



BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE CABINET

WEDNESDAY 3RD SEPTEMBER 2014
AT 6.00 P.M.

COMMITTEE ROOM, THE COUNCIL HOUSE, BURCOT LANE, BROMSGROVE

MEMBERS: Councillors M. A. Sherrey (Leader), C. B. Taylor (Deputy Leader), R. Hollingworth, D. W. P. Booth, M. A. Bullivant, R. L. Dent 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 meetings of the Cabinet held on 2nd July and the Special meeting held on 20th August (Pages 1 - 14)
4. Minutes of the meeting of the Audit Board held on 19th June 2014 (Pages 15 - 22)
 - (a) To receive and note the minutes
 - (b) To consider any recommendations contained within the minutes
5. Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 14th July 2014 (Pages 23 - 32)
 - (a) To receive and note the minutes
 - (b) To consider any recommendations contained within the minutes

6. To receive the minutes of the meeting of the Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee held on 26th June 2014 (Pages 33 - 46)
 - (a) To receive and note the minutes
 - (b) To consider any recommendations contained within the minutes
7. Homes Choice Plus Allocations Policy Review (Pages 47 - 124)
8. Finance Monitoring Report 2014/2015 Quarter 1 (Pages 125 - 138)
9. 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

26th August 2014

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE CABINET

WEDNESDAY, 2ND JULY 2014 AT 6.00 P.M.

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

Observers: Councillors S. R. Colella, L. C. R. Mallett and C. J. Spencer

Officers: Ms J. Pickering, Mrs C. Felton, Ms A. De Warr, Mr J. Godwin,
Mr D. Thomas and Ms R. Cole

11/14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R.L. Dent and C. B. Taylor.

12/14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

13/14 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 4th July 2014 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 4th June 2014 be approved as a correct record.

14/14 DOLPHIN CENTRE REPLACEMENT

Cabinet considered a very detailed report on the proposed replacement of the Dolphin Centre.

The Portfolio Holder, Councillor M. J. A. Webb referred to the need for a decision to be made on the future of the existing Centre which had been built in the 1960's with adaptations and extensions being undertaken since that time. The original life expectancy of the building had been around 40 years. In addition recent surveys of the building had indicated that it would need to be replaced within the next three or four years.

The report highlighted the importance of the Dolphin Centre in the provision of sports and physical activity opportunities to the residents of the local area, in that it is the only venue to offer both wet and dry facilities on a "pay and play"

basis with no limits on time of usage. In addition surveys undertaken had shown very high public support for the retention of a Leisure Centre in the Town Centre.

Members were reminded that in 2011 an external company had undertaken a full review of future leisure provision in Bromsgrove. The study had included the important contribution of a Leisure Centre to the overall Town Centre regeneration scheme.

Members noted that the Cabinet report made reference to the number of options which had been part of the initial considerations of officers and detailed the process which had been undertaken in order to reach the preferred option 2a which was now being formally brought forward to Cabinet and Council. In particular the mix of facilities proposed to be provided had been considered in great detail. While cost had inevitably played a part the option being put forward was not the cheapest option. The facilities proposed compared very favourably with those existing at present.

Councillor Webb reported that it was intended to provide the new Leisure Centre with as little disruption as possible to visitors and users of the existing Centre which would remain open until the new Centre was available.

As part of the detailed discussions on the report the Cabinet gave consideration to the comments and recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Board as contained in the minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 16th June 2014. The Board had considered the report of the Leisure Provision Task Group following the Group's pre scrutiny of the Dolphin Centre business case. It was noted that the Group were looking at Leisure provision within the District as a whole but ahead of that had considered the Dolphin Centre business case prior to consideration by Cabinet.

The recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Board were considered in turn:

Recommendation 1

Financial concerns around the increased membership that will be needed to ensure good annual revenue should be addressed through an Audit Board investigation of the figures

Cabinet were aware of the importance of increasing the membership of the new centre, but it was felt that the membership figures included in the report were reasonably conservative. Officers had advised after investigation that they were achievable given that the facilities would be of a high quality.

