



# Opening doors



With the high cost of homes putting job candidates off living and working in Sussex, the local DAATs have been helping prospective employees to find affordable housing. **Jackie Campbell** provides the details

**FINDING AND KEEPING ENOUGH HIGH CALIBRE STAFF** is always a challenge, and can be especially so for certain job roles in the substance misuse field. In Sussex we've made significant progress in providing good quality training pathways and helping managers to use competencies to support recruitment and development processes. However, one of the issues that's been holding back our workforce planning in Sussex (which consists of East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton and Hove), is the high cost of housing. At least a quarter of employers have told us that it is a significant barrier to recruitment.

Traditionally, low cost housing initiatives in the South East have been aimed at a defined list of public sector 'key workers'. Last year the Sussex DAATs decided to commission a piece of work that looked at ways of maximising the benefits of any housing initiatives for workers in the drug and alcohol field. One of the issues for drug workers has been that many of them are employed by voluntary organisations which are not eligible for key worker status – despite the fact that their post is likely to be funded by the public sector. In fact, over recent years, the consensus from an array of reports and studies has been that the traditional definition of key workers is overly restrictive and that housing initiatives should be targeting the needs of individual workers. A growing trend seems to be to focus on housing need in general, rather than on narrow definitions of key workers, and this is reflected in the latest government-funded affordable housing products.

Despite this move, general knowledge of affordable housing and eligibility for it is low. In fact there is now a wide range of housing options for those who cannot afford to buy a suitable home on the open market, including shared equity schemes and shared ownership schemes. Successful applicants can purchase a property using a mortgage plus an 'equity loan', or part buy and part rent a property.

MyChoiceHomeBuy, New Build HomeBuy, HomeBuy Direct and Open Market Homebuy are all products offered through housing associations where the eligibility criteria is based on applicants' ability to afford to buy a property that suits their household needs without assistance.

The main thrust of the recommendations coming out of our project has been to inform potential candidates and existing workers of the range of housing initiatives that are out there. The Sussex DAATs have already developed a website aimed at sharing information between service providers and job seekers. [Sussexdaatjobs.org](http://Sussexdaatjobs.org) now holds a wealth of information on living and working in Sussex, with explanations on the range of affordable housing schemes such as the HomeBuy range of products, as well as useful information and links for anyone moving into the area. The website is still growing and there are plans to add real case studies to illustrate how the various schemes have helped people to enter the housing market.

As well as the website, our DAATs have produced leaflets which can be handed out at recruitment events and open days. We have developed a working relationship with Moat Housing, who are the government's appointed HomeBuy agent in Sussex and co-ordinate all the affordable home ownership schemes in the region. Many of the affordable schemes are also available in other parts of the South East, London and across England. Elizabeth Flegg, the workforce development manager for Sussex DAATs, commented: 'Moat Housing have been key to helping us get the information out there and have been able to attend one of our stakeholder days to help get the message across that there is help for people who are not necessarily defined as key workers.'

Of course in recent months much has changed in the housing market, and despite prices coming down, mortgages are just as hard, if not harder, to access. The advantage of using our website is that it is easy to post the latest news and changes to the various schemes on offer. Although Sussex is still seen as an expensive option in terms of housing, giving information on all the help available can encourage candidates to take the next step and submit their application.

*Details of the appointed HomeBuy agents for other regions can be found on the [communities.gov.uk](http://communities.gov.uk) website.*

*Jackie Campbell is HR consultant for Sussex Daats*