

## Consultation on Essential Workers Housing Options

Closing Date: 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2024

### Douglas City Council Response

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**Q1** – are you responding as:

- A member of the public
- A representative from an organisation which does hire essential workers as defined on this consultation
- An essential worker as defined on this consultation
- A representative from an organisation which does not employ essential workers
- **Other (please specify)**

#### Local Authority

**Q2** – Which Sectors do you believe should be included in the definition of 'essential workers' for the purposes of housing provision? (Tick all that apply)

- **Medical and Healthcare**
- **Education and Childcare**
- **Emergency Services**
- Prison and Probation Services
- Logistics
- Utilities
- Construction
- Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing
- Finance
- Hospitality
- Digital
- Professional Services
- Manufacturing
- Retail and Wholesale
- Other (please specify)
- None of the above

**Q3** – Should any other factors be used to determine whether to classify a person as an 'essential worker' for housing purposes?

The Council feel strongly that broad categories such as this open up to a community that is too large and if not controlled could saturate the available options for supported housing provision.

This should be considered on a case by case basis depending on needs and not a 'one size fits all' approach. We understand the need to grow the Island's population but this needs to be done sustainably. The Council also understand the need to have the right 'essential workers' available on Island.

There are limited properties on the Island currently and the Council feel that it is more important that there is a strong focus on availability of Housing for all, with the correct supportive schemes, therefore reducing the current demand issue and stabilising pricing.

There are people on Island in great need of affordable housing who are currently living in sub-standard accommodation, often over occupying. A more holistic approach should be considered to allow the movement of people from one provision of housing to the next. Permitting entire classifications of people based upon their 'employment sector' rather than their need will almost certainly 'swamp' available schemes for existing residents.

There is a serious risk of blocking a housing provision path for those currently in Local Authority housing, therefore forcing them to stay in Local Authority housing and restricting the opportunity to re-allocate housing to those most in need.

The Islands young people also need to be supported with their housing need. Finally, not everyone wants to buy, a lot of people are happy renting. The issue is the availability of affordable, quality homes for rent in the private sector. Pricing is too high and this is driven by high demand for a small number of properties, allowing sub-standard properties to be rented at prices that are far too high, and therefore pushing the prices of fairly standard quality housing to unaffordable levels for most people. There is need to increase the housing supply by opening up more housing development sites.

**Q4** – The Department of Infrastructure is reviewing options for affordable housing initiatives beyond the current Shared Equity Purchase Assistance Schemes. If new affordable housing initiatives are introduced in the future, should essential workers be provided with easier or specialist access to these initiatives?

- Yes, they should have easier access, such as a reduced residency requirement or higher income thresholds
- **No, they should have the same level of access as other Island residents**
- Don't know

**Q5** - Should the Shared Equity Purchase Assistance (First Home Choice) Scheme be made more accessible for essential workers?

- Yes, this approach is fair and proportionate
- Yes, but essential workers should also have easier access to the Shared Equity Purchase Assistance (First Home Fixed) Scheme
- No, essential workers should have the same level of access as other Island residents but current restrictions should be eased for all
- **No, essential workers should have the same level of access as other Island residents and the current restrictions should remain the same**
- Don't know

**Q6** - Should the maximum income threshold for essential workers match those that apply to regular first time buyers applying for assistance under the First Home Choice Scheme?

- **Yes**
- No
- Don't know

**Q7** - If you don't think the maximum income threshold for essential workers should match those that apply to regular first time buyers, what do you think the threshold should be?

- £40,000
- £45,000
- £50,000
- No maximum income threshold
- **Other (please specify)**

Other, as per question 6.

The key factor is that we don't want local residents and those that have been contributing to the Island for a number of years disadvantaged. By this we mean that they should not be in a situation that they cannot obtain affordable housing, and those coming over from the UK should not be able to queue jump or to be prioritised over local residents.

We suggest the Government provides a "landing pad" for those that are coming into the Island to work, in the form of a financial support scheme. For example an interest free loan for between 3 to 5 years (or a reasonable period of time) subsidised rent for 6 months. Consideration should also be made if the person leaves the Island and whether they would be required to repay some or all of the financial assistance received.

If there is a focus on more Home building then this would create more housing options for all.

The Government should continue to look for ways to incentivise the building of new Homes. There should also be a focus on increasing the amount of Affordable homes for local authorities to manage, reducing the market of sub-standard accommodation and therefore

putting pressure on this existing sub-standard market of housing to be improved, which would lead to more quality housing available for rent/purchase.

This would assist in developing housing in existing communities and provide options for the development of brown field sites.

**Q8** - Should essential workers need to be resident on the Island for 5 years before being able to access the First Home Choice Scheme?

- **Yes**
- No
- Don't know

**Q9** - If you don't think the minimum 5 year residency should apply to essential workers, what residency requirement do you believe should apply to essential workers seeking to receive financial assistance towards a home purchase?

- None
- 6 months
- 1 year
- 2 years
- 3 years
- 4 years
- **Other (please specify)**

**Q10** - How much equity loan should be provided to essential workers towards their home purchase?

- up to 20%
- up to 25%
- up to 30%
- up to 40%
- **Other (please specify)**

Further to the response to Q7, it is more important that essential workers are given a level of financial support. There are other options that would not impact the available housing for those in most need, yet still allow the person arriving to the Island to be supported. An example would be an interest free loan or other financial assistance.

The Council would like to understand the assessment of people who have moved to the Island and understand, from research, how long it normally is before a person, who is essentially arriving in a new country, decides to purchase a property.

The general understanding is that most people would prefer time to settle and understand where to locate themselves, and decide whether the move is one that they would prefer to make permanent.

The reasons for people leaving needs to be better understood.

The opportunity to provide levels of financial support through interest free loans (to assist with deposits / new furniture etc) should be considered.

There is a need for available properties for people coming to the Island, these can still be made available in the form of 'landing pads' at more affordable pricing, with restricted tenure.

The Council are aware of large employers on Island looking for landing pad style housing for new employees. They are not asking for purchase schemes for these employees. These large companies are willing to invest but they do not have the opportunity to do so. This should be supported.

Brownfield site development in the Islands Capital would be an excellent option for 'landing pads'. The IOM Government should prompt the opening up of more appropriate land for housing developments. This would increase the supply of housing.

This would also then assist with the balance of throughput from Social Housing into other affordable housing schemes, again allowing those most in need in our society to be allocated Local authority housing.

The IOM Government should improve the planning system to make sure more houses can be built.