



## **Exeter SmartMove May 2007 – April 2008**

There continues to be high demand for Exeter SmartMove's guarantee bond and the other services it provides. This year, 478 homeless or vulnerably housed individuals and households were referred to SmartMove by other agencies or self-referred to the service. Those approaching SmartMove found out about us from a wide variety of sources, including East Devon District Council and Exeter City Council; Young Devon Youth Enquiry Service; the Street Homeless Outreach Team; Exeter Community Advice Service; CAB; Mortimer House; Exeter Life; Amber Foundation and Exeter Foyer.

128 households – individuals, couples and families with children - accessed accommodation through Exeter SmartMove in the 12 months from May 2007 to April 2008.

Exeter SmartMove provided a guarantee bond in respect of 44 households to enable them to move into privately rented accommodation. We enabled a further 84 households to access accommodation without the need of a guarantee bond, which is not always necessary even in the private rented sector. This may be because clients have funding from other sources, for example, because they are ex-service personnel able to access funds from the Royal British Legion, or because we are able to make an application to other funding sources, such as the Winter Pressures or because other accommodation options were more appropriate.

In the last 12 year we have accessed £12,200 in non-repayable grants for our clients, and a further £2,000 in low cost, affordable loans.

SmartMove undertakes a thorough housing needs assessment of every client meeting its referral criteria and who engages with the service. The housing needs assessment can indicate that privately rented accommodation may not necessarily be the best course of action for an applicant. It is estimated that in the region of 75% of clients referred to SmartMove will have some degree of mental ill health, for example. An assessment of their situation may well indicate a client's housing needs would be better met in supported accommodation, for example. SmartMove does not knowingly enable anyone to access a private rental tenancy if they are unlikely to sustain it. Last year SmartMove enabled many of its clients to access appropriate supported accommodation such as Mortimer House, the YMCA and the Amber Foundation.

Some clients assessed will have needs that indicate a local authority may have a duty to accommodate under homelessness legislation. While SmartMove's role is not an adversarial one, it advocated successfully on behalf of clients and challenged local councils where necessary to enable its clients to be housed in Local Authority accommodation.

Not all clients who are referred to SmartMove engage with the service. This year 242 clients referred to us by other agencies either did not engage with us, did not meet our referral criteria, could not be contacted or did not engage beyond initial contact.

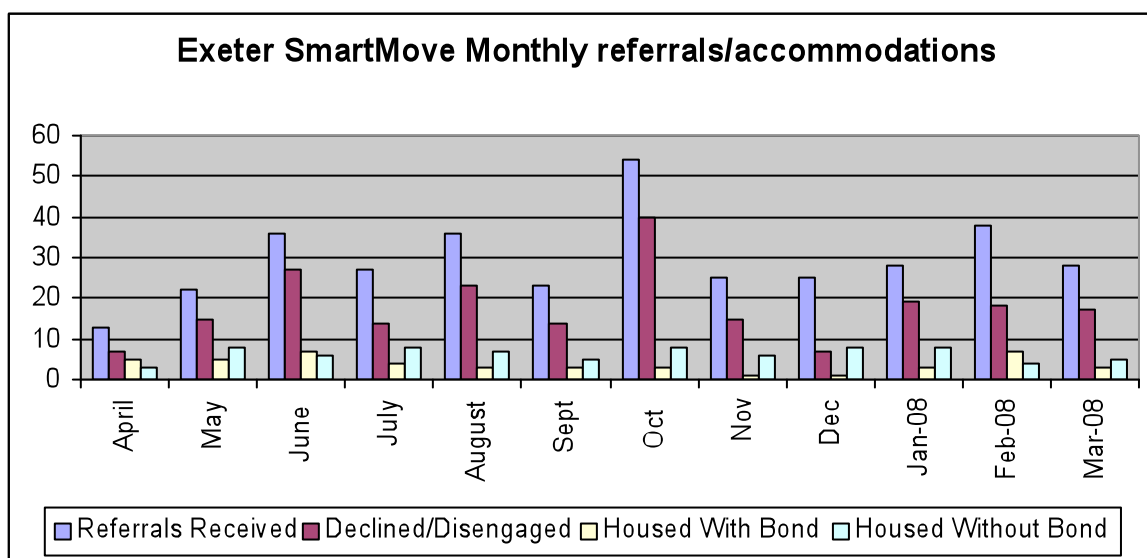


Clients not meeting the referral criteria may still be able to make use of our Tenancy Skills Workshop, which often makes a real difference to the chances of an individual successfully accessing the private rented sector. This workshop is offered to every client who has undergone the SmartMove housing needs assessment and who is accepted onto the scheme. The Tenancy Skills Workshop is a one-to-one workshop designed to give our clients the skills, knowledge and confidences necessary to source accommodation, and once sourced, to secure it and maintain it in the long term.

This Workshop can also be accessed by clients of other agencies who already have a deposit in place but who are lacking the skills, motivation or confidence necessary to approach landlords and present themselves as viable, attractive tenants. Clients from a range of other agencies took part in the Workshops, for example, rough sleepers working with the Street Homeless Outreach Team; residents in the homeless hostel Gabriel House, and those looking to move on from supported accommodation providers such as YMCA, Mortimer House and Exeter Foyer.

Exeter SmartMove also delivered Tenancy Workshops to staff of other organisations, such as Mortimer House and Social Services to enable them to share the skills with their own clients. It is part of our on-going commitment to improve access to the PRS for, and increase landlord confidence in letting to, the more vulnerable members of the wider community in general and those in receipt of Housing Benefit in particular.

Exeter SmartMove works hard to ensure that its clients face a more secure future. Every client housed through the bond scheme is given the opportunity to join the SmartMove savings scheme and is encouraged to pay an affordable amount into it each month. Last year 30 clients successfully saved towards their future with the scheme. After 12 months these savings are returned to the tenant who then becomes responsible for their own deposit. Saving for their own deposit means that SmartMove tenants are working towards breaking the cycle of repeat homelessness.



Exeter SmartMove clients were asked their opinion of the service they received from us. Some of their anonymous replies are noted below:

***“Exeter SmartMove was sympathetic, helpful and totally professional in helping me through a rough patch.”***



*“They were extremely helpful and I would recommend them to anyone having trouble finding a place to live. Also they’re trying to get funds to help me with the move.”*

*“I’m happy with all the help I got.”*

*“Thank you so much.”*



*“The lady who facilitated my move was nothing short of brilliant. If this is any guide to the charity as a whole, then it gets a thumbs up from me.”*

*“Thanks to the advice from HAG I have found a place to live!”*

*“I am delighted with my new home and have great appreciation for all the help I received.”*

