



BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE CABINET

WEDNESDAY 8TH JANUARY 2014 AT 6.00 P.M.

THE COUNCIL HOUSE, BURCOT LANE, BROMSGROVE

MEMBERS: Councillors R. Hollingworth (Leader), M. A. Sherrey (Deputy Leader), D. W. P. Booth, M. A. Bullivant, C. B. Taylor and M. J. A. Webb

AGENDA

1. To receive apologies for absence
2. Declarations of Interest

To invite Councillors to declare any Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Disclosable Interests they may have in items on the agenda, and to confirm the nature of those interests.
3. To confirm the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 4th December 2013 (Pages 1 - 4)
4. Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 16th December 2013 (to follow).
 - (a) To receive and note the minutes
 - (b) To consider any recommendations contained within the minutes
5. Minutes of the meeting of the Audit Board held on 12th December 2013 (to follow)
 - (a) To receive and note the minutes
 - (b) To consider any recommendations contained within the minutes
6. Minutes of the meeting of the Worcestershire Shared Services Board held on 21st November 2013 (Pages 5 - 14)

- (a) To receive and note the minutes
 - (b) To consider any recommendations contained within the minutes
7. Home Choice Plus Allocations Policy Review (Pages 15 - 88)
 8. Medium Term Financial Plan 2014/15 to 2016/17 - Presentation
 9. Council Tax Base 2014/2015 (Pages 89 - 92)
 10. Worcestershire Regulatory Services - Removal of Health and Wellbeing from Statement of Partner Requirements (Pages 93 - 102)
 11. To consider any other business, details of which have been notified to the Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services prior to the commencement of the meeting and which the Chairman, by reason of special circumstances, considers to be of so urgent a nature that it cannot wait until the next meeting

K. DICKS
Chief Executive

The Council House
Burcot Lane
BROMSGROVE
Worcestershire
B60 1AA

20th December 2013

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE CABINET

WEDNESDAY, 4TH DECEMBER 2013 AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors R. Hollingworth (Leader), M. A. Sherrey (Deputy Leader),
D. W. P. Booth, M. A. Bullivant and M. J. A. Webb

Officers: Ms J. Pickering, Mr G. Revans, Mrs S. Sellers and Ms R. Cole.

63/13 **APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor C. B. Taylor.

64/13 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

65/13 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 6th November 2013 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes be approved as a correct record.

66/13 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 18th November 2013 were submitted.

In relation to minute 57/13 (Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme), it was noted that a further report on Parkside would be submitted to Cabinet in January 2014.

RESOLVED that the minutes be noted.

67/13 **SHARED SERVICES BOARD**

The minutes of the meeting of the Shared Services Board held on 17th October 2013 were submitted.

It was noted that some of the ways of working which had been successfully developed within Redditch in relation to Trees and "Place" interventions, would be adapted and trialled in parts of the Bromsgrove District.

RESOLVED that the minutes be noted.

68/13 **CAR PARKING REVIEW**

The Cabinet considered a report on a review of car parking within the District. The report comprised a detailed analysis of the existing provision of parking in Bromsgrove and was intended to provide a complete context against which Members could consider any changes they may wish to introduce.

As part of the consideration of the report the Portfolio Holder made reference to the work undertaken by the Bromsgrove Older People's Forum in collating comments calling for lower car park charges. This included a petition comprising approximately 100 signatures, together with 71 completed pro forma and 20 comments received via Email.

The Cabinet considered the report in detail, in particular the following issues:

- financial implications of changes to the charging structure and the subsequent potential impact on expenditure on services such as Shopmobility and town centre improvements;
- the town centre economy and the vacancy rate within the town centre;
- the town centre development proposals and the likely impact of these on a number of the car parks within the town;
- the existing support for car park users including a flexible payment tariff, the availability of permits and the additional hour for Blue Badge holders;
- the current capacity of the car parks, including a breakdown of the types of spaces available;
- the existing charges and a full record of previous changes in parking tariffs since 2005;
- the overall number of ticket sales and income generated over a six year period;
- the income from Excess Charge Notices and off street Parking Contravention Notices, including the reduction in income following a change in enforcement policy;
- an analysis of the length of stay in both short stay and long stay car parks and the split between morning, afternoon and evening usage;
- the introduction of the Civil Parking Enforcement regime in May 2013;
- a detailed comparison of the costs of parking in Bromsgrove with the cost of parking in neighbouring and/or similar areas. As was to be

expected this indicated that Bromsgrove was cheaper than some Authorities for some periods and more expensive than others;

- the recent visit of officers to Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council as it had been suggested that Bromsgrove may wish to adopt a similar policy to that Authority by reducing car park charges. The report detailed the likely reduction in income this would entail for Bromsgrove and the uncertainty over the outcome of the changes introduced in Altrincham.

The Cabinet felt the report covered all aspects of car parking in Bromsgrove in great detail and provided a comprehensive picture of the current position. Thanks were expressed to officers for the work undertaken on the report.

Cabinet noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Board had included car parking within the Board's Work Programme. Therefore in order that the report could be considered in detail by a wider range of Members it was

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Board be requested to consider the report, together with the representations received as a result of the petition and to feedback views/comments to the Cabinet.

69/13 **APRIL - SEPTEMBER (QUARTER 2) FINANCE MONITORING REPORT 2013/2014**

The Cabinet considered the report on the Council's financial position for the period April to September 2013.

It was noted that the overall revenue position showed a predicted underspend of £17,000 at present. The Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources) referred to amendments to figures within the Capital Budget Summary for Environmental Services in relation to the Vehicle and Equipment Replacement Programme. This did not impact on the total figures.

Members' attention was drawn to the predicted level of Capital expenditure anticipated by the end of the financial year and Portfolio Holders were requested to work closely with Heads of Service to work towards this.

RESOLVED that the current position on revenue and capital as detailed in the report be noted and service underspends be used to offset the savings requirements in Corporate Services.

RECOMMENDED that £32,000 be vired from Salaries to Other Local Authorities within Business Transformation to fund the proposed Academy to be implemented with Stoke City Council, subject to 50% of this sum to be recharged to Redditch Borough Council.

70/13 **REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S ARRANGEMENTS FOR SECURING FINANCIAL RESILIENCE**

The Cabinet considered a report from the Council's External Auditors, Grant Thornton, in relation to a review of the financial resilience of the Authority.

Members noted that the majority of the financial framework in place was robust but that a number of improvements had been identified in respect of the approach to financial governance.

The action points in relation to the significant variation to the budget in the last quarter of the year and the monitoring of savings identified were being addressed by the Management Team as specified in the Action Plan within the report.

RESOLVED that the review of Financial Resilience be noted together with the actions to be undertaken by this Council.

The meeting closed at 7.15 p.m.

Chairman

Agenda Item 6

WORCESTERSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCILS AND COUNTY COUNCIL

WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES

MEETING OF THE WORCESTERSHIRE SHARED SERVICES JOINT COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 21ST NOVEMBER 2013 AT 4.35 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors Mrs. B. Behan, R. Berry, A. N. Blagg, M. A. Bullivant (Vice-Chairman), R. Davis, Mrs. L. Denham, J. Fisher, P. Harrison, M. Hart (during Minute No's 24/13 to 32/13), Mrs. L. Hodgson (Chairman), D. Hughes, K. Jennings and C. B. Taylor

Observers: Worcestershire Regulatory Services Joint Scrutiny Task Group Members, Ms. A. Scarce and Ms. J. Bailey

Invitees: Mr. I. Pumfrey, Chairman, Worcestershire Regulatory Services Management Board

Officers: Ms. J. Pickering, Mr. S. Jorden, Mrs. S. Sellers, Mr. M. Kay, Mr. S. Wilkes and Mrs. P. Ross

22/13 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor B. Clayton, Redditch Borough Council.

23/13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mrs L. Denham, Worcester City Council informed Members that she was a Member of the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service Board.

24/13 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee held on 26th September 2013 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee be approved as a correct record, subject to Mr. I. Pumfrey being shown as attending the meeting as the Chairman, Worcestershire Regulatory Services Management Board.

25/13 ICT PROJECT UPDATE - VERBAL UPDATE FROM THE HEAD OF WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES

The Head of Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) provided Members with a verbal update on the ICT Project. Members were informed that there had been a delay with data transfer due to staffing issues and that concerns

had been raised with the Managing Director, IDOX. Due to the concerns being raised there was now a dedicated support team to deal with data transfer. Therefore the data transfer should be transferred in days. The new system was the right system for the service and would enable officers to produce relevant reports for the Joint Committee.

26/13 **WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES JOINT SCRUTINY ARRANGEMENTS - VERBAL UPDATE FROM THE HEAD OF WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES**

The Head of Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) provided Members with a verbal update on the WRS Joint Scrutiny Task Group. The Head of WRS was invited to attend the WRS Joint Scrutiny Task Group meeting held on 22nd October 2013. Task Group Members had raised questions with regard to:-

- Communication with Members
- Performance
- Governance, both Joint Committee and Management Board

The Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee Chairman and Vice-Chairman were being interviewed by Members of the WRS Joint Scrutiny Task Group at its meeting being held on 21st November 2013.

27/13 **FUTURE OF FIRST CONTACT ARRANGEMENTS FOR WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES**

Members were provided with an update following the receipt of a letter from Councillor P. Swinburn, Chairman, Worcestershire Hub Shared Services (WHSS) Management Board received by the Chairman, Worcestershire Shared Services (WSS), Joint Committee, in respect of funding for the work WHSS undertook on behalf of Worcestershire Regulatory Services and the withdrawal of these services at the end of October 2013. The letter was presented as urgent business at the meeting of the WSS Joint Committee held on 26th September 2013.

The Head of Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) introduced the report and in doing so informed Members that a report was submitted to the WRS Management Board regarding the customer demand received by the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service (WHSS) when administering enquiries on behalf of WRS. The report was instigated for two reasons, as detailed on page 11 of the report.

Customer demand for a range of WRS related enquiries had apparently increased significantly since the service was initially migrated and this appeared to have had a direct impact on the overall performance of the WHSS's Customer Contact Centre. This had necessitated a review of the amount WRS contributed to support first contacts. A number of options were presented to the WRS Management Board in order to respond to the immediate issues:-

- That WRS fund the number of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) in accordance to a performance level that was appropriate to the service;
- That WRS fund the number of FTE in accordance to a performance level that was appropriate to the service and that this level of FTE was reviewed in line with a development programme to increase self-service contacts;
- That WRS incorporate the call handling model into their service.

Before a decision around options was made the WRS Management Board requested further clarification around the data presented to ensure that it was an accurate reflection of total and genuine demand for the service. The agreed data was presented to the WRS Management Board on 30th October 2013, as detailed on page 12 of the report.

In the interim, WRS, in consultation with the WRS Management Board had agreed to fund an additional two FTE (full time equivalent) posts for WHSS to deal with the existing demand until March 2014. The cost of this was approximately £26,000.

During August and September 2013 WHSS staff who took WRS calls were asked to record them following a specified protocol. The table on page 12 of the report details the information recorded over the two month period.

Three Options, as detailed in the report, were presented to the WRS Management Board on 30th October 2013, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report. Following discussion it was agreed that Option 3, to take the service in-house, was a realistic option that could be considered, although the risks would be placed on WRS to ensure the service was delivered to an acceptable standard. WRS Managers considered Option 3 would meet their strategic direction of travel, but they would have to seek funding support from partners to make this happen. It would also need to happen in parallel with the channel shift program so that, over time, the telephony commitment could be reduced, allowing partner contributions to first contact costs to be reduced.

WRS Managers were of the opinion that the in-house service would probably be staffed at the lower suggested level on the basis that direct support could be provided via professional staff from within WRS operating on a rota basis to directly support the first contact call handlers. This would over time increase the proportion of calls that could be dealt with at first point of contact, improving the customer experience and overall satisfaction.

The WRS Management Team was tasked to work with the WHSS to cost options for taking the service in-house and to work with the host authority Human Resources (HR) team to explore Option 3. A further report would therefore be presented to the WRS Management Board in December 2013. Joint Committee Members would be updated on the outcome of this report at their next meeting.

The Head of WRS further informed Members that the host authority had given assurances that their Shore-tel system was robust enough to cope with the increasing volume. However, there was a question over the portability of the

01905 number that had been broadcast for three years onto the Bromsgrove / Redditch 01527, exchange based system.

Significant implications in relation to TUPE transfer were highlighted as part of the move. These would need to be explored more by the host authority Human Resources (HR) team and the WHSS Management Board as to the eligibility criteria for staff. This would delay the implementation to allow for the relevant consultation periods. The WRS Management Board representative from Wychavon District Council had offered a benchmark figure of £125,000 per annum on which to judge the cost of in-house provision.

The Head of WRS responded to Members questions with regard to staffing levels and service delivery, more specifically the table detailed on page 13 of the report, which detailed the service standards likely to be achievable and the number of agents required. The Head of WRS was not convinced that 7 agents were required and was of the opinion that the channel shift program would help reduce demand and that 4/5 agents could deliver the service at an acceptable level, Monday to Friday between 9.00am and 5.00pm. If there was a demand for a Saturday service, WRS would be happy to provide it, but partner authorities would have to contribute.

The Head of WRS confirmed that a link on each partner authority website would be detailed in order to enable customers to access the WRS website directly.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

28/13 **WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES BUDGET MONITORING REPORT APRIL - SEPT 2013**

Members considered the Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) Budget Monitoring Report for April to September 2013.

The Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Resources, Bromsgrove District Council highlighted the significant underspends across the service due to staff vacancies, long term sick and maternity levels which would generate savings of around £426,000 in 2013/2014. Members were asked to note that the £426,000 would be offset by an anticipated overspend on agency staffing of £438,000 due to additional costs impacting on 2013/2014, where there had been an increase for the service together with supporting the implementation of the new ICT system. The Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Resources explained that this would only be a cost in the current financial year and would not impact on future year's savings realisation.

The Head of WRS responded to Members' questions with regard to vacancies, long term sick, agency staff and the generated savings of around £426,000 and agreed to provide Members with a detailed breakdown of those savings.

The Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Resources further informed the Committee that the WRS Management Board had considered a report in relation to the number of calls and enquiries on behalf of WRS. It was evident that a significantly higher number were being answered than previously anticipated. The WRS Management Board had agreed that further funding for two staff from 1st November 2013 to 31st March 2014 be made available from WRS to assist with these additional costs.

RESOLVED that the financial position for the period April to September 2013 as detailed in the Worcestershire Regulatory Services Budget Monitoring Report be noted.

29/13 **WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES BUDGET 2014 / 2015**

The Committee considered a report which detailed the proposed revenue and capital budget for Worcestershire Regulatory Services for 2014/2015.

The Executive Director, Finance & Corporate Resources, Bromsgrove District Council introduced the report and in doing so reminded Members of the lengthy report presented at the last Joint Committee meeting which detailed the costs associated with the "Health and Well Being" service and the duplication of these services across the County. It was agreed that within the Statement of Partner Requirements the functional activity of "Health and Well Being" would no longer be provided by Worcestershire Regulatory Services with effect from 1st April 2014.

The Executive Director, Finance & Corporate Resources, Bromsgrove District Council introduced the report and asked Members to note that the Worcestershire County Council (WCC) budget of £1,560,766 was subject to variation following discussions in relation to the proposed reduction for 2014/2015. As Members were aware WCC had recently presented a number of reductions to their budget over the next three years. Included within the proposals was a significant reduction to the Regulatory Services (mainly Trading Standards) funding of £1.5 million. This cut was not factored into the current budget position. Due to the number of issues that this raised for WRS, the WRS Management Board had requested that a small working group comprising of Financial and Operational officers be tasked to examine the budget requirements and the financial costs associated with the delivery of savings.

The budget, as detailed at Appendix 1 to the report, was the position excluding any reduction from any partner authority. It was proposed that this was used as the basis for discussion with WCC with the aim to plan the required savings level for 2014/2015. Therefore there may be a variation to this budget and as a result of these discussions it may prove necessary to hold a special Joint Committee meeting in January 2014 to approve the revised 2014/2015 budget.

The Executive Director, Finance & Corporate Resources, Bromsgrove District Council responded to Members concerns with regard to approving the WRS Budget 2014/2015 for their participating authority. Councillor Mrs. L. Denham

Worcester City Council informed Members that Worcester City Council had not yet published their draft budget proposal position for 2014/2015 and could also be looking at potential savings on their contribution to WRS.

Further discussion followed on the impact of the proposed reduction from WCC on partner authorities and the commitment from partner authorities to approve the budget as presented.

Mr. I. Pumfrey, Chairman, WRS Management Board responded to Members concerns and highlighted that the Worcestershire Shared Services Partnership agreement protected partner authorities from any effects due to the financial WCC changes. Therefore the allocation, as detailed at Appendix 1 to the report, showed the final Budget for the six participating Councils to include the savings as reported.