It was therefore felt not to be necessary to refer the figures to the Audit Board but Cabinet recognised that the Board could call for further investigation if it felt this was required.

Recommendation 2

The Overview and Scrutiny Board should be involved in scrutinising more detailed plans to ensure that they address the needs of customers with disabilities.

Cabinet recognised that a great deal of work had been undertaken to date to ensure that the new facilities would be fully accessible to customers with disabilities. Cabinet were aware however that members of the Overview and Scrutiny Board had an interest in this area and were welcome to call for the opportunity to scrutinise more detailed plans.

Recommendation 3

Cabinet note the Board's disappointment that the Sports hall has not been included within the plan for the new Dolphin Centre.

Cabinet took note of the Board's comment but drew attention to the Sports England report on the provision of Sports Halls in Bromsgrove which had demonstrated a more than sufficient supply of Sports Hall facilities. It was intended that public access to existing or new Sports Hall facilities would be increased through hire or dual use agreements. It was part of the role of the Council to promote the use of alternative facilities and to make the best use of public funds.

Recommendation 4

Cabinet note the Board's concern that insufficient facilities have been planned for the Centre, especially for young people (i.e. No climbing wall as has been installed in other leisure centres).

Cabinet took note of the Board's concern but did not agree that insufficient facilities had been planned. The mix of facilities had been carefully considered with a view to providing the best opportunities for all age groups. The installation of a climbing wall had been looked at but after investigating the experience of other providers was not felt to be the best use of public money.

The Leader and the Portfolio Holder thanked the Leisure Provision Task Group and the Overview and Scrutiny Board for their consideration of the business case and contribution to the process so far.

Thanks were also expressed to officers for their very detailed work on the proposals over a period of time.

Following further discussion it was

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) that Option 2a, as set out below, be confirmed as the preferred option for the replacement of the Dolphin Centre at a total project cost of £11.5m:

Facility Mix

- Main Pool – 25m by 13m (6 lanes) with 100 spectator seats
 - Learner Pool – 12m by 8m with moveable floor
 - Fitness Suite – 80 stations with functional training spaces supporting up to 1800 members
 - Dance Studio – 2 spaces for up to 60 people
 - Spinning Studio – for up to 25 people
 - Spa facilities and treatment rooms – Sauna, Steam room and Jacuzzi
 - Ancillary facilities includes car park of 200 spaces
- (b) that within the total cost, this Council purchases the Blackmore House site on School Drive from Worcestershire County Council at a value of £1.425m;
- (c) that borrowing of £9.536m be approved to fund the majority of the costs associated with the project;
- (d) that at the completion of the project, the enabling land which will no longer be required on School Drive (currently Car Parking) be considered to be surplus to requirements and be offered to the market to reduce borrowing costs;
- (e) that £100k of balances be used to ensure the total funding of £11.5m for the project is available;
- (f) that officers investigate and implement an option to develop a Dual Use arrangement at North Bromsgrove High School provided that it does not impact on the capital costs incurred by the Council and therefore does not impact on the Medium Term Financial Plan;
- (g) that authority be delegated to the Head of Leisure and Cultural Service and the Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Resources following consultation with the Portfolio Holders, to agree the final terms for the disposal of land associated with this project;
- (h) that authority be delegated to the Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services to enter into the necessary legal documents for the purposes of implementing recommendations (a) to (g) above;
- (i) that officers be requested to provide updates on the project at key milestones as agreed with the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Cultural Services to include verbal updates at all Cabinet meetings and an update report once final tender submissions are received to confirm the final project position and proposed timescales.

15/14

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

Following consideration of minute 10/14 of the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 16th June 2014 as part of the discussion of the previous item, the remainder of the minutes were submitted.

RESOLVED:

- (a) that in relation to minute 6/14 (Summary of Results of Staff Survey) recommendation 1 relating to a statement to be added to the top ten recommendations from the staff survey be approved;

- (b) that in relation to minute 6/14 (Summary of Results of Staff Survey) recommendation 2 relating to contact details for staff being made available to elected Members, this be referred to the Chief Executive for further consideration of the most appropriate way of meeting the requirements of Members in this regard; and
- (c) that the remainder of the minutes be noted.

