



End of Year Report

Year One
May 2006 to April 2007

It's a time for celebration and reflection at Exeter SmartMove as our first year draws to a successful conclusion. It would have been difficult to accomplish all that we have without the close working we have forged with so many individuals, projects and organisations within Exeter, across Devon and nationwide. We at Exeter SmartMove feel that we have achieved positive, measurable outcomes over these last 12 months and we know we have made a real difference in the lives of our clients because they tell us so. We know that we can count on your continued support in the coming year and look forward to providing even more real housing solutions for some of the most vulnerable members of our community.

Here's to the next 12 months!

*Ruth, Carrie and Gill
The Exeter SmartMove Team*

What our clients say about us:

"SmartMove are a great charity. Without them I wouldn't have been able to look after my family properly"

"SmartMove has helped me re-start life"

"Without the help of SmartMove I feel I would not have been able to stand on my own two feet"

"SmartMove gave me help in all aspects of moving and finding accommodation. I cannot say enough on their behalf"

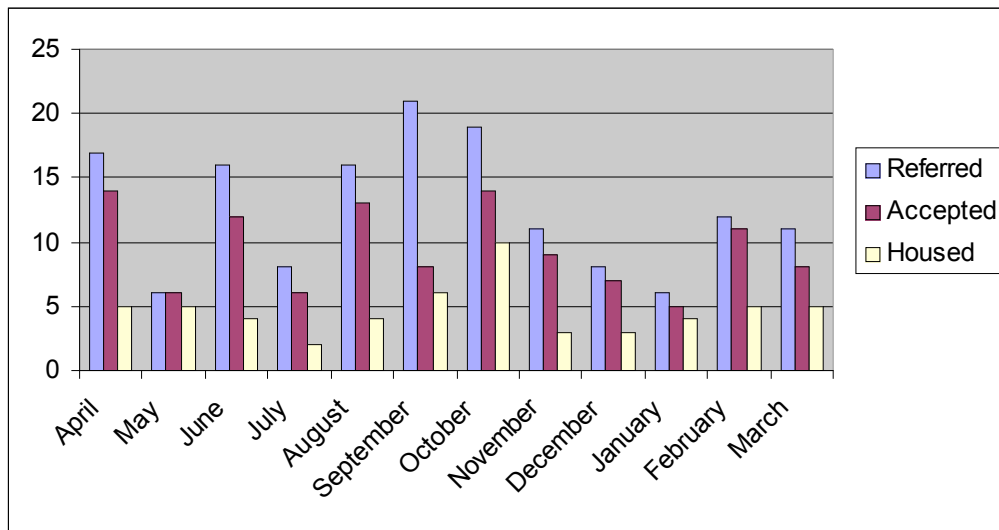
"I would recommend their services to anyone looking for accommodation"

Who we helped

265 people engaged with Exeter SmartMove this year. On initial engagement every client's housing needs were assessed. Each client was given housing advice appropriate to their individual needs. For example, clients considered to have a priority need under Homelessness legislation were referred to their local housing



authority; clients confirming they already had a deposit in place were offered benefits advice and given strategies for sourcing appropriate, affordable accommodation. Clients for whom SmartMove appeared to be a suitable option were invited for interview and assessment.



How we helped them

All clients attending for a SmartMove assessment underwent a thorough housing needs investigation. They were given housing advice and information on tenancy law, budgeting and benefit advice. They were also given practical advice, information and assistance on sourcing secure, affordable, appropriate accommodation in the private rented sector. This is a difficult task given the discrepancy in Exeter between rent levels and the levels at which Housing Benefit is paid. Every client was supported in approaching landlords. All clients were given this help and advice either by attending a special Tenancy Awareness Workshop, or by working with their designated project worker in a one-to-one setting, depending upon their needs.