Further discussion followed on the savings WCC were looking to achieve and the challenging times ahead for local authorities that were not anticipated. Mr. I. Pumfrey, Chairman, WRS Management Board responded to Members' questions with regard to the substantive one off costs and additional costs to be met by WCC, reiterating that the Worcestershire Shared Services Partnership agreement protected the other member authorities against any negative impact and that any substantive or one off costs would have to be met by WCC. Members were further informed that the WRS Management Board understood, that over the next three years, partners may want to reduce or vary their contributions, and would therefore be looking at 'ground rules' for those partners seeking changes to their budget contribution and service arrangements in order to make the process more manageable and transparent.

An alternative and additional Recommendation was put forward and the Chairman encouraged further debate on this. Following further discussion it was

RESOLVED:

- (a) that the revenue budget allocations for 2014/2015 for the District Councils, as detailed below be approved;

Bromsgrove	£492,193
Malvern	£415,639
Redditch	£581,474
Worcester City	£600,755
Wychavon	£754,516
Wyre Forest	£574,347
	£3,418,924

- (b) that the Worcestershire County Council budget of £1,560,766 was subject to variation following discussions in relation to the proposed reduction for 2014/2015, be noted, and
- (c) that an officer working group be set up to look (collectively) at the constraints and savings of all partner authorities and include in the three year financial plan.

30/13 **WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES GROWTH POTENTIAL – STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP**

Members were asked to consider a report which detailed further work undertaken to develop the growth potential of Worcestershire Regulatory Services.

The Head of Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) provided Members with a brief presentation on WRS Growth Potential – Strategic Partnership.

The presentation covered:-

- Why pursue WRS growth?
- Benefits of WRS growth
- Implications of not growing
- What have we done so far?
- Strategic Partnering
- Issues to consider
- Time scales (indicative)
- Questions?

Following on from the presentation the Head of Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) introduced the report and in doing so informed Members that WRS were seeking approval for the commencement of a procurement process to test the market for interest from commercial organisations in developing a strategic partnership for delivery of regulatory services. The Head of WRS highlighted that he would not be asking the Joint Committee for approval to test the market unless there was an interest.

A strategic partnership would provide a means of reducing the net cost of WRS to Joint Committee partner authorities whilst securing the capacity and resilience of WRS in an uncertain future climate. This would in turn directly support delivery of current WRS priorities.

The Head of WRS drew Members' attention to the costs involved in procuring a strategic partnership. These related to specialist legal advice and project management; and were estimated in the region of £20,000. These costs would be contained within the balance of funding available from WRS set up and ICT costs. There would also be significant staff resources required from the host authority.

The value of such a contract would require it to be procured by competitive dialogue under EU procurement rules. This process was likely to take approximately nine months from formal advertising of WRS requirements. WRS Management Board had therefore advised that this procurement process began at the earliest opportunity. The Head of WRS highlighted the timescales as detailed below:-

- Nov 2013 – Joint Committee agree to procurement exercise
- Dec 2013 – procurement process begins

- June 2014 – Joint Committee receive results of procurement process and proposal
- July-Sept 2014 – partners approve proposal and governance arrangements
- Oct 2014 – If approved, Implementation Plan starts

The Head of WRS responded to Members' questions with regard to the meetings with Counties and Districts, in the immediate vicinity, who had expressed an interest and why WRS had not been able to successfully close a deal.

The Chairman, WRS Management Board informed Members that the Management Board had reached the conclusion as the Head of WRS had implied, to seize the opportunity to develop a strategic partnership and take WRS skills to the open market by offering a blended package of WRS skills to other public sector organisations and commercial companies; this would benefit Joint Committee partner authorities. The right strategic partnership would help maintain WRS.

The Chairman, WRS Management Board further responded to Members concerns with the risks involved and in doing so, referred to page 34 of the report, that the adoption of a structured project management approach would balance these risks and ensure that the project was halted if the likelihood of successful procurement became unrealistic.

The Head of WRS suggested that an evaluation framework used to assess potential partners be developed and the agreed framework be brought back to the Joint Committee.

The Executive Director, Finance & Corporate Resources, Bromsgrove District Council informed Members that Joint Committee Members would be kept fully informed, with any final decisions resting with each partner authority. Any changes to the governance arrangements for the Joint Committee, as a result of successful procurement, would have to go back to each respective partner authority for consideration.

Having been put to the vote with a majority agreement it was

RESOLVED:

- (a) that the further work undertaken to develop the growth potential of Worcestershire Regulatory Services be noted;
- (b) that the commencement of a procurement process to test the market for interest from commercial organisations in developing a strategic partnership for delivery of regulatory services, be approved. With the proviso that should the costs involved exceed the agreed amount of £20,000 it be brought back to the Joint Committee; and
- (c) that, as requested, partner councils to identify, by 1st March 2014, additional regulatory functions to include within the scope of procurement of a strategic partnership.

31/13 **PERFORMANCE AND ACTIVITY DATA - QUARTER 1 & QUARTER 2**

The Committee considered a report which detailed the Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) Activity Data for Quarter 1 and 2.

Mr. S. Wilkes, Business Manager, WRS introduced the report and in doing so drew Members' attention to page 42 of the report, Performance Measures, Measures 1 and 2. Members were informed there had been a reasonable return rate to the public survey of 23%. As detailed in the report the data showed a summer spike in nuisance complaints, 50% of nuisance complaints relate to noise nuisance, officers are aware from past experience that a good summer yields additional work. Mr. Wilkes responded to Members' questions with regard to page 53 of the report 'Time to Close Complaints' data and confirmed that the longer time to close a complaint generally indicated either a more difficult complaint or one which, by its nature, resulted in formal action.

The Head of WRS responded to Members questions in respect of:

- No comparative data on performance from previous years.
- No detailed information on telephone queries or data from the Worcestershire Hub.
- 'End to end' information, how long it takes to solve a problem.

The Head of WRS highlighted that the data presented was activity data. A streamlined suite of outcomes and measures had been agreed by Joint Committee Members in February 2013 and were detailed in the WRS Service Plan 2013/2014. The Head of WRS drew Members' attention to a recent invite, extended to all Joint Committee Members, to attend an 'Away Day' – Joint Management Board and Joint Committee Workshop to be held at Wychavon District Council on Monday 20th January 2014. The workshop would provide Joint Committee Members with the opportunity to determine what information was required for each partner authority.

RESOLVED that the Worcestershire Regulatory Services Activity Data Quarter 1 and 2 report be noted.

32/13 **WORCESTERSHIRE SHARED SERVICES JOINT COMMITTEE – PROPOSED MEETING DATES 2014 / 2015**

The Committee considered the proposed meeting dates scheduled for 2014/2015.

RESOLVED that the Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee meeting dates and start time of 4.30pm for 2014/2015 be approved as follows:

- Thursday 20th February 2014
- Thursday 26th June 2014 – Annual Meeting
- Thursday 25th September 2014
- Thursday 20th November 2014 – Budget Meeting
- Thursday 19th February 2015

The meeting closed at 6.55 p.m.

CABINET

8th January 2014

Home Choice Plus Allocations Policy Review

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Cllr Del Booth
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Sue Hanley
Wards Affected	All
Ward Councillor Consulted	N/A
Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

- 1.1 Housing authorities are required by s.166A of the Housing Act 1996 to have an allocation scheme for determining priorities and for defining the procedures to be followed in allocating social housing accommodation and they must allocate in accordance with that scheme.
- 1.2 The allocations law provisions of the Localism Act 2011 came into force in England on 18th June 2012 amending Part 6 s169 of the Housing Act 1996. The objectives behind these amendments are to:
- Enable housing authorities to better manage their housing waiting list by giving them the power to determine which applicants qualify for an allocation of social housing. Authorities are now able to operate a more focused list which better reflects local circumstances. These changes can help to manage unrealistic expectations by excluding people who have little or no prospect of being allocated accommodation.
 - Make it easier for existing social tenants to move
 - Maintain the protection provided by the Statutory Reasonable Preference Criteria – ensuring that priority for social housing is given to those in greatest need.
- 1.3 Housing Authorities may only allocate accommodation to people who are defined as ‘qualifying persons’ (s.160ZA (6)(a)) with the exception for members of the Armed and Reserve Forces.
- 1.3 A summary of the proposed changes to the allocations policy are:

Qualification Criteria: Applicants must have a 2 year local connection to the Home Choice Plus Partnership area or have been in permanent paid employment in the Partnership area for six months. Those applicants who have a local connection to Bromsgrove, under the 1996 Housing Act, will have a higher banding than those without a connection to the district. This will ensure those applicants with a connection to Bromsgrove will have preference over those without.

No Housing Need: Where an applicant is not an existing tenant requiring a transfer, eligible for sheltered housing or a household interested in low cost home ownership, and is deemed to have no housing need they will not be eligible to join the housing register.

Reduced Banding: Households with an income, of more than £35,000 (currently the threshold is £60K) will be placed into the reduced banding unless they are in receipt of means tested benefits. This will ensure those applicants who do not have the means to access housing in the private sector will have preference.

Bedroom Standard: It is proposed that the bedroom standard be changed to fall in line with the way that housing benefit assessments of a household's bedroom requirements are made.

Additional Preference for Community Contribution

- Applicants in Employment
- Applicants Volunteering
- Applicants in Education and Training
- Disabled applicants whose disability prevents them from seeking work, volunteering or attending education or training.
- Applicants who are full time carers
- Members of the Armed Forces

1.4 Accordingly, Members are asked to approve the draft Policy for consultation which is attached as Appendix 1.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet is asked to resolve that

- 1) The Home Choice Plus Allocations Policy is approved to be sent out for consultation, and;**
- 2) Officers report back to Cabinet on the outcome of discussions with the Home Choice Plus Partnership regarding local connection**

3. KEY ISSUES

Financial Implications

3.1 Current costs to run the service

Total Cost to BDC	£53,846
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Anticipated one off additional cost of Implementing Home Choice Plus Policy for 2014/15	£30,000
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Officers are discussing with bdht any additional costs relating to the changes

Legal Implications

3.2 Housing authorities are required by s.166A of the Housing Act 1996 to have an allocation scheme for determining priorities and for defining the procedures to be followed in allocating social housing accommodation and they must allocate in accordance with that scheme.

3.3 The allocations law provisions of the Localism Act 2011 came into force in England on 18th June 2012 amending Part 6 s169 of the Housing Act 1996. The objectives behind these amendments are to:

- Enable housing authorities to better manage their housing waiting list by giving them the power to determine which applicants qualify for an allocation of social housing. Authorities are now able to operate a more focused list which better reflects local circumstances. These changes can help to manage unrealistic expectations by excluding people who have little or no prospect of being allocated accommodation.
- Make it easier for existing social tenants to move
- Maintain the protection provided by the Statutory Reasonable Preference Criteria – ensuring that priority for social housing is given to those in greatest need.

3.4 Housing Authorities may only allocate accommodation to people who are defined as 'qualifying persons' (s.160ZA (6) (a)) with the exception for members of the Armed and Reserve Forces. In addition, housing authorities are encouraged to adopt a housing options approach as part of a move to a managed waiting list.

3.5 Housing Act 1996 Part VI specified five categories of applicant who must be awarded 'reasonable preference' and this remains unchanged by the Localism Act 2011 and these are:

- people who are homeless
- those owed homelessness duties
- people occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or other unsatisfactory housing conditions
- People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds
- People who need to move to a particular locality within the local authority district, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship to themselves or others.

3.6 The Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for armed forces)(England) Regulations 2012 and the Housing Act 1996 (Additional Preference for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012 sets out how local authorities should respond to the housing needs of ex servicemen. The proposed changes to the allocations policy addresses the expectations contained within these regulations.

3.7 A new code of guidance has been written replacing all previous guidance on social housing allocations: 'Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England.

Service / Operational Implications

3.8 Bromsgrove District Council is currently part of the Home Choice Plus Partnership, which was established in 2008. The partnership is made up of six local housing authorities, who all operate within a common housing allocations policy. Customers seeking affordable housing across the areas covered by the partnership register with Home Choice Plus and are placed in a band according to their housing need. Applicants subsequently bid for properties as they become available under a Choice Based Lettings approach.

3.9 Since the introduction of the Localism Act 2011, many housing authorities have reviewed their housing allocations policy, to introduce some of the new freedoms and flexibilities available under that legislation. This is to better manage customer expectations and reduce the number of households on housing waiting lists, given the relatively small number of homes becoming available every year. There are also moves to increase housing opportunities for certain customers who have traditionally struggled to secure housing through the list.

3.10 The authorities who make up the Home Choice Plus Partnership have considered these matters and the Partnership has collated the key messages back from Councils and drafted a new common allocations policy as a result of these discussions – see appendix 1. The new draft policy goes considerably further than its predecessor, incorporating the changes available under the Localism Act, and the Partnership will be

putting the new draft policy out for consultation in January 2014. Assuming the draft policy is subsequently implemented, system changes will be introduced in June 2014 to enable the new housing allocations approach to go live in September 2014.

- 3.11 Bromsgrove District Council has actively considered the same themes and has explored thinking behind the existing Choice Based Lettings approach. Alongside this, a review of the existing housing waiting list, undertaken by Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT) in July 2013, has seen the number of households registered in the District reduce from 3700 to 1500
- 3.12 Many areas of the new draft allocations policy produced by the Home Choice Plus Partnership meet the expectations of the Council, but concerns remain about local connection, and how to prioritise the housing needs of Bromsgrove residents when it comes to allocating properties in the District.
- 3.13 The draft policy currently proposes applicants satisfy a two year local connection to the partnership area in order to register, but feedback from discussions with Bromsgrove Members indicates that applicants should need to satisfy a two year local connection with the District, as opposed to the partnership area, in order to secure properties in Bromsgrove.
- 3.14 Officers will discuss with the Partnership the ability for Bromsgrove District Council to require a two year local connection to the District for the allocation of affordable housing in Bromsgrove.
- 3.15 The Home Choice Plus Timeline for implementation of the new policy is as follows:

Consultation	Mid Jan – April 2014
Final policy sign of	May 2014
System changes	June 2014
Review of all applicants	July/Aug 2014
Go Live	Sept 2014

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3.16 A summary of the proposed changes to the allocations policy are:

Section	Current Policy	Proposed Change
Qualification Criteria	Home Choice Plus is an 'open' waiting list. Anyone can apply and be accepted.	Applicants are not eligible to join the Home Choice Plus housing register unless they meet qualification criteria: The household must have lived in the Partnership area, by choice, for a minimum period of 2 years. Exceptions to this are households accepted for the full homeless duty, where the applicant has been in permanent paid employment for a minimum of six months, where the household has a close family member who has lived in the relevant local authority for a period of five years, where the applicant is a member of the armed forces or there are other special circumstances...
No Housing Need	Home Choice Plus is an 'open' waiting list. Anyone can apply and be accepted regardless of whether they are in any housing need.	Where an applicant is deemed to have no housing need they will not be eligible to join the housing register. Exceptions to this will be existing tenants requesting a transfer or applicants who are would like to apply for shared ownership properties.
Reduced Banding	Households with an income of more than £60k will be placed into the Reduced Banding	Applicants with an income of more than £35k will be placed into the reduced banding, unless they are in receipt of means tested benefits.
Bedroom Standard	The current bedroom standard conflicts with the bedroom eligibility used to calculate housing benefit entitlement.	The bedroom standard will be amended to fall in line with the bedroom eligibility used to calculate the housing benefit entitlement.

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Additional Preference – Community Contribution	No additional preference is currently awarded beyond the reasonable preference bandings and local connection.	Six months waiting time additional preference will be awarded within the band for: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Employment (where applicants meet the required hours in employment for working tax credits thresholds and have been in employment for six out of the last 9 months.2. Volunteering – for 20 hours per month for a continuous period of at least six months at the point of application and offer.3. Education and Training – for a continuous period of 6 months at application and offer.4. Full time carers who have done so for a period of 6 months at application and offer.5. Severely disabled applicants who are not able to participate in any of the above.6. Members of the Armed Forces with urgent housing needs
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3.17 Local Connection – Housing Act 1996

- normally resident in the area (this must be residence of choice, and for at least six months of the previous 12, or three years of the previous five, and the relevant period will be up to the date of the decision, including any time spent in interim accommodation)
- employed in the area (this will not include casual work or study, but can include part-time or voluntary work)
- have family associations in the area (family associations will usually be with parents or adult brothers or sisters, but can be with other relatives where a particularly close relationship exists.
- have other special circumstances that mean that they need to be in the area

3.18 The table above shows there are opportunities and risks around any decision the Council takes in terms of remaining within the partnership, or withdrawing from it, now or in the future. However, it is feasible to remain in the partnership, introduce various elements of the Localism agenda, and ensure housing is prioritised for Bromsgrove residents in the short to medium term.

3.19 Taking this approach does not prevent the Council from withdrawing from the Partnership at a later date, which it may wish to do once the future of the housing contract becomes clearer with BDHT.

Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications

3.20 In framing the qualification criteria, the council has had regard to its duties under the equalities legislation.

3.21 A strong and proactive housing options approach will ensure that households are offered support to access the housing solution which best meets their needs (this might be private rented housing, low cost home ownership or help to stay put), in addition expectations about accessing social housing will be properly managed, and social housing will be focussed on those who need it most.

