

## **Homefinder Policy Update 2023**

### **Homefinder Policy**

Homefinder is a financial assistance scheme to prevent and relieve homelessness, the details of the help offered are laid out in the Homefinder Policy. The scheme has been running for over ten years and assisted many households, including ninety in the last twelve months, Homefinders provides interest free loans and grants to applicants in housing difficulties. Homefinders can help reduce arrears to stop the loss of a home, as well as to pay the deposit and rent in advance with a private landlord, when that hasn't been possible.

The policy prevents homelessness and therefore reduces the need to use expensive temporary accommodation such as bed and breakfast. It also makes a huge difference to applicants, enabling them to keep their existing home or help to move to another.

Housing Services administer Homefinder with the help of the Great Western Credit Union, loans are interest free, and applicants only have to pay back what they borrow. Great Western Credit Union bring financial professionalism to the scheme and manage the new loans and repayments. The funding is recycled so that as funds are repaid, we are able to lend to other households in housing need. In exceptional circumstances, where a loan is not viable, we may offer a grant. Grants are often given to help people who are sleeping on the streets, to help pay their transport costs, to return home, or for other applicants to help with a removal cost.

Beneficiaries of the scheme need to have a local connection, usually through residence to Bath and North East Somerset Council, they must have a Housing Need and be able to afford to make loan repayments. Help is limited to those with lower incomes and savings.

### **Update 2023**

The policy has been updated to reflect changes in incomes and benefits as well as changes in demand to Housing Services.

The three main changes are,

- To increase levels of financial support, recognising the increase in advance rents and deposits required to access private rented housing. Increasing the earnings levels and amount of savings for those eligible.
- Since the last policy was written, the Council needs to provide new assistance to Ukrainian families now resident in the district. There is not sufficient Social Housing to meet this demand so this assistance to access Private Rented Housing is needed. Special funding for this has come from Central Government and the expenditure for this can now be managed through this scheme.
- The scheme is now offering limited financial assistance for Social Housing residents who are downsizing to smaller properties, freeing up larger properties for homeless families.

## **Homelessness**

The Council is currently experiencing a significant increase in homeless households who require temporary accommodation, reflecting the national increase. This increase has led to financial pressure to fund accommodation for these households.

The Homefinder policy is able to address some of the increased pressure on our Homelessness Services, by preventing and relieving homelessness, maintaining existing or facilitating new tenancies. Assistance to help tenants downsize also helps increase the supply of larger family homes for Homeless families.

### **Options.**

1. Not updating this policy will reduce the number of households for whom we can prevent or relieve their homelessness due to market pressures on housing costs.
2. Updating the policy enables us to help more applicants in housing need, to reduce homelessness and the pressure this causes on families. It will also help to reduce the expensive cost of Temporary Accommodation to this authority.

### **Proposal.**

To accept the new updated Homefinder Policy

**Mike Chedzoy Housing Options and Homelessness Manager**

**August 2023**