

Feedback on Your Choice you Home

January 2024

Introduction

North Norfolk District Council does not own its own housing stock. We work with registered providers to maintain a housing register where people can access social housing in our area. The scheme enables the Council and its partners to work together to ensure we prioritise those in most need of affordable housing.

The council has a statutory duty to have a housing allocation policy under The Housing Act 1996 (as amended) and has taken into account the code of guidance for local authorities published 2002, the Localism Act 2012, the North Norfolk District Council Homelessness Strategy and the Equality Act 2010.

We operate a Choice Based Letting Scheme, and the Housing Allocation Policy sets out a framework that describes how to register, the assessment process and property allocation process. The Council is currently reviewing how homes are allocated to ensure people have homes that meet their needs, prioritising those who need it most and making the application process easier. As part of our review of the Allocation Scheme, we asked people who have used the service, whether they are in housing or still on the waiting list, their thoughts on how the system works and what can be done to improve it.

Feedback

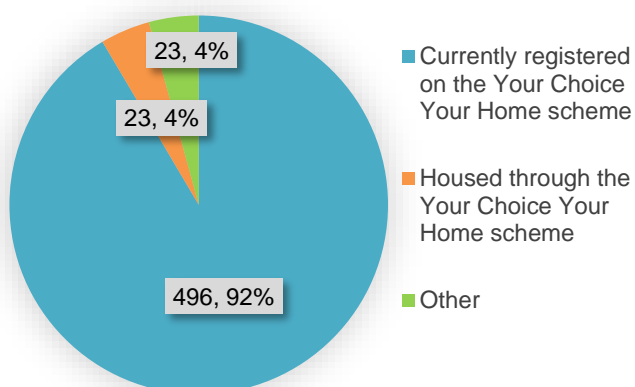
For a six-week period we asked eight questions about peoples experience of using Your Choice Your Home. The survey was publicised on the Council's website, promoted through the Autumn addition of our Outlook magazine, key partners were informed, and notifications were sent out by email to applicants registered on the scheme.

A total of **545** surveys were completed. This report contains an analysis of survey responses. A separate appendix report is available on request which details all comments made by respondents to the questions within the survey.

For each open question the text comments have been studied individually and coded depending on what issues/themes were raised. The coded comments are then reported on, based on the number of times those individual issues have been raised.

Q1. Which of the following best describes you?

The survey was anonymous so did not collect any personal or identifiable data but asked demographic questions to identify the relationship between the respondent and Your Choice Your Home, e.g., current applicant, someone who has been housed through the scheme, or something else.

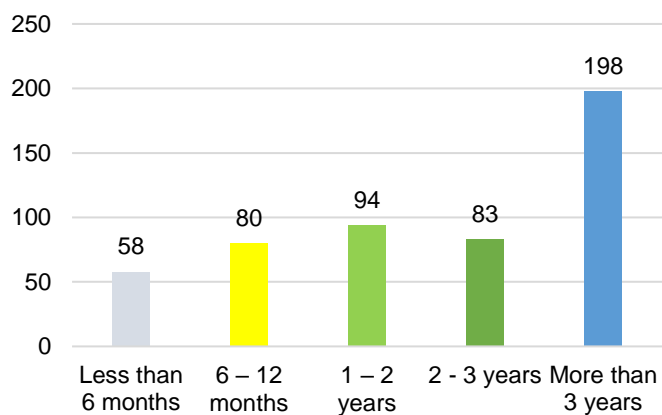


Answered: 542
Skipped: 3

As shown the vast majority (**92%**) identified themselves applicants currently registered on Your Choice Your Home.

Other respondents **4%** included friends or family members who are supporting applicants, carers helping applicants with mental health, applicants who are not sure if they are still on the Housing list, social housing tenants and people outside of the area wanting to join

Q2. How long have you been on the Your Choice Your Home scheme?

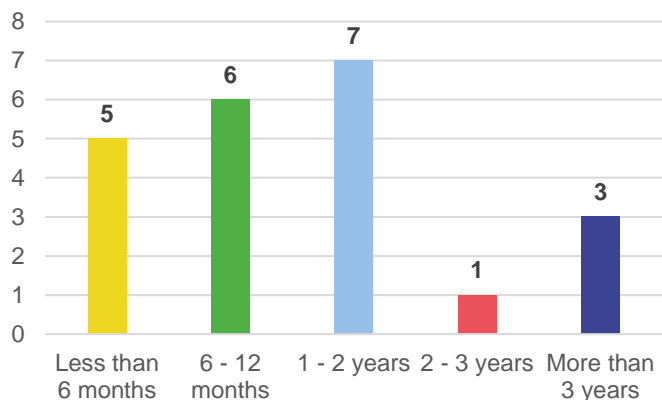


Answered: 513
 Skipped: 9
 Not Applicable (been housed): 23

This graph identifies how long someone has been an applicant on the scheme.