3.22 An Equalities Assessment Record has been completed which identifies areas of potential adverse impact and the measures that will be put in place in order to mitigate this.

3.23 Consultation will take place with applicants, residents and relevant stakeholders and responses will be considered prior to the final policy being approved.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk	Consequence	Controls
Qualification Criteria	May result in increased review requests	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Information will be provided to explain the policy and the housing options team will provide advice and assistance for applicants to find accommodation.
More restrictive local connection criteria could mean less people in housing need are able to access the list.	May lead to more people approaching as homeless. May result in an increase in the use of temporary accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developing greater access to the private rented sector and other housing options will help to mitigate this.
Increase in Housing Options Interviews	.Greater strain on current resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Applicants will be signposted to the enhanced housing options on line advice tool – Bromsgrove Home Options to mitigate the impact on housing options.
Registered Providers setting up their own waiting lists	A reduction in revenue funding to the Council. Applicants will have to apply to multiply organisations making the allocation of affordable housing confusing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work with Registered Providers in any changes to the pollicy

5. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Draft Home Choice Plus Allocations Policy

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Localism Act 2011
Housing Act 1996

7. AUTHOR OF REPORT

CABINET

8th January 2014

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Allocation Scheme



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HOME CHOICE PLUS PARTNERSHIP

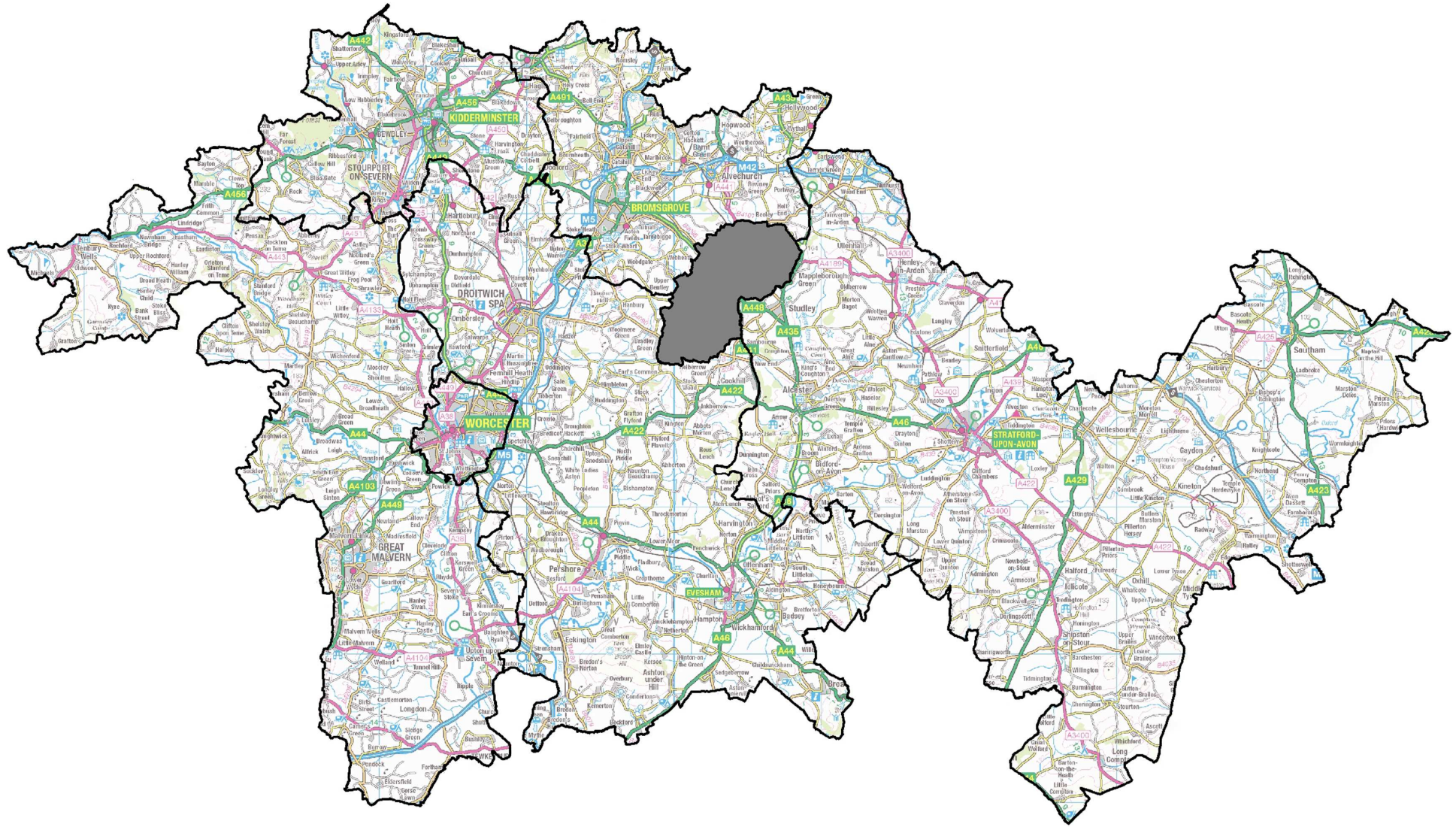
List of partners

Local Authorities

Bromsgrove District Council, Malvern Hills District Council, Stratford-on-Avon District Council, Worcester City Council, Wychavon District Council, Wyre Forest District Council

Housing Associations

Advance Housing Association, Anchor Trust, Beth Johnson Housing Group, Bournville Village Trust, Bromford Group, Bromsgrove District Housing Trust, Festival Housing, Fosseyway Housing, Fry Housing Trust, Gloucestershire Housing Association, Hanover Housing Group, Housing 21, Jephson Housing Association, Marches Housing Association, Mercian Housing, Midland Heart Ltd, Nexus Housing (West Midlands), Orbit Heart of England, Pershore Alms Houses, Rooftop Housing Group, Sanctuary Housing Association, Servite Housing Association, South Shropshire Housing Association, Stonham Housing Association, Warwickshire Rural Housing Association, Waterloo Housing Association, Worcester Community Housing, Wyre Forest Community Housing, Wyre Forest Sheltered Housing.



Glossary of terms

Term	Definition
Affordable housing	housing let at a social or affordable rent or a low cost home ownership property let to a specified eligible household whose needs are not met in the market. Also known as social housing
Allocation	an offer of housing from a Housing Association or Local Authority either directly or via a nomination from a Local Authority
Band start date	the date the household is awarded the banding applicable to their housing need
Banding/bands	the prioritisation of households on the housing register based on their housing need
Bid	Households' expression of interest in an available / vacant property
Direct matching	an allocation outside of the Home Choice Policy/Scheme. Please see page 39 for more information
Home Choice Plus Allocations Policy / Allocations policy	the policy document that determines how housing is allocated to households
Home Choice Plus Partnership	- A group of local authorities operating the same Allocation Scheme (known as "the partnership")
Home Choice Plus Scheme / Allocations Scheme	the scheme including the software, the policy and the processes involved for allocating housing to households
Homelessness	The legal definition of homelessness in the Housing Act 1996 Part VII is that a person is homeless if they have no accommodation available to them in the UK or anywhere which would be reasonable for them to continue to occupy. They would also be homeless if they have accommodation but are not able to gain access to it, or if it is a moveable structure but they have nowhere to place it. A person is threatened with homelessness if they are likely to become homeless within the next 28 days.
Housing Association	for the purposes of this Scheme also includes Registered Providers and refers to social housing providers regulated by the Homes and Communities Agency
Housing Register	a database/list of households who have applied for affordable housing
Local Authority Agents	organisations that act on behalf of the Local Authority in relation to the Housing Register and Homelessness, under a contractual arrangement usually Housing Associations
Local connection	a household's connection to a local area or authority including residency, family connections and employment
Persons from	people subject to immigration control and any other persons from

abroad	abroad where the secretary of state makes regulations
Reasonable preference	categories of housing need which are defined by the Housing Act 1996, Part Six that are required to be included in an allocations policy
Registration / Effective date	the date of registration of the Housing Application
Statutorily homeless	This term describes those households who have made a homeless application to a Home Choice Plus local authority or its agent and where the full homeless duty has been accepted. This means the household has been determined to be eligible, homeless, in priority need, unintentionally homeless and having a local connection and has been issued with a written decision which confirms this.
Weekly bidding cycle	the period of time available for households to place bids on properties they are interested in

1. Introduction

Home Choice Plus is a scheme used to advertise and/or allocate social rented and privately rented properties which has been agreed by the Home Choice Plus Partnership (the Partnership) and operates in the same way across a number of Local Authority areas including;

- **Bromsgrove District Council**
- **Malvern Hills District Council**
- **Stratford-on-Avon District Council**
- **Worcester City Council**
- **Wychavon District Council**
- **Wyre Forest District Council**

Within the Home Choice Plus Scheme is an **allocation policy** which outlines how the Partnership will prioritise households on the Housing Register.

The Districts mentioned above work in partnership with a number of Housing Associations to allocate social housing in a fair and transparent way. **Housing Associations and Registered Providers will have their own allocations policy which they will apply when allocating to their properties. This means applicants at the top of the Housing Register waiting list on banding and date time may not be rehoused by the Housing Association / Registered Provider if they don't meet the requirements of their allocations policy.**

Collectively the partnership has the following aims;;

Aims of the partnership

- We are committed to working in partnership to offer a choice from a range of housing options for people in housing need.
- We aim to ensure that Home Choice Plus is easy to understand, transparent and fair and challenge the perception that the way social housing is allocated is unfair.
- We will work to ensure that all households are able to access the service we provide.
- We will develop sustainable communities by enabling people to make realistic and informed choices about where they wish to live.
- We will make effective use of all housing stock.
- We will ensure that local people will have an enhanced priority within the banding structure.

- We want to encourage and reward households who make a positive contribution to their community
- We will assist in achieving mobility across the participating Local Authority areas.
- We will enable a better understanding of the housing demand.
- We will ensure the scheme meets our equalities duties.
- We will publish information that enables households to understand how we assist them through the allocations scheme

Access to Home Choice Plus is via a single register for housing; households only have to register for the scheme once and are then able to bid for vacancies advertised in any of the participating Local Authority areas.

Home Choice Plus enables people with a housing need to look for a home in an area of their choice. Households registered with Home Choice Plus will be banded according to the suitability of their current accommodation to meet their needs and their local connection.

What are Allocations under this Scheme?

The following are allocations of accommodation under this Scheme:

1. The nomination of an applicant or existing tenant to be an Assured or an Assured Shorthold tenant of housing accommodation held by a Housing Association (via a Council's Nomination Rights Agreement with the Housing Association). Often the nomination will be that of a 'Starter Tenant' of a Housing Association whereby the Housing Association will grant an Assured Shorthold Tenancy for a set probationary period (usually 12 months) and provided the tenant successfully completes the probationary period the Housing Association will grant an Assured Tenancy or a fixed term tenancy (please see individual Housing Association / Registered Provider's tenancy policies).

By 'affordable housing' we mean social rent and affordable rent, allocated to specified eligible households whose needs are not met in the market. It should meet the needs of eligible households, including availability at a cost low enough for them to afford, determined with regard to local incomes and local house prices.

The ways in which we advise and assist applicants on a whole range of housing options, including access to the private rented sector and low cost home-ownership opportunities, can be found on the Home Choice Plus website www.homechoiceplus.org.uk and the partner Local Authorities' websites.

A list of Local Authorities' contact points can be found at Appendix 1

The scheme may also be used to advertise intermediate market rent, shared ownership and private rented properties. Please see the eligibility criteria of the relevant landlord for more details regarding allocation of these types of properties.

Allocations Policy

This Allocations Policy describes how you can qualify for the the Home Choice Plus scheme and how it prioritises housing applicants to identify their housing need with regard to the legal definition of Reasonable Preference and other categories of housing need that the Steering Group have recognised. .

Whilst all applicants are assessed in accordance with the scheme, the allocation of properties will be subject to the allocation policies of individual Housing Associations where they have one who will assess applicants on the Housing Register according to their stated priorities. They may have different rules about the number of people who can live in a home of a particular size. This will be made clear when a property is advertised. For more information regarding the letting of properties please see the Home Choice Plus Partnership website.

This policy sets out in detail who can or cannot be accepted under the policy and how this assessment is made. It also sets out how applicants can apply for and access housing.

We have designed the Allocations Policy to meet current legal requirements and to promote sustainable communities and balance housing markets.

The Legal Framework

This Allocations Scheme complies with the requirements of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) and takes into account the three relevant codes of guidance - Allocation of Accommodation: Code of Guidance for Housing Authorities 2002 issued by the ODPM, the Allocation of Accommodation: Choice Based Lettings Code of Guidance for Housing Authorities 2008 and Fair and Flexible: Statutory Guidance on Social Housing Allocations for Local Authorities in England 2009, issued by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG). All of these documents can be obtained through the DCLG website. [Update with current list](#) And include localism Act 2011 and Welfare Reform legislation and Equalities 2010.

This section describes this legal framework.

The 1996 Housing Act (as amended by the 2002 Homelessness Act) requires local authorities to make all allocations and nominations in accordance with an Allocations Scheme. A summary of the Allocations Scheme must be published and made available free of charge to any person who asks for a copy. A summary of the Allocations Scheme and general principles is available through the Home Choice Plus website www.homechoiceplus.org.uk and at partner Local Authority and Housing Associations offices.

The Housing Act 1996, (as amended) requires local authorities to give Reasonable Preference in their allocations policies to people with high levels of assessed housing need. This includes homeless people, those who need to move on welfare or medical grounds, people living in unsatisfactory housing and those who would face hardship unless they moved to a particular locality within the local authority's area.

The Act also requires local authorities to state within the policy its position on offering applicants a choice of housing accommodation, or offering them the opportunity to express preference about the housing accommodation to be allocated to them.

The policy is also drafted and framed to ensure that it is compatible with the Partnership's equality duties including the duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination and to promote good relations between different racial groups, as well the duty to promote equality between disabled persons and other persons and between men and women. The Partnership has carried out an Equality Impact Assessment in relation to the policy.

This Policy has considered:

- The partner Local Authorities' statutory obligations and discretion as to who is eligible for housing allocation
- The partner Local Authorities' statutory obligation to provide Reasonable Preference to certain categories of applicants set down by law i.e. those who must be given a greater priority under the Allocations Policy.
- The partner Local Authorities' statutory discretion to grant "additional preference" and/or to determine priority between applicants with Reasonable Preference.

- The general and specific statutory discretions the partners can exercise when allocating housing.

Service Standards

We will aim to;

- Register all eligible applications within 10 working days (where full information is available) Please note some applications can take up to four weeks to assess
- Process all supporting information within 10 working days
- Complete shortlists (match suggested) for properties within 5 working days of advertising cycle ending
- Advise all applicants excluded from the housing register within 5 working days with the reason for the exclusion
- Assist you to bid for properties where required
- Respond to your letters, client messages and emails within 10 working days
- Respond to telephone calls within 1 working day

What we ask of you...

- Speak to us in a polite and courteous manner
- Provide us with the information we need, so we can help you
- Contact us if you are unable to keep appointments
- Inform us with any changes in your circumstances which may affect the service we provide to you
- If you are unhappy with the service you have received, please contact us
- If you are happy with the service let us know

2. Statement on Choice

Choice and Constraints

We are committed to offering the greatest choice possible in the allocation of housing through the Home Choice Plus scheme but this is in the context of considerable pressure on allocations within our social housing stock and we will therefore have qualification criteria covering who is and isn't eligible to join the waiting list.

Whilst keen to encourage and facilitate mobility within housing, the Home Choice Plus Partnership recognises that provision of choice has to be balanced along with local needs. Those without a connection to any Local Authority within the partnership, will not be eligible to go on the housing register unless they meet one of the exceptions criteria.

In determining priority for housing within the banding structure, a higher degree of preference will be awarded to applicants who have the greatest need and have a local connection within a Local Authority area.

Applicants have the opportunity to view details of all properties that are available and to choose to 'bid' for properties for which they are eligible.

Whilst a key objective of the Home Choice Plus scheme is to offer applicants more choice, there will be a number of exceptional situations where this may not be possible, for instance;

- Where the applicant does not meet the eligibility criteria for the scheme or the vacant property.
- Where a Local Lettings Plan has been agreed and the applicant does not qualify.
- Where there is a legal agreement restricting who can be offered the property.

These exceptional circumstances will be made clear when the property is advertised, unless the exceptional circumstance concerns the individual specifically (who has bid for the property) in which case it will be discussed with the applicant at the point of allocation.

The Home Choice Plus Partnership will collect information from applicants regarding their particular preferences regarding where they want to live. This is to support our work in identifying housing needs and demands within specific parts of districts.

3. Eligibility and Reasonable Preference

Who is and who is not eligible under this Scheme.

Who can apply to register on the Home Choice Plus scheme?

