes tenancy and in some other instances across tenures, suitable support can be offered at a number differing levels. Compounded needs within households can make it difficult to access the mainstream. Partnership working in hand with in-depth profiling and a more intimate understanding of the customer base can only enhance the positive experiences and outcomes for individuals and households. Particularly in respect of emerging populations and for gypsies and travellers.

Reference Documents:

- Black & Minority Ethnic Communities and Housing in the East Midlands: A Consultation Report November 2007 was published by the Centre for Comparative Housing Research, De Montfort University and Housing Vision.
- Derby Homes – Equality Impact Assessment - Allocations - November 2007
- Derby City Council – Equality Impact Assessment - Allocations - June 2007
- Census 2001

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7 January 2008