35 people were accommodated in privately rented accommodation for which SmartMove has provided a rent deposit guarantee bond. 26 people were accommodated in privately rented accommodation for which SmartMove did not need to provide a bond, either because the landlord agreed to waive the deposit or because clients have secured deposits from other sources. All clients, whether requiring bonds or not, were helped to find accommodation by it either being identified to them by SmartMove workers, or because they had increased their skills and confidences in sourcing accommodation by attending tenancy-sourcing workshops and one-to-one training sessions run by their allocated SmartMove worker. 20 people were accommodated by supported accommodation providers, which were identified by SmartMove workers as being more appropriate to those clients' needs. The remaining 48 people who attended the SmartMove interview and assessment had other more viable or appropriate, housing options identified to them – for example, they were identified as having a potential priority need and referred to a local housing authority, who may have a duty towards them under Homelessness legislation; or were advised of their rights under Landlord and Tenant law in connection with remaining in their accommodation; or were signposted to other organisations who may have more appropriate services, such as rough sleepers being referred to the Street Homeless Outreach Team for allocation of a place at the hostel for homeless men.



35 clients received practical help setting up their tenancies. Of these, we have provided 5 clients with their first month's rent – Rent in Advance. 35 clients were helped to make a claim for Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit, and for a Social Fund loan where appropriate. Each of these 35 clients were helped to set up a savings scheme so that at the end of their tenancy they will have saved an amount, in cash, equivalent to the bond that SmartMove has guaranteed. This means that ultimately they will have sole responsibility for their tenancy and will be able to move on to other accommodation if they wish because they will have saved a significant sum of money. We have enabled 35 clients to achieve some measure of financial independence.

Who else we worked with

There has been an increase in landlord numbers from 14 to 31. We have also been successful in generating close working with 4 residential letting agents in the area. It is a testament to the thorough assessment procedure by which SmartMove vets its potential clients that private letting agents are willing to work with our clients and accept SmartMove's bond guarantee, particularly since letting agents work in a commercial environment motivated by profit. By working with letting agents SmartMove has made significant headway into opening up a reservoir of accommodation usually denied our client group. We have therefore increased equal opportunities for our client group.

How we worked with the community to increase the availability of decent, affordable accommodation

We fostered close working with key members of Exeter City Council staff: Principal Environmental Health Officer, Keith Williams; Housing Benefit Customer Services Manager, Elaine Whiting; Josie Wainright, head of ExtraLets; Larry Blackshaw, Senior Housing Benefits Assessor and Amanda Downie, Housing Needs Manager.

We delivered landlord and tenant and housing awareness training to the clients of six outside agencies including former rough sleepers; students of the Workers Education Association; workers from the former Eastern Bloc/Expanded EU countries, and to care leavers and young people attending the Meaningful Occupation Project.

We have developed close working relationship with South Devon Residential Landlords Association, addressing their meetings on two occasions, successfully exhibiting with them at the 2007 Devon County Show.

We at Exeter SmartMove are grateful to all of you who have helped us to help some of the most vulnerable members of our community help themselves





SmartMove prepares to publicise its work at the 2007 Devon County Show

We have pioneered a Practitioners' Forum with other projects within Exeter seeking to place clients in privately rented accommodation, and have built close working with rent deposit schemes in other areas in order to share best practise.

We worked with national bodies who are leaders in their fields to highlight and work towards solving the issues of homelessness and affordability in the housing market. As a result we manned Shelter's *Wall of Shame* campaign when it visited Exeter; reported rent levels to Niall Holland, director of CHAS, and were included in the resulting report presented to the Standing Committee in the House of Commons in order to influence the new Welfare Reform Bill. We attended Crisis's national SmartMove Conference and undertook training with the Royal British Legion.

Jacqui Gale, Director of Exeter Homeless Action Group writes:

“SmartMove has been very successful in opening up the private rented accommodation to low income clients and played a major role in preventing homelessness in the City.”
May 2007

And finally, a word from those who have made use of our services:

“I would like to thank Exeter SmartMove very much for their help. I was helped in a professional and friendly manner”