Any United Kingdom resident aged 16 years or over can apply to join the scheme by completing an application form. The Home Choice Plus policy does exercise an eligibility criteria and so not all applications will be accepted where there is no close association to the area and/or where there is no housing need (please see information on Bronze Plus and Bronze Banding on pages XX and XX) . Please see the following sections regarding the eligibility criteria.

Anybody can make joint applications including married couples, civil partners, cohabiting couples, same sex couples, and brothers and sisters. In such cases, it is usual for a joint tenancy to be granted in the event of an offer of accommodation being made. The eligibility of applicants to be on the Housing Register will also be checked at the point of allocation.

Qualification Eligibility Criteria

Applicants are not eligible to join the Home Choice Plus housing register unless they met the qualifying criteria of a close association outlined below;

In determining whether the household has a close association we will agree a connection exists in the following circumstances;

- Where the local connection arises due to residency the household must have lived in the partnership area (by choice) for a minimum period of two years.
- Where the household meets any of the statutory homelessness definitions included in the allocations policy including the local connection definitions in s199, Part VII Housing Act 1996.
- Where the local connection arises due to employment, they must have been in permanent, paid employment for a minimum period of six months, within one of the Local Authority areas included in the Partnership.
- Where the household has a close family member who has lived in the relevant Local Authority, for a minimum period of five years.
- Where the applicant is a member of the armed forces there are special arrangements – please see pages 18 and XX of this policy
- has a local connection as a result of special circumstances

Local connection for homeless purposes will be assessed having regard to the definition of local connection contained in Section 199 Housing Act 1996 (in the case of homeless applicants) and the various codes of guidance.

In determining permanent employment we will give consideration to the Local Government Association guidelines which state that this is employment other than that of a casual nature.

In determining close family member we mean mother, father, sister, brother or adult child (aged 18 and over).

If an applicant claims a connection on the basis of special circumstances e.g. a care leaver from the Partnership accommodated elsewhere, then the decision about allowing them on the list must be made to a senior officer or manager.

Applicants with a connection to the partnership, but without a district local connection will be awarded a Silver Plus, Silver or Bronze Band, depending on their housing need except with the Local Authority area where they have a connection.

For the purposes of determining eligibility on residency grounds, living in the Local Authority area will not include the following:

- Occupation of a mobile home, caravan or motor caravan where it is not their only or principal home
- Occupation of a holiday letting (which includes a permanent building, hotel or bed and breakfast accommodation) for the purposes of a holiday.
- Resident of a prison, Bail Hostel or other such accommodation.
- In-Patient of Hospitals/specialist centres

Age Eligibility Criteria

Young people aged between 16 – 18

Young people aged between 16 and 18 can apply to Home Choice Plus and will be registered. For young people under the age of 18 years the Housing Association may grant permission to allow the occupation of a property by way of an “Equitable Tenancy” however a Housing Association / Registered Providers will not normally grant a tenancy to anyone under the age of 18 years unless they are also able to provide a guarantor to cover rent. Please refer to individual Housing Association and Registered Providers policies for more details.

Applicants who are not eligible to join the housing register

At the point of registration all applicants are asked for information about their housing history and legal status to establish eligibility to join the housing register under the relevant legislation and this allocations policy.

Applicants are not assessed for the Scheme or placed into a Band until a decision has been made regarding their eligibility.

Persons from abroad

People from abroad come to the participating Local Authority areas to live, work and study. The majority of foreign nationals arriving in this area will not immediately qualify for social housing and are therefore more likely to rent in the private sector.

A person from abroad (or two or more persons jointly if any of them is an ineligible person) is ineligible for an allocation of housing accommodation if he is subject to immigration control within the meaning of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996, or is excluded from entitlement to housing benefit by section 115 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 (c 33) (exclusion from benefits) unless he is of a class prescribed

by regulations made by the Secretary of State. Persons who are subject to immigration control and eligible for housing assistance are;

- 1) Refugee status
- 2) Exceptional leave to remain
- 3) Indefinite leave to remain

Nationals of a country that has ratified the European Convention on Social and Medical Assistance (ECSMA) or the European Social Charter provided they are habitually resident in the CTA and are lawfully present in the UK. If you have any further questions regarding your status and if this applies please contact your local authority or their agent or seek independent legal advice.

Households who are living abroad and therefore not habitually resident will not be eligible to register.

This does not apply to a person who is already a secure or introductory tenant, or an assured tenant of housing accommodation allocated to him by a local housing authority.

Applicants who were considered as ineligible due to immigration status can re-apply at any time.

Persons with no local connection to the Partnership

Applicants who have no local connection to the Partnership or who have lived in one of the Partnership areas for less than two years (and don't meet any other eligibility criteria) will not be eligible to join Home Choice Plus..

Whilst we want to give priority to applicants who have a close association or local connection to one or more of the Local Authority areas we recognise that some categories of applicant will be exceptions to the close association or local connection criteria outlined above and on page 33. This would include the following;

- Households accepted as homeless and one of the Local Authorities has accepted a full duty to them under the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by Homelessness Act 2002) which has not yet been discharged
- One of the Local Authorities are satisfied that the applicant needs to live in the area to provide ongoing, regular and significant care and support to a relative who lives in the area and their application is supported by the local Adult or Childrens Services team.
- One of the Local Authorities (or its agent) have agreed to rehouse the applicant under a reciprocal agreement with their current landlord or local authority
- Rehousing or relocation into the Local Authority area is accepted by the Local Authority (or its agent) as being essential due to public protection issues or for other exceptional reasons.
- Members of armed forces as shown on page xx

- Where a Local Letting Plan or s106 restriction applies on a specific site

Unacceptable behaviour

Where the applicant, or a member of their household, has been guilty of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make him unsuitable to be a tenant of the relevant authority, they will be ineligible for registration.

Unacceptable behaviour is defined as behaviour which would, if an applicant or member of their household was a secure tenant, entitle a landlord to outright possession under any of the Grounds 1 to 7, Schedule 2 of the Housing Act 1985.

Unacceptable behaviour can include:

- Owing significant rent arrears and/or failing to comply with a current tenancy condition with a Council, Housing Association or private landlord to such an extent that a Court would grant a possession order.
- Conviction for using the property for an illegal or immoral purpose.
- Causing nuisance and annoyance to neighbours or visitors for example anti-social behaviour.
- Being convicted for committing certain indictable offences in or near the home and still posing a threat to neighbours or the community.
- Being violent towards a partner or members of the family.
- Allowing the condition of the property to deteriorate.
- Allowing any furniture or fixtures provided by the landlord to deteriorate due to ill treatment.
- Obtaining a tenancy by deception, for example by giving untrue information.
- Paying money to illegally obtain a tenancy.
- Having lost tied accommodation provided in connection with employment due to conduct making it inappropriate for the person to reside there.

In determining whether an applicant is ineligible due to unacceptable behaviour, the Council, or its agent, will consider:

- Has the applicant or a member of the applicant's household been guilty of unacceptable behaviour?
- Was the unacceptable behaviour serious enough to have entitled the Landlord to obtain an order for possession?
- At the time of the application, is the applicant still unsuitable to be a tenant by reason of that behaviour, or the behaviour of a member of their household who wishes to reside with them?

The applicant will be excluded from the housing register and the applicant does have a right to review against this decision. This decision will be taken by the District Council, or its agent. An applicant may be rendered ineligible at anytime during the process should Home Choice Plus become satisfied that they are ineligible.

Applicants classified as being ineligible through “unacceptable behaviour” (and ineligible through their immigration status) can make an application for accommodation in the future. It is for the Local Authority (or it’s agent) to consider behaviour, at the point of application to the housing register, and whether the applicant is now eligible under the Policy.

Each application will be assessed on its merits and a decision regarding eligibility will be made accordingly. Anyone deemed ineligible for the Scheme will be provided with a full written explanation for the decision and will have a right of review of the decision.

Please see the section on Reviews below.

Armed Forces

Members of the UK armed forces stationed abroad will be considered as living in the United Kingdom for the purposes of applying for social housing.

The Localism Act 2011 amends the Housing Act 1996 to give local housing authorities in England the power to decide what classes of persons are or are not qualifying persons under section 160ZA(7) of the Housing Act 1996, for an allocation of housing accommodation.

The Secretary of State has the power to prescribe in Regulations criteria that may not be used by local housing authorities in deciding what classes of persons are not qualifying persons (section 160ZA(8)(b)). These Regulations require that local housing authorities do not use local connection (within the meaning of section 199 of the Housing Act 1996) as a criterion in deciding whether the following are not qualifying persons:

- (a) persons who are serving in the regular forces or have done so in the five years preceding their application for an allocation of housing accommodation;
- (b) bereaved spouses or civil partners of those serving in the regular forces where their spouse or partner’s death is attributable (wholly or partly) to their service and the bereaved spouse or civil partner’s entitlement to reside in Ministry of Defence accommodation then ceases;
- (c) seriously injured, ill or disabled reservists (or former reservists) whose injury, illness or disability is attributable wholly or partly to their service.

The Application of Reasonable Preference

Home Choice Plus is required by law to assess the relative priority that housing applicants are awarded. This is particularly important when, as is the case with the

Home Choice Plus partnership area, the demand for social housing is greater than the availability of homes.

The law, as it applies to local housing authorities, requires that Reasonable Preference for housing must be given to those in the categories set out in the Housing Act 1996 (as amended). The statutory Reasonable Preference categories cover:

- All homeless people as defined in Part VII of the Housing Act 1996
- People who are owed an accommodation duty because they have a priority need but are intentionally homeless (under s190 (2)), because they are not in priority need and not homeless intentionally 193 (2) or because they are threatened with homelessness, in priority need and not intentionally homeless (195 (2) of the 1996 Act (or under section 65 (2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985) or who are occupying accommodation secured by any housing authority under section (192 (3).
- People occupying unsanitary, overcrowded or otherwise unsatisfactory housing;
- People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds (including grounds relating to a disability);
- People who need to move to a particular locality within the district to avoid hardship to themselves or others.

Specific details and examples of how Reasonable Preference and priorities are determined and applied are detailed in section 5: The Banding Structure.

Determining priority between applicants with Reasonable Preference

Home Choice Plus determines priority between applicants with Reasonable Preference by taking into account various factors including:

- The financial resources available to a person to meet their housing costs.
- Any local connection – as defined in s199 Housing Act 1996 (as amended) – that an applicant has with the Home Choice Plus area.
- The length of time the applicant has been waiting within their current band
- Reducing preference because of applicant's behaviour or circumstancesCommunity contribution made by the household

4. Registration and Assessment Process

How to Apply

Before anyone can apply for vacancies advertised through the Home Choice Plus scheme they must first register.

Initial registration can be completed;

- online www.homechoiceplus.org.uk
- by requesting and completing a registration form
- at Home Choice Plus partner offices

An advocate (for example, a family member, friend or support agency) can complete the registration form on behalf of an applicant who is requesting assistance.

If the applicant is not eligible to register they will be notified in writing giving the reason for the decision and informing them of their right to request a review.

All applications once received will be assessed and placed in the appropriate band. Assessment may involve a home visit or interview to discuss housing options.

Where additional information is required to confirm that a higher band is appropriate, the application may be placed in a lower band until the circumstances of the applicant have been confirmed.

Once registered with the Home Choice Plus scheme the applicant will be given a membership number.

Applicants to the scheme are entitled to request details from any of the partners about information that has been used to make a decision on their registration. Partners' contact details can be found at Appendix 2.

Help with registration

Help with registration can be given to applicants by any member of the Home Choice Plus Partnership as well as other organisations such as County Council social care services, health workers, support workers and voluntary bodies.

In particular, help will be provided to applicants who find it hard to fully participate in the scheme.

This document and others are available in a range of formats on request from the Home Choice Partnership.

Support can be offered to assist an applicant to use the system where they are interested and ready to move. Access to the system can be provided through the Worcestershire Hubs, Housing Associations' offices and Local Authorities' offices.

Training can also be offered to a range of local organisations and support workers on a regular basis to enable them to be able to help applicants with accessing the scheme. Staff from the partner Local Authority and Housing Associations will be able to work with anyone that the applicant has requested to act on their behalf, subject to the applicant's written consent.

Definition of Household Types

Your household type determines the size and type of housing you may be eligible for.

Single person (under 60)	One person household and with no resident children A woman who is less than 25 weeks pregnant
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Couple	Married, cohabiting, civil partnership and same sex couples without resident children or with a woman who is less than 25 weeks pregnant
Family	Single parent or couple (as defined above) with minimum of one dependant child, who lives with parent (s) as the main or principal home A woman who is 25 weeks pregnant or more
Pensioner / Disability Living Allowance (DLA) / Personal Independence Payment (PIP)	One person household and couples over 60 or person in receipt of DLA / PIP
Other	Any other household group including friends, brother and sister and families with non dependent children

In order to reflect your housing requirement for a particular property type or size the Local Authorities, or their agents, may need to put the applicant into a different category in order to achieve a correct allocation Example – if the applicant is a single person with a medical need that means they require a larger property for a resident carer, their household type will be amended to “family” or “other” to enable them to bid.

The Home Choice Plus process

- 1** You can register for Home Choice Plus by filling in a housing application either online at www.homechoiceplus.org.uk or requesting a paper application form from any of the contact points.
- 2** Once we have registered you, we will send you confirmation of the registration number and the band you have been placed in.
- 3** Vacant properties will be advertised each week and applicants are advised to look for suitable vacancies regularly.
- 4** You can make up to 3 bids per week, as long as you match what the advert asks for.
- 5** The applicant with the highest priority and who has been in the relevant band the longest will be considered for the property.
- 6** The successful applicant will be contacted by the Landlord and asked for information such as proof of identity. A viewing will be arranged and if you are accepted an offer will be made.

5. The Banding Structure

Home Choice Plus operates a needs-based banding system as described below. Bands are arranged to reflect housing need, with the highest band indicating the greatest need for housing. The scheme consists of eight bands, as summarised below. A more detailed description of the bands and of Reasonable Preference can be found under each band section.

The bands within the policy are based on the reasonable preference criteria set out within the 1996 Housing Act.

Once registered the applicant can only be in one band per Local Authority and the highest banding possible will always be applied according to the policy.

The table below describes the bands into which households will be placed according to their housing circumstances.

Priority (3 month time limit)

Applicants who are statutorily homeless with a duty to re-house under s193 of Housing Act 1996 (eligible, homeless, priority need, not intentional and with a local connection).

Gold Plus (6 months time limit) (Local Connection)

- Homeless cases where no statutory duty to re-house (excludes intentional homeless)
- Homeless cases accepted for a full rehousing duty by a Local Authority within the partnership (but not the LA that accepted the duty)
- Occupying property in a serious state of disrepair; factors taken into consideration by the Local Authority or its agent include where the Local Authority could have served an improvement notice for a Category 1 hazard or equivalent (not for overcrowding and space hazards)
- Verified high medical need / disability that is directly affected by the current housing situation and would be immediately improved by moving
- Applicant is homeless or threatened with homelessness, through no fault of their own (excludes those in priority band)
- Requiring move-on from supported accommodation
- Tenants who are under-occupying social rent or affordable rent housing in the Home Choice Plus partnership area
- Tenants who are occupying a social housing property in the Home Choice Plus partnership area with major adaptations that they do not need
- Households suffering with serious overcrowding (3 or more bedrooms lacking)
- Two or more criteria in Gold

Gold (12 months time limit) (Local Connection)

- Households who have been determined to have become homeless intentionally
- Households suffering from harassment (excludes priority band cases)
- Overcrowding or lacking up to and including 2 bedrooms

<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Living in exceptional circumstances▪ Households with children under 10 years old and living in upstairs flat▪ Households suffering with some disrepair in their property
<p>Silver Plus (6 months time limit) (No Local Connection)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Homeless cases where there is no statutory duty to re-house (excludes intentional homeless and those in a priority band)▪ Homeless cases accepted for a full rehousing duty by a Local Authority within the partnership (but not the LA that accepted the duty)▪ Properties in a serious state of disrepair; factors taken into consideration by the Local Authority or its agent include where the Local Authority could have served an improvement notice for a Category 1 hazard or equivalent (not for overcrowding and space hazards)▪ Verified high medical need / disability that is directly affected by the current housing situation and would be immediately improved by moving▪ Applicant is homeless or threatened with homelessness, through no fault of their own▪ Applicant requires move-on from supported accommodation▪ Tenants who are under-occupying social rent or affordable rent housing in the Home Choice Plus partnership area▪ Tenants who are occupying a social housing property in the Home Choice plus partnership area with major adaptations that they do not need▪ Households suffering with serious overcrowding (3 or more bedrooms lacking)▪ Two or more criteria in silver
<p>Silver (12 months time limit) (No Local Connection)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Households who have been determined to have become homeless Intentionally▪ Households suffering from harassment (excludes priority band cases)▪ Overcrowding or lacking up to and including 2 bedrooms▪ Living in exceptional circumstances▪ Households with children under 10 years old and living in upstairs flat <p>Households suffering with some disrepair in their property</p>
<p>Reduced Banding (with reasonable preference)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Households with financial resources above defined limits▪ Households who have deliberately worsened their circumstances to qualify for a higher banding▪ Households with housing-related debts owed to a Local Authority or Housing Association▪ Households who have committed acts of anti-social behaviour and other tenancy breaches but not severe enough to have obtained outright possession▪ Households who aren't bidding for properties that are available and suitable for their needs or successfully bid but then refuse properties that are suitable for their needs
<p>Bronze Plus (no time limit) (Local Connection)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Households who do not meet any of the above reasonable preference

criteria and with a local connection, and who may have a low housing need including;

- Eligible and interested in shared ownership
- Eligible and interested in older peoples accommodation
- Households with low level medical or welfare issues
- Households that are newly forming
- Households who are suffering financial hardship
- Households who are sharing facilities with other non-related households
- Households residing in an institution or supported housing scheme e.g. hospital with no access to settled accommodation
- Households who have insecurity of tenure (those in tied accommodation or lodging with family members)
- In social housing and seeking a transfer

Bronze (no time limit) (No Local Connection)

- Households who do not meet any of the above reasonable preference criteria and without a local connection, and who may have low housing need

Cumulative Preference in Gold and Silver Bands

Applicants whose circumstances match more than one criterion in the Gold or Silver bands will be awarded 'cumulative preference', which means that they will move up a band. For example, an applicant who met two or more criteria in Gold band would be awarded Gold Plus banding. An applicant who met two or more criteria in Silver band would be awarded Silver Plus banding. If you fit the criteria for two or more reasonable preference categories in Gold you will move into Gold Plus but can't then move to the higher (priority) band unless you are accepted for the rehousing duty under s193 Housing Act 1996. This also applies to applicants with two or more reasonable preference categories in silver band. If they move into Silver Plus and have further reasonable preference categories they can't move up into Gold or Gold Plus unless they have a local connection.