As shown, over **38%** of respondents have been on the scheme for more than 3 years and **34%** have been registered on the scheme for over 1 Year.

Q3. If you have been housed recently through the Your Choice Your Home scheme, how long were you on the scheme before being housed?

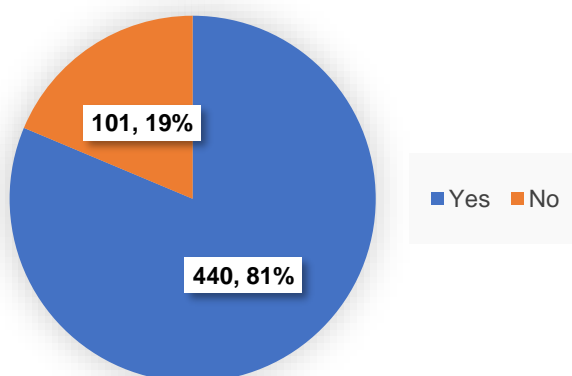


Answered: 23
 Not Applicable: (513)

The question was only relevant to the 23 people who responded saying have been housed recently through your Choice your home.

The Housing Register is not a waiting list, so the length of time someone will have to wait before being allocating a home will be dependent on individual circumstances and needs.

Q4. Are you actively bidding on properties?



Answered: 541
 Skipped: 4

84% of people responding confirmed that they are actively bidding on properties.

The 16% of applicants who said they were not actively bidding were asked to tell us why not.

Responses were varied but the most common reason was the lack of suitable (size and Location) properties available.

Other reasons included:

- Auto Bidding in Place
- Have lost hope.
- Medical issue
- I don't know how to use the system.
- Private Rented tenancy but want social housing.

Q5 to Q8 – Free text comments

The free text comments in Questions 5 to 8 open comments section of the consultation enabled respondents to provide further reflections on their views and experiences of the allocations process.

Free text comments have been grouped by identifying reoccurring themes in responses to help understand the sentiment behind respondents, many of these responses contained detailed explanations of people's individual circumstances and we understand that there will be conflicting opinions.

The most frequently occurring themes (those with 10 or more comments) identified from the free text responses are shown below.

Q5. What do you like about the Your Choice Your Home scheme?

323 people were able to identify something that they liked about the scheme.

The most frequently occurring themes (those with 10 or more comments) identified from the free text responses are shown in the table below.

Theme	Responses	Summary
Accessibility	141	The scheme is, fair, transparent and easy and convenient to use. Auto Bid is available for applicants who need support.
Choice	89	Your get a chance to choose which accommodation/area you want to bid on.
System Functionality	26	The ability to see properties and bid online and receive email notifications when properties are available.
Chance	19	It provides hope of getting a home
Affordability	16	Rent is cheaper than private rented properties
Property Adverts	12	The information provided gives more detail about property, including rent and maps.

Q6. What do you dislike about the Your Choice Your Home scheme?

371 people were able to identify something they disliked about Your Choice Your Home. The concerns were wide and varied and generally appeared dependent on people's circumstances. Whilst outside of the scope of Your Choice Your Home, the acute shortage of housing was identified as the top frustration with **23%** of people highlighting the lack of suitable/available properties impacting their view of Your Choice Your Home negatively.

Overall, the negative comments related less to the scheme and more to how it was applied in practice, or based on a negative personal experience that someone has had. Issues raised included, frustrations about the application process, or criteria for assessing housing need. Reference was also made to priority being given to applicants in temporary accommodation jumping the queue which prevents band 1 applicants who have been waiting a long-time accessing housing.

Some people are wanting a more hands-on' approach from staff with regards to support and advice available to them and others feel that the scheme did not go far enough to recognise medical/disability needs of the households or the social and psychological effects of Overcrowding.

A smaller number of people also disliked the process for transferring tenants and felt the scheme offered very little opportunity for tenants wishing to move to a more suitable home or ever being able to obtain a new build property.

Theme	Responses	Summary
Lack of Homes	84	Lack of properties available and applicants unable to get their needs met in terms of appropriate/suitable accommodation.
Waiting time	55	The length of time applicants are waiting for social housing and that waiting time does not appear to count.
Banding / Priority	47	Criteria for assessing housing need is not clear and does not recognise personal circumstances and need.
Property Adverts	30	Quality and lack of pictures/information on property adverts to assist applicants in bidding on suitable properties. Properties advertised at any time, means that you are constantly having to look rather than being on a weekly cycle that would provide routine for people to look and bid for suitable properties.
Communication/Feedback	28	Lack of communication/feedback regarding the scheme including eligibility, chances of being housed and outcomes after bidding has closed.
Property Eligibility	24	Property alerts that have a minimum age requirement, tenant only, or adapted are confusing and generate wasted bids.
Bidding Process	24	Lack of clarity regarding shortlisting and the perception that homes are being let direct or to people who have not been waiting as long or have lower needs.
Local People/Connection	15	Homes are being allocated to people without a connection to North Norfolk. A smaller number of feedback highlighted a different viewpoint with people frustrated at how hard it is to get back into North Norfolk without a connection or their connection has been lost.