Applicants who have been found to be intentionally homeless, within the Gold and Silver Band, will not qualify for a cumulative preference award.

The Bandings Explained

Priority Band

(Awarded for 3 months)

The following criteria will lead to Priority band being awarded:

Statutory Homeless with a duty to re-house

Priority band is awarded by the Local Authority or their agent where the local authority or its agent has accepted a full duty under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996

(as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) to provide accommodation for an applicant.

The priority band can only be used in the Local Authority area where the homeless duty exists or in another Local Authority area within the scheme if a referral has been agreed. Within the other Partnership areas the applicant will be in a reasonable preference band, usually Gold Plus where there is a local connection to the District, or Silver Plus where there is no local connection.

Gold Plus

(Local Connection and High housing need – awarded for 6 months)

The following criteria will lead to Gold Plus band being awarded:

Homeless cases where no statutory duty to re-house (excludes intentional homeless)

Gold Plus band is awarded by the local authority or its agent where an applicant is determined under the homelessness legislation to be eligible for assistance, homeless, not in priority need, not homeless intentionally and has a local connection to that Local Authority.

Properties subject to serious disrepair

Gold Plus band is awarded where an applicant is living in sub-standard accommodation (regardless of the tenure) and (following confirmation or notification by the relevant Officer) it is determined that action is required under the Housing Act 2004. This would be for a Category 1 hazard that is very severe and may have led to the service of the following notices (only);

- Emergency Remedial Action
- Demolition or Clearance Orders
- Improvement Notices for Category 1 hazard (other than for overcrowding and space)

NB In circumstances where the applicant is in a Local Authority tenancy and the LA can't serve notice upon itself then this category would still be awarded where a notice would be served if the tenure was different.

Where applicants report poor housing conditions, the relevant Officers may inspect the property to consider using their powers to remedy hazards.

Home Choice Plus will need to liaise with the relevant Officer on a regular basis to check that the property circumstances are still in disrepair prior to an offer of accommodation being made.

Where the property disrepair has been remedied the applicant's banding will need to be reassessed.

Where a notice has been served that prohibits occupation or the disrepair is so serious that the relevant Officer advises occupation of the property is not appropriate on health and safety grounds, applicants will be dealt with under the Homelessness legislation.

High Medical Need or Disability

This band is awarded following an assessment by Home Choice Plus, of the evidence provided by the applicant and/or by the preferred medical advisor in relation to their health and/or disability.

An applicant will normally be expected to complete a medical assessment if they have indicated that there is a medical or disability problem that is made substantially worse by their current housing. Their circumstances will be assessed by a Home Choice Plus officer based on evidence provided by the applicant, and we will consider evidence from all appropriate medical professionals.

This banding will only be awarded if the current accommodation is so unsuitable in relation to their medical, welfare or disability needs that a move is essential. The assessment is not of the applicant's health, but how their health or welfare is affected by their accommodation.

The following are examples of cases that would qualify for this band:

- The applicant's accommodation is directly contributing to the deterioration of the applicant's health; e.g. severe chest condition requiring intermittent hospitalisation as a result of prolonged periods of exposure to damp (i.e. mould spore allergens). The most vulnerable group is that of persons aged 14 and under. The effects of damp must be recognised as severe under the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System as assessed by a the relevant Officer.
- A person with a severe disability requiring substantial adaptations to a property which are not provided in their current accommodation and where the property cannot be adapted.
- A person suffering with a severe and enduring mental illness or disorder where the medical condition would be significantly improved by a move to alternative accommodation.

Households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness through no fault of their own (who have not made a homeless application)

This status is awarded to all households who are homeless as defined by the Homelessness legislation but have not made a homeless application or don't wish to be considered under the homelessness legislation. and where, following investigation, it is proven that the applicant is threatened with homelessness through no fault of their own.

This banding also applies to households who have made a homeless application and been accepted for rehousing within another area of the Home Choice Plus partnership.

Tenants who are under – occupying affordable social housing or living in an adapted property where they do not require the adaptations

It is important that the best possible use is made of existing housing stock and priority will be given where a Local Authority or Housing Association tenant, in the Home Choice Plus area, applies to move to a smaller, or more appropriate type of property.

Some examples would be;

- a) Applicant's currently living in family sized accommodation, either social or affordable rent, who wish to 'downsize' and free up at least one bedroom.
- b) applicants currently living in family sized accommodation, either social or affordable rent, wishing to move to a one bed property or a two bed property designated for older people e.g. Retirement housing, Extra Care or a bungalow
- c) an applicant occupying an adapted property where they do not require the adaptations.

Please note this only applies where a family sized property or a property with substantial adaptations will become available for reletting following the move

Move on from Supported Accommodation.

This status is awarded where an agreement between the Local Authority or its agent and the Supported Housing provider, is in place for applicants to move on from supported accommodation in the Home Choice Plus area.

This status will only be awarded to applicants in supported accommodation or care-leavers where the following criteria have been met:

- The applicant is ready to move to independent settled social housing on the recommendation of the support provider
- An ongoing support package has been assessed and where required, is in place.

In the case of young people moving on from care, applicants are awarded this category in accordance with the 16- and 17-year old Joint Protocol between the Local Authority and the County Council's Children's Services Department (for the five districts within Worcestershire) and the agreement with Warwickshire County Council (in Stratford-on-Avon). Applicants must be a former "Relevant Child" as defined by the Children Act 1989.

The evidence to support this will be provided by the County Council's leaving care service and will consist of confirmation that:

- The care-leaver is ready to move to independent settled housing and is genuinely prepared for a move to independent living.
- The care-leaver possesses the life skills to manage a tenancy including managing a rent account.
- An ongoing support package has been assessed and where required, is in place.

Applicants are expected to make full use of their priority by placing bids on all suitable properties to enable them to move on to independent accommodation. Home Choice Plus officers may use their discretion to place bids on behalf of the applicant where bids are not being placed or are being inappropriately placed to facilitate

move-on through supported accommodation. This will be done in consultation with the applicant and (if relevant) their support worker.

Children accommodated out of area by Children's Services or Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children under the responsibility of Worcestershire County Council will be awarded a Gold Plus band under move on from supported accommodation and will be granted a local connection with the five District Councils within Worcestershire where they don't have a specific connection to one Local Authority.

Serious Overcrowding

Applicants lacking three or more bedrooms will be awarded Gold Plus band e.g. where the applicant has a four bedroom need and is living in a one bedroom property.

Overcrowding assessments will include all household occupants and the overall size of the property in determining the band, regardless of whether the whole household wish to be rehoused together or not.

Applicants who claim they are overcrowded will have their circumstances assessed against the Home Choice Plus Bedroom Standard. The table below shows the bedroom entitlement for adults and children:

Home Choice Plus Bedroom Standard			
Household Make-up	Suitable Property Size :		
	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed
Single Person	✓		
Childless Couple	✓		
Parent(s) & 1 child		✓	
25+ weeks pregnant woman with or without partner and no other children		✓	
Parent(s) and 2 children of same sex aged between 0 and 16		✓	
Parent(s) and 2 children of same sex over 16			✓
Parent(s) and 2 children of different sex under the age of 10		✓	
Parent(s) and 2 children of different sex when the oldest reaches 10			✓
Parent(s) and 3 children – 2 of same			✓

sex aged between 0 and 16. Plus 1 other child			
Parent(s) and 3 children - 2 of different sex under the age of 10. Plus 1 other child			✓

To calculate the property size eligibility for larger households, please use the following guidance:

- 2 children of the same sex are able to share a room until the oldest reaches the age of 16, at which point an additional bedroom will be required.
- 2 children of different sex are able to share a room until the oldest reaches the age of 10, at which point an additional bedroom will be required.

For example:

A family with 2 parents and 3 children of the following age and sex:

- one girl aged 4
- one girl aged 6
- one boy aged 10

are eligible for a 3 bedroom property (one bedroom for the parents, one for the two girls and one for the boy).

A family with 2 parents and 3 children of the following age and sex:

- one girl aged 4
- one girl aged 16
- one boy aged 10

are eligible for a 4 bedroom property (one bedroom for the parents, one for the boy, one for the 4 year old girl and one for the 16 year old girl).

The appropriate Home Choice Plus senior officer within the Local Authority / agent may exercise discretion in deviating from the Bedroom Standard to increase the number of rooms an applicant requires. Examples would include where an extra room is required to accommodate a carer on health grounds, or where the applicant is a registered foster carer.

The bedroom standard allows the policy to determine whether there is underoccupation or overcrowding for the purposes of banding. The HA will determine, through their allocation policy the type and size of property an applicant can occupy.

Gold Plus or Gold (please see below) will also apply to applicants needing to be rehoused on the application if they have no bed spaces available to them.

Evidence of overcrowding must be provided at the point of registration and allocation of accommodation and may be verified by a home visit.

There may be some exceptions to the bedroom requirements including the following;

- where there is a carer included in the household
- where there is a disabled child in the household and they are sharing a room with another child
- where the household has care and supervision responsibilities for other children not normally residing with the household

Including a carer as part of the household – check to see where else we included carers later in section

A carer is someone who, with or without payment, provides help and support to a partner, relative, friend or neighbour, who would not manage without their help. This could be due to age, physical or mental health, addiction, or disability. In all cases the carer must have been identified by the applicant as the person who is primarily responsible for providing them with care and that they need to live with them.

Even if a carer is in receipt of Carer's Allowance this does not necessarily mean that it is necessary for them to reside with the person who is being cared for. An application to include a carer on a housing application will be considered if the need for a carer has been assessed by a relevant specialist organisation e.g. a social care, health professional as needing to provide overnight support by a resident carer. In these circumstances the applicant must provide supporting evidence from other agencies e.g. Social Care or a Health professional.

In some limited circumstances it may be possible to consider cases where the carer is not in receipt of Carer's Allowance but would be eligible. Under these circumstances it will still be necessary for the applicant to demonstrate that the person looked after is in receipt of a relevant care related benefit.

Household with a disabled child

CG to give me some form of words.

Households with access to other children

Anyone with access to children will need to demonstrate their involvement in the care and supervision of the child. A senior officer within the Local Authority or their agent will give consideration to factors including regularity of contact, who claims the relevant benefits for the child and any residency orders as well as legislation, codes of guidance and case law in determining which parent has primary responsibility for the children. Please note: the bedroom standard assessment is for determining overcrowding and does not guarantee that an applicant will be offered the exact property size for their household needs. In particular, where their housing need exceeds four bedrooms but there is a limited supply of larger properties within the Home Choice Plus partnership they are unlikely to be offered social housing that exactly meets their needs. Also households that include other adults rather than children may find it difficult to obtain social housing where they require larger properties normally allocated only to households with children, as priority is usually given for family houses to people with dependant children within the Housing Association / Registered Provider's allocation policies.

There may be other special circumstances subject to emerging case law where the bedroom standard does not apply and this will be determined by a senior officer or manager.

Silver Plus

(No Local Connection and High Housing Need – awarded for 6 months)

The Silver Plus band is awarded for the above Gold Plus preference categories where the applicant has no local connection to that participating Local Authority.

Gold

(Local Connection and Housing Need - valid for 12 months)

The following criteria will lead to Gold band being awarded:

Households who have been determined to have become homeless intentionally.

Where the local authority or its agent has carried out investigations under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) and found the applicant intentionally homeless. Where the applicant's housing need would normally be Gold Plus such as severe overcrowding or serious medical issues they will be awarded Gold Plus. Where the reason for intentionality is one of the five reasons for awarding a reduced banding, the household will be moved into the Reduced Banding category.

Households suffering from harassment

Applicants who cite harassment as the main reason for making the application will be asked to provide information about all the circumstances surrounding the application and each case will be assessed on its merits. Any enquiries will be made in a sensitive manner so as not to prejudice the safety of the applicant. Any claims of harassment should be substantiated by evidence from a third party e.g. Police, Housing Officer etc. If the harassment is deemed so severe that it is not reasonable to continue to occupy the accommodation, this will be investigated under the Homelessness legislation.

If you are suffering from domestic abuse it is likely that you will be treated as homeless and therefore awarded the appropriate homelessness-related bands.

Overcrowding or lacking required bedrooms

This applies to households who are overcrowded or lacking up to (and including) two bedrooms. Please see section above (under Gold Plus) regarding how overcrowding is determined.

Living in exceptional circumstances

This banding on Home Choice Plus should only be awarded in those instances where the applicant's living circumstances are considered to be exceptional given the prevailing housing conditions in the district and where no other banding criteria reflects or addresses the problem(s).

In reaching a decision to award the banding, account must be taken of the suitability of the current accommodation and the location of the accommodation in relation to the applicant's needs.

Examples are given below of potential situations where this banding may be granted – the list is not exhaustive and the decision lies with the Local Authority / agent assessing the application.

- The applicant is adequately housed but needs to give or receive support on the grounds of disability or illness that is substantial and ongoing and it is not possible for the person giving care to use public transport or their own transport to provide assistance.
- The applicant needs to move on welfare grounds e.g. hardship.
- The applicant's household is overcrowded, coupled with medical issues that do not accrue medical priority e.g. ADHD, autism.
- The applicant needs to take up or continue employment, education and/or training that is not available elsewhere and they do not live within reasonable commuting distance

Households with Children living in upstairs flats or maisonettes

This status is awarded to households with children under 10 and living in an above ground floor flat or maisonette. This may be verified by a home visit.

Properties suffering from disrepair

Properties that are suffering from disrepair (regardless of tenure) that is not deemed to be severe or a threat to the health and safety of the occupier will be awarded this band following confirmation or notification from the relevant Officer. Normally disrepair would be assumed to be Category 1 where a hazard awareness notice has been served, and Category 2 where category D (or equivalent) hazards exist (as defined under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System, part 1 of the Housing Act 2004) except for overcrowding and space assessment which is assessed separately under the Home Choice Plus overcrowding policy.

Home Choice Plus will need to liaise with the relevant Officer on a regular basis to check that the property circumstances are still in disrepair prior to an offer of accommodation being made.

Silver

(No Local Connection – valid for 12 months)

The Silver band is awarded for the above Gold preference categories where the applicant has no local connection to that participating Local Authority.

Reduced Banding

(Reasonable preference but reduced priority)

This band will be used for households in reasonable preference categories where their priority is reduced for one of the following reasons;

Applicants will be banded according to their current housing need but demoted to the reduced priority band. This decision will be reassessed by the District Council or their agent after a period of six months, or at the applicant's request at any time.

1. Financial Resources

Owner occupiers and people with sufficient financial resources available to them to meet their housing needs will be placed in reduced priority.

Applicants who have a household income (including benefits) of more than £35,000 per annum and / or savings/capital/assets/equity of £50,000 that will enable them to access and maintain private accommodation will be encouraged and supported to do so through our housing options service. The figure has been set at 35k as this is a figure from the Worcestershire Strategic Housing Market Assessment as the level by which households can afford private rented accommodation in the highest rental area. Any household in receipt of a means tested benefit will not be subject to this reduced banding criteria.

Applicants will be asked to give income and asset/savings/capital details at the point of application and if, at that stage, they exceed the threshold their banding will be the Reduced Banding category (where they have a housing need). The income and assets/capital/savings details will also be considered at the point of offer to ensure the applicant is still on the correct banding.

The financial resources of an armed forces applicant will be disregarded where it is a lump sum that was received as compensation for an injury or disability sustained on active service.

Financial thresholds may also be determined by Registered Social Landlords and applicants should contact individual organisations where they believe income or capital may be an issue at the point they are made an offer of accommodation.

2. Deliberately worsening housing circumstances

Where there is evidence that an applicant has deliberately worsened their circumstances in order to qualify for higher priority on Home Choice Plus, this priority will be reduced. This would include circumstances where an applicant surrendered their tenancy, where it was reasonable to occupy and against the advice of the Housing Advice / Options Officer or where they moved to a property that was smaller than their requirements.

3. Housing related debts

Where households have housing related debts these will be assessed by the District Council, or their agent. The officer must establish the debts have arisen from a deliberate act or omission that leads to non-payment.

The applicants will be encouraged to make affordable arrangements to pay and they will be placed within the reduced priority band until an affordable arrangement has been reached with who they owe the money and the applicant is maintaining regular payments. The Local Authority will expect the debtor to demonstrate they have taken reasonable steps to resolve the issue prior to reducing the banding given. For this circumstance to apply the debt must not be more than six years old (as after this the debt cannot be recovered).

4. Anti – social behaviour and other tenancy breaches

Where there has been a breach of tenancy such as anti-social behaviour, or due to the property condition, the applicant will be placed within the reduced priority band. The Local Authority will expect the landlord where the problems occurred, to demonstrate they have taken reasonable steps to resolve the issue prior to reducing the banding given.

5. No bidding or refuses offers of accommodation

Where applicants in the Gold Plus, Silver Plus, Gold and Silver bands have failed to place bids, or have placed successful bids but refused properties, and there is evidence that properties that would meet their needs have been advertised on Home Choice Plus, their banding will be reviewed within the set time period above and they will be placed in the Reduced Banding category.

Reducing an applicants banding

The banding for a household (in reasonable preference) can be reduced if one of the following circumstances apply;

1. Financial Resources
2. Deliberately worsening circumstances
3. Housing related debts
4. Anti-social behaviour and other tenancy breaches
5. No bidding or refusing offers of accommodation

Applicants will be banded according to their current housing need but demoted to the reduced priority band. This decision will be reassessed by the District Council or their agent after a period of six months, or at the applicant's request at any time.

Housing Related Debt

The reduced priority band will apply to those with rent arrears, recharges, former tenancy arrears, rent deposit debt etc where the debt is £500 or they owe the equivalent of 6 or more weeks target rent (whichever amount is the smaller). The RSL will need to notify the Local Authority (or its agent) of the arrears and any arrangements made with the applicant. Where the applicant can demonstrate a regular payment history (complying with the agreement) for three months or more and the debt is less than £500 the Local Authority will move them back to the correct banding. The Local Authority will exercise its discretion, depending on individual circumstances where there are mitigating circumstances or an urgent need to move.

ASB / Tenancy Breaches

The reduced priority band will apply to applicants who are guilty of anti-social behaviour or tenancy breaches where formal legal action has been commenced e.g. injunction, ASBO, CRIMBO or Notice etc. This would include anyone found guilty of sub-letting a social housing tenancy and waste /neglect of the property. The officer must consider any particular support needs the applicant might have and whether this is having an impact on their behaviour before we reduce the applicants banding. The officer should only consider recent tenancy breaches / anti social behaviour e.g. over the last 2/3 years.

The officer can reinstate the correct banding where the tenancy breach is resolved or the applicant can demonstrate changed behaviour over a reasonable timescale.

Deliberately Worsening Circumstances

Where there is evidence that an applicant has deliberately worsened their circumstances in order to qualify for higher priority on Home Choice Plus, this priority will be reduced. This may include the following;

- Unsuitable property choice – e.g. with stairs if need ground floor
- Overcrowding – e.g. moved in with others / moved others in by choice
- Causing disrepair – including not allowing access
- Giving up a suitable tenancy
- Adaptations – apply to move within 5 years and still meets need
- Refused support which could have maintained tenancy

Officer must consider the particular applicants circumstances and particularly issues of vulnerability or where poor advice has been given before reducing the persons banding.

No bidding or refuses offers of accommodation

Where applicants in the Gold Plus, Silver Plus, Gold and Silver bands have failed to place bids, or have placed successful bids but refused properties, and there is evidence that properties that would meet their needs have been advertised on Home Choice Plus, their banding will be reviewed within the set time period above and they will be placed in the Reduced Banding category.

The officer must consider the households' vulnerability and any issues that may have affected their behaviour at the time e.g. domestic abuse, mental health problems.

Bronze Plus

(Local Connection)

(Please note this banding will be reassessed after one year where no bids have been placed)

All applicants who live, work or have a local connection as defined by s199 Housing Act 1996, to a particular district in the Home Choice Plus partnership and do not meet any of the reasonable preference criteria, as set out above, and have low housing need.

Where the household has a low level housing need due to medical, disability or welfare conditions / issues, the banding will only be awarded where the condition / issue will be improved by a move to alternative accommodation.

Insert list in here

Home Choice Plus Allocation Scheme does not recognise insecurity of tenure where the applicant is in an assured shorthold tenancy in the private rented sector unless there is another issue arising such as threat of homelessness or disrepair.

Bronze

(No Local Connection - reassessed after one year where no bids have been placed)

All applicants who have a local connection with one of the districts (minimum residency of two years) in the Home Choice Plus partnership and do not meet any of the reasonable preference criteria, as set out above, but have a low housing need.

Time Limited Bands

A number of the bands are awarded on a time limited basis, i.e. for 3, 6, 12 months and two years (where the applicant hasn't bid). At the end of the time limit, if an applicant has not been successfully housed, the Local Authority or its agent will reassess the application and contact the applicant to confirm their circumstances and/or bidding pattern. Please see the Reviews / Complaints Section on page 45 for more information.

Local Connection

In order to ensure that Home Choice Plus meets the housing needs of local communities, we will award a higher band to those applicants with a Local Connection to each relevant Local Authority.

Example - Applicant with medical need with local connection to Bromsgrove but no other Local Authority area will be placed in Gold Plus when bidding within Bromsgrove and Silver Plus for all of the other Local Authorities.

To determine the relevant local connection banding of a household, who meet the eligibility criteria for registering on the waiting list, we would use the following;

- has lived in the relevant Local Authority area by choice for a certain time (for six months out of the last 12 months or for three years out of the last five years);
- has close family living in the relevant Local Authority area, who have been permanently resident for at least the previous five years;
- has permanent paid employment in the relevant Local Authority area for a minimum period of six months
- has a local connection as a result of special circumstances

Waiting Time

New applicants are placed into a bronze or bronze plus band, while we assess their housing need and their waiting time will be from the date of registration (the effective date); this will be the date the form is received and date stamped at the office of the Local Authority (or its agent), or on the date the form is received online.

If an applicant is moved up into a higher band (following assessment) then the date they moved into that band will override the registration date (effective date). Please note it can take up to four weeks to assess a banding.

If the applicant remains in or moves down to a Bronze or Bronze plus band then the registration date (effective date) will apply.

Change of Circumstances

All applicants are required to notify the relevant Home Choice Plus partner, with whom they are registered, immediately of any change to their circumstances which may affect their priority for housing. Applicants will need to provide proof of their change before it is assessed.

Applicants who have had a change of circumstances and have not informed Home Choice Plus may have their application status changed to 'application pending' whilst an investigation takes place in order to determine eligibility. The applicants' banding will be reassessed at the point that they submit the change of circumstances (not at the point when the circumstances change) and this will then determine their band start date. If an applicant does not respond to contact from Home Choice Plus within one month, their application will be closed.

Applicants should notify the Home Choice Plus Partner of any change in their circumstances. For example:

- A change of address, for themselves or any other person on their application
- Any additions to the family or any other person they would wish to join the application

- Any member of the family or any other person on the application who has left the accommodation
- Any confirmed pregnancy
- Changes of name
- Changes in financial circumstances, including change of employment
- Accommodation issues
- Medical or other housing needs

Most changes of circumstances can be completed online but evidence will still be required.

Additional Preference – Community Contribution

We want to encourage applicants who can, to work and/ or volunteer so we can raise levels of aspiration, ambition and promote sustainable communities. The following criterion applies to either the applicant or joint applicant. The onus will be on the applicant or joint applicant to provide the evidence to be awarded this banding.

We will award an additional waiting time of six months if any of the following circumstances apply (please note households can qualify for one six months waiting time period regardless of how many of the below are relevant);

Applicants in Employment

Where applicants meet the required hours in employment for working tax credits thresholds and have been in employment for six out of the last nine months.

We will verify employment at point of registration, at review and at the offer stage.

Applicants Volunteering

Applicants volunteering for a minimum of 20 hours per month and for a continuous period of at least six months, at the point of application, at review and the same at the point of offer, will be given additional preference.

Volunteering must be for a not for profit organisation registered with the charity commission or otherwise recognised by the Local Authority (or their agent).

Applicants in Education and Training

This applies to applicants, who have been studying or training, which includes attending higher and further education or by accessing a vocational course of study or engaging in a programme of work related courses. This must be for a continuous period of at least six months, up to the point of application and the same at point of offer.

Training which is compulsory in order to qualify for out of work benefits will not be taken into account in awarding this additional preference.

Applicants who are full time carers

This applies to applicants who are unable to satisfy the criteria outlined above, but who care for someone on a full time basis for a period of six months and are in

receipt of carers allowance (due to disability or frailty) will also qualify for the additional preference.

Applicants with a disability

We recognise that it may not be possible for some applicants to achieve any of the community contribution due to severe disability (e.g. where you are awarded the support element of Employment Support Allowance or higher rate Disability Living Allowance / Personal Independence Payment) and in these circumstances officers will award the additional waiting time..

Members of the Armed Forces

By Armed Forces, we mean the “regular forces” and the “reserved forces” as defined by section 374 of the Armed Forces Act 2006(a). The “regular forces” means the Royal Navy, the Royal Marines, the regular army or the Royal Air Force. The “reserve forces” means the Royal Fleet Reserve, the Royal Navy Reserve, the Marine Reserve, the Army Reserve, the Territorial Army, the Royal Air Force Reserve or the Royal Auxiliary Air Force.

Members of the Armed Forces who have been served with a cessation to occupy accommodation will be given housing advice and the appropriate banding and, if required, considered under the Homeless legislation (Housing Act 1996, Part VII and other relevant legislation).

The Home Choice Plus partnership recognise the contribution made by members of the armed forces and we support the principles of the Worcestershire Community Covenant and the Warwickshire Community Covenant.

The Housing Act 1996 (Additional Preferences for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012 require Local Authorities to give additional preference to a person with an urgent housing need and are in one of the reasonable preference categories. The reasonable preference categories are;

1. People who are homeless
2. People occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing
3. People otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions
4. People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds
5. People who need to move to a particular locality where failure to meet that need would cause hardship.

By urgent housing need we mean households who are in Gold Plus and Priority Band.

The regulations are;

that local housing authorities must frame their allocation scheme to give additional preference to the following persons if they fall within one or more of the statutory reasonable preference categories and are in urgent housing need:

- a) serving members of the regular forces who are suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is wholly or partly attributable to their service
- b) former members of the regular forces
- c) bereaved spouses or civil partners of those serving in the regular forces where (i) the bereaved spouse or civil partner has recently ceased, or will cease to be entitled, to reside in Ministry of Defence accommodation following

- the death of their service spouse or civil partner, and (ii) the death was wholly or partly attributable to their service
- d) existing or former members of the reserve forces who are suffering from a serious injury, illness, or disability which is wholly or partly attributable to their service

If an “Armed Forces” applicant is able to meet the local connection criteria (or is exempt from this), does not have sufficient resource to meet their own housing need and falls into one or more of the statutory reasonable preference categories, the Home Choice Plus Allocations Policy will award the applicant an additional six months in waiting time at the point that need has been assessed or date of registration (if need hasn’t changed over time). This only applies to members of the armed forces who have been discharged within the last five years. **6.**

Applying for a Property and Lettings

Looking for available Properties

Once applicants have been registered with Home Choice Plus and been notified of their registration number, they can start to look for a property of their choice.

Advertising

All Housing Association landlords are committed to advertising their available properties as widely as possible. Properties will be advertised on a weekly basis in the following ways.

- Website – available to anyone with access to the internet. The website enables applicants to view all available properties on line at www.homechoiceplus.org.uk
- Interactive (Digi) TV - available to anyone with an interactive digital television.
- Property Line - A local number for each area will be available for applicants to call to hear what properties are available. This service is particularly beneficial to disabled applicants, those who are blind or partially sighted, and for those who are unable to read.
- Hub, Landlord and Local Authority Offices – computers will be available to view and bid for available properties. Staff will be on hand to assist where needed.
- Community Outlet – newsletters will be displayed in many community outlets for example libraries, parish councils, supermarkets etc.

Adverts will provide information about the location, property type and size, rent level, and eligibility criteria.

How to Bid

Applicants can bid for properties in a number of ways. They will need to have ready their membership number, memorable date and the property reference number they wish to place a bid on.

- **On the Internet**
www.homechoiceplus.org.uk

- **On the Telephone**
Automated Bidding Line Number 0845 270 0557 a 24-hour automated service.
- **By Mobile Phone**
You can text your Bid from your Mobile Phone to 07784 486 644
- **In Person**
At any of the Contact Points as listed in Appendix 1
- **Interactive (Digi) TV/WAP enabled Mobile phones**
Press the Red button for interactive services through Virgin Media or Sky. Go to 'Looking Local' and find your area.

When to bid for a Property

Vacant properties will be advertised from each Tuesday morning. Applicants can bid any time during that week until 12 midnight on the following Monday. This is called the weekly bidding cycle. The time that a bid is placed during the week does not make a difference to the shortlist position – it is not a 'first come first served' system.

Number of Properties an applicant can bid for

Applicants can make 3 bids each week as long as they match what the advert criteria asks for. Bids must be on separate properties that they are eligible for. Applicants can withdraw their bid if they change their mind and re-bid on a different property at any time throughout the bidding cycle.

Multiple Bidding

Applicants will be able to bid for a maximum of three vacancies during any given advertising period. If an applicant appears at the top of more than one shortlist in a bidding cycle, they will be contacted to discuss which property they wish to consider. The selected Housing Association will then 'Match Suggest' the applicant and further Housing Associations will then skip this applicant if they are at the top of their shortlist(s). If the Housing Association who has Match Suggested the applicant subsequently decides not to offer them the property, the Provider will inform the applicant of the reasons for this directly, but the applicant will retain their banding and be able to continue bidding. Please see the section on "Reasons why an applicant may not be offered a property".

Applications from employees, Board Members and Co-optees

Staff, Board Members and Co-optees will be treated and assessed as any other applicant to the Housing Register.

Statutory Homeless Households

Applicants placed into the Priority Band on Home Choice Plus will have been accepted as statutorily homeless (where the full rehousing duty is owed) by a Local Authority in the Partnership area under s193 in Housing Act 1996 (eligible, homeless, priority need and not intentionally homeless, with a local connection).

The allocation of this banding comes with certain requirements under the Home Choice Plus scheme. We require applicants to try to secure suitable accommodation as soon as possible once they have received their rehousing (s.184, Housing Act Part VII) acceptance letter and therefore would expect them to be bidding for as many suitable properties as available (up to three bids per week)

Failure to bid each and every week on all suitably sized properties (up to a maximum of 3) may result in the Local Authority or its agent, placing bids on an applicant's behalf to make sure its duty to the applicant as a homeless household is fulfilled.

Please note that if applicants choose to only bid on one property when there are three suitable properties advertised, the local authority or its agent may bid on the two remaining properties to ensure that the applicant is re-housed as soon as possible.

All bids in this banding must be on properties of a suitable size and type and must be within the local authority area where the homeless duty applies to meet the requirements of the policy.

When a successful bid is made for a property the applicant will be notified of this and, subject to rights of review under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, this will constitute an offer of housing under Part VI as a discharge of the Council's homelessness duty.

Should the applicant be rejected by the Housing Association under its own allocations criteria, the homelessness duty will not be discharged and they will remain eligible for a further offer.

Eligibility for types of dwelling

Housing Association / Registered provider partners will use their individual policies to determine an applicant's eligibility for a size and type of dwelling. Broadly the Housing Association will use the overcrowding standard to determine the appropriate size of property. However, in exceptional circumstances they may deviate from the overcrowding definition to advertise and allocate their housing stock.

Examples are:

- Where applicants require larger accommodation on health grounds. This will be considered on a case by case basis, taking into account the advice of a qualified medical advisor – this will be determined at the point of registration (please see section on overcrowding within the banding).
- Pregnant households will be recognised as a family by Home Choice Plus at 25 weeks, this will allow the applicants to apply for family sized accommodation.
- Where the applicant has been approved as a foster carer / to adopt by Children's Services, and so will need a larger property than normally required by the household (please see section on overcrowding within the banding).