Q7. How do you think the Your Choice Your Home scheme can be improved?

325 comments were received relating to how the scheme can be improved. These closely mirrored the themes identified in question 6 (what do you dislike about the Your Choice Your Home scheme?) and again the lack of availability of home being the biggest concern.

Some of the comments relating to our overall approach included the need to focus on an applicant's personal circumstances, that one size does not fit all, and the need to take mental health issues, and physical health into account when determining priority for allocating homes.

A significant number of comments related to the size of properties and how there could be better use of the housing stock to meet the requirements of people in need. This included looking at people who want to transfer to smaller properties, and letting people who need adaptations be considered for properties that could be adapted rather than having to wait for an adapted property to become available.

Some suggestions were around making the Policy easier to understand and interpret, and having better information up front so people know what their banding means and chances of being allocated a home.

Other comments related to making the reporting of change of circumstances easier and providing a better assessment when needs change around what this might mean to your chances of being housed.

Theme	Responses	Summary
More Homes	58	There is an urgent need to build more affordable homes.
Communication/Feedback	45	<p>We need to recognise the importance of regular communication throughout the allocations process and improve both general information and feedback on an individual basis.</p> <p>We should provide people with the opportunity to discuss their application personally and have a proper assessment so that we truly understand peoples needs.</p>
Banding/Priority	36	<p>Suggestions were mixed and related to who should be given priority and varied from housing emergency situations to waiting time and that people who are waiting the longest on the list.</p> <p>Other suggestion related to couples without children or working families who are just keeping their heads above water.</p> <p>Looking closer at overcrowding, medical conditions, the age of applicants and ensuring that property types are more suitably matched were all other themes where people thought the scheme could be improved.</p>
Property Adverts	28	<p>Include more information and pictures (including inside and garden) and make it clearer who can bid for the property.</p> <p>Other comments relating to property adverts were around improving notification alerts when properties go live.</p>
Individual Needs	23	Acknowledge personal circumstances. Whilst policies need to have rules people felt the system needed to be flexible enough to cater for individual circumstances.
Bidding Process	22	<p>Suggestions were around shortlisting and not letting several people know at the same time as gives false hope and ensuring that bidders meet the criteria of the property being advertised, e.g., the system not allowing you to bid that you are not eligible for or that you are unlikely to be able to afford.</p> <p>Other feedback suggested that more should be done to assess need and only target people whose need meets that property, scrap direct lettings and let everyone have the opportunity to bid, and changing to only advertising properties once a week.</p>
Local People/Connection	21	<p>There should be more opportunities for local people to get homes before people from outside the local area.</p> <p>Again, suggestions under this theme were mixed, with a smaller proportion of people saying that priority should go by people's needs whether they live in North Norfolk or not.</p>

Waiting time	18	Recognition that waiting time is taken into consideration with applicants feeling like they are being put to the back of the list as new applicants are getting housed first. Help manage expectations about how long it could take.
Fairness & Transparency	12	Being more transparent about who is getting the homes and being clearer on eligibility and chances.
Choice	12	Understanding where people want to live is important and we should not push areas they don't know or takes them away from their support networks. Policy of refusing a house, need to encourage people not bid on properties they are not wanting but also be more flexible in accepting a refusal from applicant because it does not meet their needs. Other Suggestions included extending outside of North Norfolk and some also mentioned the lack of choice in Landlords.
Property eligibility	11	Tighten up allocations for homes that would be suitable for disabled people regardless of whether they have yet been adapted. Give more opportunity to transfer tenants to get a new build home. Look at under occupation as over time families have moved out and offer a more friendly system for notifications – e.g., don't send people details of properties they will not be eligible to bid on.

Q8. Do you have any comments to make on the on the scheme as a whole?

The survey's final question was also an open question, asking for any additional comments that people may wish to contribute. There were 241 responses to this question covering a wide range of themes.

Most of the common themes have already been highlighted in previous questions and again, responses reflected less to the scheme and more to how it is applied in practice, or a personal experience, with some people being very positive about the scheme and their experience and others expressing dissatisfaction at the lack of homes, lack of communication, homes going to people outside of the area, the waiting time and the lack of clarity around medical conditions (including supporting GP letters, medical reports not being recognised) and consideration for certain households, e.g working families, single households and over 60s.

Other themes identified related to Housing Staff (both positive and negative), the Council as a whole, domestic abuse victim-survivor priority, registered provider policies and procedures, e.g. selling stock, empty homes etc Nationally Policy, e.g., bedroom eligibility, and the time it take to get a housing needs assessment.

The Council would like to thank everyone that took the time to feedback their views. This feedback will be instrumental in guiding our next steps We will use the survey results to help us make changes and to shape the way we provide our service.