- Where the applicant or a member of the household needs the support of a carer who will need to sleep in the home and cannot reasonably be expected to share a bedroom with another member of the household. See paragraph below for more information about including a carer in a housing application (please see section on overcrowding within the banding).
- Where the landlord or Local Authority wants to deliberately under-occupy a property and a Local Letting Plan is in place
- Where there is little or no demand for a particular vacancy and it is therefore difficult to let (at the point of advertising the property)
- Where no suitable applicants can be identified to make the best use of larger accommodation.

Selection process

Applicants must note that individual Housing Associations will apply their own allocation policies and the suitability of the property will be considered by the Housing Association, in accordance with its allocation policy, at the point of allocation.

All eligible bids for each property are placed in order of housing need. Priority is decided first by band and then by date within the band and then by effective date.

A bid for a property will not be considered if the applicant's household does not meet the size, age or disability requirements for that property unless there are exceptional circumstances which need to be taken into account.

Partner landlords advertising properties will select and may interview the top applicant/s before an offer is made.

A property will not always be offered to the applicant at the top of the shortlist if there are reasons why this applicant is not eligible or would not be suitable. Please see the 'Reasons why you may not be offered a property' section below for more details.

Successful applicants will be given the opportunity to view the property prior to tenancy sign-up.

If the applicant chooses to refuse the property, the reasons for the refusal will be recorded by the partner landlord advertising the property and their banding may be reassessed.

If an applicant is matched to a property they will not be able to bid for other properties until they have decided to either accept or refuse the offer.

If the applicant is at the top of the shortlist the local authority or landlord will check the application to ensure the banding is correct and there aren't any other factors that would limit offers of accommodation e.g. change of circumstances.

Reasons why you may not be offered a property

Housing Associations may choose not to allocate you a property due to their own allocations policy, please see the Home Choice Plus website or contact individual Housing Associations for more information.

[Restrictions on offers through the advert](#)

Landlords may apply restrictions in order to identify suitable applicants in particular circumstances and these will always be specified in the advert. Where a property is advertised with certain restrictions, the letting will be made to the bidder who meets the criteria with the earliest band start date in the highest band as with usual lettings.

Some properties may be restricted for bidding as follows;

- Under agreements pursuant to Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) imposing conditions on who is able to bid – normally a restriction to households with a local connection
- Housing Associations may adopt specific lettings criteria in relation to particular developments or areas in order to address identified problems and to create sustainable and balanced communities. In these circumstances a local lettings policy would apply.
- Partner Housing Associations will also be entitled to advertise properties with preference given to their existing tenants in order to facilitate transfers.

Refusing Offers of Accommodation

Households are expected to take reasonable care when bidding for a property to ensure it meets their needs. If, however, an applicant decides to refuse an offer of accommodation, the property will be offered to the next suitable applicant. An application may be reassessed if an offer of a property is refused. The Local Authority or its agent will take into consideration suitability of the property and reasonableness of the offer in any reassessment undertaken.

If an applicant in a time limited band refuses an offer of accommodation the application including the banding will be reassessed and may be placed in the reduced priority band.

Refusals by Households to whom the full homeless duty is owed

If a homeless applicant refuses an offer of suitable accommodation, the local authority or its agent may decide that its duty under the Homeless Legislation is discharged, subject to the statutory review process and their banding will be reassessed.

Homeless applicants have the right to request a review of certain decisions made by the local authority or its agent in respect of their homeless application. This includes the decision to bring to an end the full homeless duty by making a suitable offer of settled accommodation. The applicant has this right whether they refuse or accept the offer of accommodation. If the review finds in favour of the homeless applicant, the applicant will retain their Priority band (provided they are still homeless) and will be able to place bids on alternative properties. However, if the reasonableness and suitability of the offer is upheld, the homeless duty will be ended and the applicant's banding will be reassessed. Homeless applicants are therefore advised to accept an offer and then request a review if they believe it to be unsuitable..

Exempt Allocations – Accommodation provided for lettings that are not covered by this Scheme.

The following exempt allocations are covered by s160, Housing Act 1996;

The following are not allocations under this Policy:

- Succession to a tenancy on a tenant's death pursuant to s89 Housing Act 1985 and s17 Housing Act 1988 (this will be dealt with by the landlord under the relevant legislation and policies)
- Assignment of a tenancy by way of mutual exchange
- Transfer of the tenancy by a court order under family law provisions or under the Civil Partnership Act 2004
- An introductory tenancy (including assured shorthold) becoming an assured / secure tenancy
- Transfers initiated by Council / Housing Associations (e.g. decant to alternative accommodation to allow for major works)
- Rehousing due to being displaced from previous accommodation by a Council or being rehoused by a Council pursuant to the Land Compensation Act 1973

The following allocations are deemed to be exempt as, although they may consider this allocation policy to some extent, they also require different decision making processes and criteria in making assessments and rehousing the applicant:

- A person being granted a family intervention tenancy
- Provision of non-secure temporary accommodation in discharge of any homelessness duty or power
- Supported accommodation
- Where a Housing Association needs to directly match a property (more details regarding this are included later in this policy)
- Extra care and some Very Sheltered accommodation
- Changes to joint tenancies which will include the granting of a new tenancy through changes from a sole to a joint tenancy and from a joint to a sole tenancy. The individual Housing Association will decide whether to allow a Joint Tenancy depending on the circumstances of the case.
- Households requiring a move through the Witness Protection Scheme or similar, at the formal request of the appropriate authority
- Some adapted properties may be held on a separate register specifically for people with disabilities

Local Lettings Plans

Home Choice Plus reserves the right to apply additional criteria for example specific local connection criteria, offers of family sized accommodation to smaller households or employment- while still meeting the statutory obligations for Reasonable

Preference when using Local Letting Plans. The Local Authority partners may, in the interests of promoting balanced and sustainable communities, agree with participating Housing Associations local lettings plans for specific areas, estates, or blocks. This is to ensure that lettings plans are tailored to the needs of an area, and protect the interests of existing residents and the wider community.

All local lettings plans will be published on the Home Choice Plus website.

The principles in applying Local Lettings Plans (LLPs)

- Local Lettings Plans may be developed to meet the particular needs of a local area.
- There must be a clear reason for having LLPs (this may take the form of recurring antisocial behaviour issues, high child densities or a concentration of older residents) and will be subject to reconsideration.
- LLPs must be developed and approved in accordance with an agreed procedure that must have specific aims and will be reconsidered on an annual basis.

The decision to implement a local lettings plan will be developed and approved by the Local Authority Senior Officer responsible for the relevant Home Choice Plus area and a Senior Manager of the relevant Housing Providers. Any decision to implement a local lettings policy will always take into account the implications for equal opportunities and the need to ensure that the Council is able to meet the allocation needs of those owed a reasonable preference.

Where a property is advertised in accordance with a Local Lettings Plan (LLP), the letting will be made to the highest bidder who meets the eligibility criteria of the LLP

Examples of possible Local Lettings Plans:

The following are examples of local letting policies that could be employed in Home Choice Plus covering an area, estate, or block:

- Age restrictions.
- Where the property forms part of a rural housing scheme on an exception site
- Restrictions on lettings to vulnerable households where there are already a concentration of supported tenants/residents
- Lettings to childless households where there are high concentrations of children and young people living on a specific estate or scheme

Direct Matching for urgent cases with reasonable preference

Where possible all lettings should be made through Home Choice Plus to ensure fairness and transparency in the system and to give our customers confidence. Where applicants have got reasonable preference but their circumstances mean they have urgent housing need they may require a direct match. An example of this would be those with critical health or social needs where an immediate move is necessary for their health and wellbeing and this can only be achieved through direct matching.

The direct matching might also occur because of the type of accommodation e.g. because it has adaptations and requires a specific applicant.

Direct matching may also occur for those in fear of extreme incidences of domestic violence, harassment, hate crime or extreme neighbour nuisance / anti-social behaviour where there is a genuine risk to their health and well-being or to support a move through witness mobility schemes (or similar).

There may be direct matching that takes place for tenants within the Housing Associations which are outside of the allocations scheme, where applicants are registered on Home Choice Plus (these are often known as management moves). This would apply in circumstances such as Tenants who are required to decant from their premises due to re-designation, demolition or refurbishment or where Successors left in a property too large for their needs or where a non-successor has exceptional needs / would be deemed to be owed a duty under Part 7 Housing Act 1996 for example.

7. Administration of the Scheme

Delegation of Authority

The Home Choice Plus Scheme operates alongside the separate allocation policies and activities of partner Housing Associations (please see Home Choice Plus website for further information).

The Council may delegate or contract out functions to Housing Association partner organisations and will not abrogate any of its legal duties and powers to any Housing Association partner.

The administration of the scheme is undertaken by the Local Authorities or their agents and they are also responsible for updating and improving the scheme in line with good practice and legislation, consulting with partners and customers and ensuring the scheme is followed.

Certain functions within the scheme can only be undertaken by a senior officer or manager and, where this is the case, this has been highlighted throughout the allocations policy.

Reassessment of Bandings

Applications to the Home Choice Plus Scheme will be reassessed on a regular basis. The timescale for this is determined by their banding and is conducted by their owning Local Authority or its agent.

Bandings will be reassessed when it is apparent there has been a change of circumstances.

An applicant will be notified of the reassessment. Failure to respond to appropriate correspondence in relation to the reassessment within one month will result in the application being closed. If good reason can be shown why there was a failure to respond to the reassessment then the application may be reinstated with the original band start date.

When the date is reached for reassessing the banding, the Local Authority or its agent will contact the applicant for confirmation of their circumstances. This contact may take the form of a letter, telephone call or email. If the applicant's circumstances have changed, they will be assessed and banded accordingly.

If the Local Authority, or its agent, considers that an applicant has not been using their priority and bids appropriately, a senior officer will review the application and banding may be altered to the reduced priority band unless good reason can be shown as to why bids have not been placed.

Reduced Priorities

The process for reducing priority

Any applicant whose priority is reduced will be provided with written notification of the decision that will contain the following information:

- The reasons for the decision to reduce priority
- The Band that their housing circumstances would have warranted and the Band that they have been placed in as a result of the decision (the reduced priority band).
- What they have to do before they can be considered again for any higher Band warranted by their housing needs.
- That the applicant has a right to request a review

Closing of Applications

Applications will be closed if applicants:

- Request their application to be closed
- Do not respond to a request to provide updated information about their registration, or
- Do not make a bid within 1 year of applying to join the Scheme
- Circumstances have changed and they are no longer eligible under this allocations policy.
- Have not informed Home Choice Plus they have moved and given a forwarding address.

When an applicant is re-housed through Home Choice Plus, their application will be automatically closed and they will need to complete a new registration form if they want to remain on the Housing Register.

In all other circumstances where they have moved they will need to complete a change of circumstances and be reassessed.

Re-joining the Housing Register

Where a household wishes to re-join the Home Choice Plus housing register at a later date, their new date of application will be the date they re-register.

Equality and Diversity

Our aim is to implement and maintain services which ensure that no potential or current applicant is treated less favourably on the grounds of gender, marital status, race, nationality, ethnic or national origin, disability, age or sexual orientation, nor is disadvantaged by the application of a rule, condition, or requirement, which has a discriminatory effect which cannot be justified by law. Allocations will only be made to those persons who are eligible.

This policy will be subject to periodic equality impact assessments.

Confidentiality

The fact that a person is an applicant on the Allocation Scheme will not be disclosed (without their consent) to any other member of the public.

Data protection and information sharing

All information held is subject to the Data Protection Act 1998. Home Choice Plus will seek the express consent of applicants joining the Allocation Scheme to share personal information about the applicant, and any member of their household. Please be aware that the application and any information relating to it can be viewed by all key partners through the Home Choice Plus partnership.

Information sharing without consent

Information may be shared about the individual and their history irrespective of whether their consent has been obtained in exceptional circumstances which will include:

- In accordance with the provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (Section 115).
- Where there is a serious threat to the other party's staff or contractors.
- Where information is relevant to the management or support duties of the proposed landlord or support organisation to ensure the health and safety of the applicant, a member of his or her household, or a member of staff.

False statements or withheld information

It is a criminal offence for applicants and/or anyone providing information to this Scheme to knowingly or recklessly make false statements or knowingly withhold reasonably requested information relevant to their application (s171 Housing Act 1996). This includes but is not limited to information requested on the housing registration form, in response to correspondence at the renewal of the application, or relating to any other reassessment of the application. An offence is also committed if a third party provides false information whether or not at the instigation of the applicant. This would apply at any stage of the application process.

Where there is suspicion or an allegation that a person has either provided false information or has withheld information, the application will be placed under pending status during the investigation and will be excluded from this Allocation Scheme until an outcome is reached.

If the outcome of any investigation is that they did not provide false information or there was no withholding of information or such was not found to be withheld knowingly, then the application will be reinstated from the date of registration meaning the relevant applicant should not suffer prejudice.

However, where the investigation shows that false information was provided on the application form the application will be re-assessed. The applicant may also be liable to prosecution.

Ground 5 in Schedule 2 to the Housing Act 1985 (as amended by the 1996 Act, s.146) enables the landlord to seek possession of a property where it has been granted as a result of a false statement by either the tenant or a person acting at the tenant's instigation.

If it is determined that an applicant directly, or through a person acting on his or her behalf, has given false information or withheld required information it will result in an applicant being removed from the Scheme and deemed Ineligible.

Monitoring Home Choice Plus

The full Home Choice Plus Partnership will meet regularly to monitor the outcomes being achieved (please see the Terms of Reference for the Home Choice Plus Steering Group and associated groups).

The Home Choice Plus Steering Group will complete an annual report to Registered Social Landlords as part of regular monitoring

8. Reviews of decisions

Information about decisions and reviews

The Local Authority, or its agent, makes the decision regarding the start dates and banding of every applicant.

An applicant to the Home Choice Plus scheme has a right to request a review from the owning Local Authority, or its agent, if unhappy with any decision (finding of fact) including decisions to exclude from registration, the level of priority awarded or the way in which the application has been dealt with. Applicants will be able to appoint an advocate, and once appointed, the Home Choice Plus partner will deal directly with the advocate. The applicant should request an internal review within 21 days of the date of the decision letter.

Applicants have the following further and specific rights to information about decisions and rights of review of decisions:

- the right, on request, to be informed of any decision about the facts of their case which has been, or is likely to be, taken into account in considering whether to make an allocation to them
- the right, on request, to review a decision mentioned above, or a decision to treat them as ineligible due to immigration controls or unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable to be a tenant
- the right to be informed of the decision on the review and grounds for it.

The applicant will be notified of the outcome of the review including the reasons if the original decision is confirmed. We will aim to determine the review within 56 days of the request or such longer period as may be agreed with the applicant. The applicant will also have the right to seek judicial review, make a formal complaint through the Local Authorities complaints procedure (please see below) or to the Local Government Ombudsman.

Reviews will be carried out by a senior member of staff within the Home Choice Plus partnership or delegated to an appropriate organisation and an officer who was not involved in the original decision.

Where the complaint concerns an issue with the letting of a property, the applicant should address their complaint directly to the relevant Housing Association and follow that organisation's complaint procedure.

Complaints

An applicant who is not satisfied with the service that they receive may register a complaint with the appropriate Home Choice Plus Partner by telephone, e-mail or in person. All complaints will be acknowledged and investigated. Please see the organisation's individual complaints procedure for details on how to complain and the length of time to consider your complaint. You can ask someone else or an organisation such as Citizen's Advice Bureau to make a complaint on your behalf.

For those whose first language is not English, assistance can be made available.

9. Feedback on let properties

Home Choice Plus will publish details of the number of bids for each property on the website giving details of the successful applicant's band and their band start date.

This feedback will help applicants determine their prospects of success in obtaining housing.

Lettings are monitored by property type and household to demonstrate how the Home Choice Plus partnership meet their various aims and objectives. The Home Choice Partnership will share this information with the Full Partnership on an annual basis and will ensure it is published on the Home Choice Plus website.

We will also monitor the number of lettings to Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups to ensure that we are reflecting the overall population and that all households are fairly accessing the system.

Appendix 1 Home Choice Plus Advice and Contact Points

Bromsgrove District

Bromsgrove District Housing Trust

Bromsgrove District Housing Trust, Buntsford Court, Buntsford Gate,
Bromsgrove, Worcs B60 3DJ
0800 0850 160 customer_services@bdht.co.uk
www.bdht.co.uk

Bromsgrove District Council

Customer Service Centre, School Drive, Bromsgrove, Worcs, B60 1AY
01527 881288
worcestershirehub@bromsgrove.gov.uk
www.bromsgrove.gov.uk

Malvern Hills District

Elgar Housing Association

Partnership House, Grovewood Road, Malvern, Worcs, WR14 1GD
01684 579579
housingneeds@festivalhousing.org
www.festivalhousing.org

Malvern Library

Graham Road, Malvern, Worcs, WR14 2HU
01684 862151

Tenbury Wells Library

24 Teme Street, Tenbury Wells, Worcs, WR15 8AA
01684 862151

Upton upon Severn Library

School Lane, Upton upon Severn, Worcs, WR8 0LE
01684 862151

Stratford-on-Avon District

Stratford-on-Avon District Council

Elizabeth House, Church Street, Stratford-upon-Avon,
Warks, CV37 6HX
01789 260861/2
housingadviceteam@stratford-dc.gov.uk
www.stratford.gov.uk

Stratford-on-Avon District Council

Globe House, Priory Road, Alcester, Warks, B49 5DZ
01789 762216

Southam Library

High Street, Southam, Warks, CV47 0HB
01926 817560

Worcester City

Worcester City Council

Orchard House Complex, Farrier Street, Worcester WR1 3BB
01905 722233 housing@worcester.gov.uk
www.worcester.gov.uk

Wychavon District

Wychavon District Council

Civic Centre, Queen Elizabeth Drive, Pershore, Worcs, WR10 1PT
01386 565020 housingneeds@wychavon.gov.uk
www.wychavon.gov.uk

Droitwich Community Contact Centre

44 High Street, Droitwich Spa, Worcs, WR9 8ES
www.wychavon.gov.uk

Evesham Community Contact Centre

Abbey Road, Evesham, Worcs, WR11 4SB
www.wychavon.gov.uk

Rooftop Housing Group

70 High Street, Evesham, Worcs WR11 4YD
01386 420800 www.rooftopgroup.org

Spa Housing Association

The Royal Exchange, 9 Queen Street, Droitwich Spa, Worcs, WR9 8LA
01905 823100 www.festivalhousing.org

Wyre Forest District

Community Housing Group

Oxford House, Oxford Street, Kidderminster, Worcs, DY10 1BQ
01562 732356 allocations@communityhg.com
www.communityhg.com

Wyre Forest District Council

Worcestershire Hub

Vicar Street, Kidderminster, Worcs, DY10 1DB
01562 732928
www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk

Wyre Forest District Council

Worcestershire Hub

Civic Centre, Stourport-on-Severn, Worcs DY13 8UJ
01562 732928
www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk

Wyre Forest District Council

Worcestershire Hub

6 Load Street, Bewdley, Worcs, DY12 2AF
01562 732928
www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk

Appendix 2 Home Choice Plus Partners' Contact Details

Name	Address	Phone Number	Email	Website
Advance Housing Trust	2 Witan Way Witney Oxon OX28 6FH	01993 772885	info@advanceuk.org	www.advanceuk.org
Anchor Trust	Milestone Place, 100 Bolton Rd, Bradford, BD1 4DH.	0845 140 2020		www.anchor.org.uk
Beth Johnson Housing Association	Sanctuary House, Chamber Court, Castle Street, Worcester, WR1 3ZQ.	01905 338600		www.sanctuary-group.co.uk
Bourneville Housing Trust	Estate Office, Oak Tree Lane, Bourneville, Birmingham, B30 1UB.	0121 472 3831	info@bvt.org.uk	www.bvt.org.uk
Bromford Housing Group	1 Venture Court, Broadlands, Wolverhampton, WV10 6TB.	0330 1234 031	customerservices@bromford.co.uk	www.bromfordgroup.co.uk

Bromsgrove District Housing Trust	Buntsford Court, Buntsford Gate, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, B60 3DJ	0800 0850 160	info@bdht.co.uk	www.bdht.co.uk
Elgar Housing Associations	Partnership House, Groewood Road, Malvern, Worcestershire, WR14 1GD.	01684 579579	housingneeds@festivalhousing.org.uk	www.festivalhousing.org
English Churches	2 Estuary Boulevard, Estuary Commerce Park, Liverpool, L24 8RF	0345 155 9029	info@riverside.org.uk	www.riverside.org.uk
Festival Housing	Festival House, Groewood Road, Malvern, Worcestershire, WR14 1GD.	01684 579579	housingneeds@festivalhousing.org.uk	www.festivalhousing.org
Festival Housing	The Royal Exchange, 9 Queen Street, Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire, WR9 8AL	01905 823100	housingneeds@festivalhousing.org.uk	www.festivalhousing.org
Fosseway Housing	1 Venture Court, Broadlands, Wolverhampton,	0330 1234 031	customerservices@bromford.co.uk	www.bromfordgroup.co.uk

	WV10 6TB.			
Friendship Care & Housing	50 Newhall Hill, Birmingham, B1 3JN	0121 506 2800		www.fch.org.uk
Fry Housing Trust	43 Rowley Village, Rowley Regis, West Midlands, B65 9AS	0121 559 6406	admin@fryha.org.uk	www.fryha.uk
Gloucestershire Housing Association	2 St Michael's Court, Brunswick Road, Gloucester, GL1 1JB	0800 318522	info@gloscha.co.uk	www.gloscha.co.uk
Housing 21	The Triangle, Baring Road, Beaconsfield, HP9 2NA.	0370 192 4000	enquiries@housing21.co.uk	www.housing21.co.uk
Jephson Housing Association	Jephson House, Blackdown, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, CV32 6RE	01926 339 311	info@jephson.org.uk	www.jephson.org.uk
Marches Housing Association	Benedict Court, Southern Avenue, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 0QF	01568 610100	home@marchesha.co.uk	www.marchesha.co.uk
Mercian	Gee Business	0121 322	info@mercian.org.uk	www.mercian.org.uk

Housing	Centre, Holborn Hill, Aston, Birmingham, B7 5JR	7373		
Midland Heart Ltd	20 Bath Row, Birmingham, B15 1LZ	0345 60 20 540	customer.servicecentre@midlandheart.org.uk	www.midlandheart.org.uk
Nexus Housing (West Midlands)	Apex 2, Wainwright Road, Worcester, WR4 9FN	01905 342600	nexus@wmhousing.co.uk	www.nexushousing.co.uk
Orbit Heart of England	10 Greenhill Street, Stratford upon Avon, WARMS CV37 6LG	0345 8 500 500	info@orbit.org.uk	www.orbitheartofengland.org.uk
Rooftop Housing Group	70 High Street, Evesham, Worcestershire, WR11 4YD	0800 0421 800	info@rooftopgroup.org	www.rooftopgroup.org
Sanctuary Housing	Sanctuary Midlands, 164 Birmingham Road, West Bromwich, Birmingham, B70 6QG	0800 131 3329	midlands@sanctuary-housing.co.uk	www.sanctuary-group.co.uk
South	The Gateway, The	01588		www.sshropsha.co.uk

Shropshire Housing Association Ltd	Auction Yard, Craven Arms, Shropshire, SY7 9BW	676200		
Stonham Housing Association	2 Gosforth Park Way, Gosforth Business Park, Gosforth, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE12 8ET	0845 155 1234		www.homegroup.org.uk
Viridian Housing	41 Poplar Road, Kings Heath, Birmingham, B14 7AA	0121 444 6666	wmids@viridianhousing.org.uk	www.viridianhousing.org.uk
Warwickshire Rural Housing Association	Whitwick Business Centre, Stenson Road, Whitwick Business Park, Coalville, Leicestershire, LE67 4JP	01530 278080		www.warwickshirerha.org.uk
Waterloo Housing Association	Waterloo House, 76-78 Boldmere Road, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands, B73 5TJ	0121 355 7771		www.waterlooha.org.uk
Worcester	Progress House,	0800 197	wchtalk@wchnet.co.uk	www.wchnet.co.uk

Community Housing	Midland Road, Worcester, WR5 1DU	2805		
Wyre Forest Community Housing	3 Foley Grove, Foley Business Park, Kidderminster, Worcestershire, DY11 7PT	01562 733 000	information@communityhg.com	www.communityhg.com
Wyre Forest Sheltered Housing	3 Foley Grove, Foley Business Park, Kidderminster, Worcestershire, DY11 7PT	01562 733 000	information@communityhg.com	www.communityhg.com

COUNCIL TAX BASE CALCULATION 2014-15

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Hollingworth
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	
Wards Affected	No
Ward Councillor Consulted	No
Non-Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

- 1.1 This reports sets out details of the calculation of the District's tax base for Council Tax setting purposes. The calculation of the Council Tax base is required as part of the determination of the level of Council Tax for 2014/15.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Cabinet are asked to resolve:

a) the amount calculated by Bromsgrove District Council as the Council Tax Base for the whole area for 2014/15 is approved at 34,117.95

b) the amount calculated by Bromsgrove District Council as the Council Tax Base for 2014/15 for the calculation of local precepts shall be the amounts shown in **Appendix 1** of this report.

3. KEY ISSUES

Financial Implications

- 3.1 The calculation of the Council Tax base forms the basis of the calculation of Council Tax for the new financial year.

Legal Implications

- 3.2 The Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992, made under powers of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 specify the rules for the calculation of the Council Tax Base.

Service / Operational Implications

- 3.3 non-specific to this report

Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications

3.4 There are no implications for the Councils Equalities and Diversity Policies.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

4.2 There are no risk management issues.

5. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Appendix 1 Council Tax Base Calculation for 2014/15

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Held with Revenue Services Section

AUTHOR OF REPORT

Name: David Riley
E Mail: david.riley@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk
Tel: 01527 548 418

Council Tax Base Calculation 2014/2015

The Council Tax Base calculation for each parish is detailed below (band D equivalents).

Parish Name	Gross	Net
Whole Area	34,462.58	34,117.95
Alvechurch	2,227.35	2205.07
Barnt Green	914.25	905.10
Belbroughton	1,154.66	1143.11
Bentley Pauncefort	185.89	184.03
Beoley	443.73	439.29
Bournheath	211.08	208.97
Catshill & Marlbrook	2,204.03	2181.99
Clent	1,193.66	1181.73
Cofton Hackett	744.27	736.83
Dodford with Grafton	397.35	393.37
Finstall	285.67	282.82
Frankley	49.24	48.74
Hagley	2,044.88	2024.43
Hunnington	225.56	223.30
Lickey & Blackwell	2,098.22	2077.24
Romsley	640.19	633.79
Stoke Prior	1,658.33	1641.75
Tutnall & Copley	362.11	358.49
Wythall	4,530.72	4485.42
Urban	12,891.40	12762.49
Totals	34,462.58	34,117.95

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WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES – REMOVAL OF HEALTH AND WELLBEING FROM STATEMENT OF PARTNER REQUIREMENTS

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor C. B. Taylor
Portfolio Holder Consulted	
Relevant Head of Service	Steve Jordan, Head of Regulatory Services
Ward(s) Affected	All
Ward Councillor(s) Consulted	N/A
Non-Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

This report seeks agreement to the modification of the statement of partner service requirements for Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) by removing the requirements in relation to health and wellbeing / health promotion.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Cabinet RESOLVE that:

- 1) the statement of partner service requirements for Worcestershire Regulatory Services be modified by removing the requirements in relation to health and wellbeing / health promotion; and**
- 2) delegated authority be given to the Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services, following consultation with the relevant portfolio holders, to make the relevant amendments to the legal agreement with the other partners.**

3. KEY ISSUES

Financial Implications

- 3.1 The savings to the Council from the removal of this requirement will be £22,486 per annum.

Legal Implications

- 3.2 The necessary amendments to the legal agreement with the other partners in Worcestershire Regulatory Services removing the requirements in relation to health and wellbeing / health promotion are required.

Service / Operational Implications

- 3.3 When Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) was established in 2010 the statement of partner service requirements for all partners included a number of

activities relating to health and wellbeing / health promotion (see appendix 1). These requirements reflected the services provided at that time by the district councils and the County Council and their relationships with other bodies responsible for public health, etc. They also reflected deliverables within the now defunct Local Area Agreements.

- 3.4 Since the creation of WRS, there have been significant changes in the public health landscape. Public health responsibility transferred from the NHS to county councils in two tier areas in 2013, under the national leadership of Public Health England. This change places primary responsibility for health and wellbeing matters locally with Worcestershire County Council which now funds the health and wellbeing coordinators based within the six district councils.
- 3.5 The WRS Management Board has recently reviewed the current statement of partner requirements in respect of health and wellbeing / health promotion and concluded that, as much of the work is now undertaken by other bodies, these requirements should be removed with a contingent reduction in the overall WRS budget of £157,000. This change was recommended to the Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee when it met on 26 September 2013. The Joint Committee agreed to ask participating partner councils to formally request the removal of these requirements ahead of its next meeting when the budget for 2014/15 will be set.
- 3.6 Removal of this requirement from the agreement for WRS will have very little impact within the District. As explained below, much of the work involved is now undertaken by the County Council in its lead public health role. Some of the other work such as food hygiene training is non-statutory and is provided commercially for those businesses that need it. It is not expected that the removal of these requirements from WRS will result in any significant adverse health and wellbeing implications within the District.

Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 3.7 No adverse equalities impacts have been identified

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 4.1 No particular risks have been identified.

5. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Health and Wellbeing Statement of Partner Requirements

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

WRS - Statement of Partner Requirements

AUTHOR OF REPORT

Name: Clare Flanagan, Principal Solicitor
email: clare.flanagan@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk
Tel.: (01527) 64252 (Extn. 3173)

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Function: Health & Wellbeing/ Health Promotion

Participating partners

Bromsgrove District Council
Malvern hills District Council
Redditch Borough Council
Worcester City Council
Wycharon District Council
Wyre Forest District Council
Worcestershire County Council

Requirements applicable to all participating partners

Activity	Outcomes/ critical success factors	Performance measures/ key performance indicators and targets	Applicable polices, strategies, service standards, statutory codes or guidance
Provision of advice, information and education on food safety	Improve food safety in all settings where people consume food include work, leisure venues and the home.	Reduction in the number of food poisoning cases and outbreaks.	National strategies and campaigns including those promoted by the Food Standards Agency
Provision of advice, information and education on health and safety at work.	Improve management of health and safety in all Local Authority enforced settings. Well attended and positively received safety awareness days.	Reduction in the number of accidents and cases of work related ill-health.	National strategies and campaigns including those promoted by the Health and Safety Executive.
Provision of a wide variety of	Affordable training available to businesses and voluntary	Compliance with CIEH requirements as a training centre.	

Worcestershire Regulatory Shared Service
Statement of partner service requirements

APPENDIX 1

<p>food hygiene training and awareness courses and events including CIEH level 1 and 2 food hygiene courses and refresher training and/or signposting to training providers.</p>	<p>organisations. Food handlers trained in food safety commensurate with their role. Reduction in food poisoning cases.</p>		
<p>Provision of nutrition training and advice to caterers.</p>	<p>Availability of healthier food options in a variety of settings.</p>	<p>In compliance with national strategies and guidance issued by the Food Standards Agency.</p>	<p>National strategies and guidance issued by the Food Standards Agency.</p>
<p>Healthy Eating project work</p>	<p>Enable consumers to use labelling information to make healthy food choices. Improve public understanding of what is in the food they eat.</p>	<p>NI121 Mortality rate from circulatory diseases at ages under 75 NI 56 Obesity among primary school age children in Year 6 NB: Report activity to Worcestershire Partnership theme group on completion of actions against the Action Plan</p>	<p>Food Standards Agency guidance, Health Challenge England (DOH,) Service plan projects</p>
<p>Provision of a wide variety of certificated health and safety training and awareness</p>	<p>Affordable training available to businesses and voluntary organisations. Employees and managers trained in health and safety commensurate with their role. Reduction in accidents and</p>	<p>Compliance with CIEH requirements as a training centre.</p>	

Worcestershire Regulatory Shared Service
Statement of partner service requirements

APPENDIX 1

courses and events.	cases of work related ill health.		
Membership of the Worcestershire Tobacco Control Alliance.	Contribution to county wide initiatives on tobacco control		
Provision of smoking cessation advice and signposting to smoking cessation support services.	Contribution to county wide LAA targets on reducing tobacco use.		
Promoting awareness of and providing work experience of Environmental health and Trading Standards as professions and career choices.	Awareness of the range of activities and functions of the service and awareness of potential career opportunities within the two professions.		
Participation in national health and safety awareness campaigns such as those relating to asbestos.	Reduction in accidents and incidents of ill health.		

<p>Work within schools to promote healthy eating and food hygiene, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lunch box advice - hand washing promotion - 5 a day 			
<p>Contribute to the network of LSP's, QCDRP's and LAA theme groups (Health & wellbeing, WPEG and Crime & Disorder)</p>	<p>Achievement of LAA and other county-wide targets.</p>	<p>As detailed in LAA, Community Strategy documents etc.</p>	

Additional requirements applicable to Wychavon District Council

Activity	Outcomes/ critical success factors	Performance measures/ key performance indicators and targets	Applicable policies, strategies, service standards, statutory codes or guidance
<p>Consultations</p>	<p>Considered response to national consultations on health and well-being initiatives etc</p>		
<p>Work with pre-</p>	<p>Contribution to county wide LAA</p>		

school children and their families to promote health eating and active lifestyles (WHAT programme)	targets on reducing obesity.		
MEND programme (7-13 year olds). Provision of 'theory lead' input	Contribution to county wide LAA targets on reducing obesity		
Provision of 'Mission Possible' materials and support to KS2 school groups.	Promotion of food safety and healthy eating messages.		In accordance with Mission Possible guidance.

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