16/14 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME

Members considered the report on proposals to reduce the financial impact to the District and other precepting bodies in relation to the Government changes to the Council Tax Support Scheme.

The report reminded Members that it had previously been agreed to review the existing Council Tax Support Scheme for 2014/15 in order to meet the anticipated shortfall in funding resulting from the Government changes.

It was reported that before any changes in the scheme could be made there was a requirement for public consultation to be undertaken. It was therefore proposed that following initial consultation, a further report be submitted to Cabinet in September with a proposed scheme.

It was noted that the proposed options for consultation were set out in the Appendix to the report and included the following:

- Reduction in permitted capital/savings
- Cap on the maximum amount of support that can be claimed to:
 - 80%
 - 85%
 - 90%
- Removal of Second Adult Rebate;
- Cap support at a lower Council Tax Band
- Changes to non-dependent deductions

The proposals for consultation also included a reduction to the period of exemption for empty properties as follows;

- Limiting the amount of Council Tax discount on short term empty property to 50% for one month (excluding new developments)

Following discussion it was

RESOLVED that the Head of Customer Access and Financial Support be authorised to consult on the options for change to the Authority's Council Tax Support Scheme with effect from April 2015, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

17/14

REVIEW OF MARKET POLICY, TRADERS' TERMS AND CONDITIONS AND NEW MARKET STALLS

Cabinet considered a report relating to the Market in Bromsgrove High Street. The report related to the purchase of new market stalls which would replace the existing stalls and improve the appearance and operation of the market, together with the introduction of new terms and conditions in respect of the market.

It was noted that the new arrangements in the High Street, following completion of the reconstruction works, would allow for additional traders and also for speciality events such as Food Festivals and Craft Fairs. It was noted that the stalls would be purchased as they became required and the £60k was the maximum cost.

Members also noted that the proposed new stalls had a life expectancy of 10 years and it was anticipated that the additional income generated from the additional stalls could be used to generate a reserve for their future replacement.

The proposed terms and conditions as contained in Appendix 1 to the report were considered and it was reported that the Market traders had been consulted on these and were in agreement with them.

Members queried whether the whole of condition 5.3 was enforceable and the Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services undertook to consider this.

RESOLVED that the introduction of the proposed new terms and conditions for market traders on Bromsgrove High Street as contained in Appendix 1 to the report be approved.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) that the 2014/15 Capital Programme be increased by £60k to fund the costs associated with the purchase of the replacement market stalls; and
- (b) that £56k be released from balances to fund the majority of the cost with the additional £4k to be met from current reserves.

18/14

TOWNSCAPE HERITAGE INITIATIVE GRANT - 22-24 HIGH STREET, BROMSGROVE

Cabinet considered a report on a proposed grant for the renovation of 22-24 High Street, Bromsgrove under the Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI).

Members were reminded of the THI scheme which was jointly funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Worcestershire County Council for the restoration of historic buildings on High Street and Worcester Road.

The proposed grant would enable the top floors of the grade 2 Listed Building to be brought back into use, with the owners of the building contributing

approximately half of the total eligible renovation costs. It was noted that the building was one of the seven priority “plus” buildings eligible for funding through the THI scheme.

Cabinet felt this was a good example of the importance of the THI scheme in bringing back into full use an important building in the Conservation Area. It would also encourage increased residential opportunities in the High Street.

RESOLVED that the Townscape Heritage Initiative Grant in respect of 22-24 High Street , Bromsgrove be approved on the terms set out in the report.

19/14

FINANCIAL OUTFURN AND RESERVES STATEMENT 2013/2014

Members considered a report containing financial information for Revenue and Capital for the year ended 31st March 2014. The report also contained details of the earmarked reserves for the year ending 2013/14 and sought approval for the creation of new reserves required to support the future plans of the Authority. In addition the report contained further details of the requirement for the Capital funding of teenage provision in Hagley to be met from Section 106 contributions.

It was noted that the revenue account resulted in a surplus of £647k and that this was due to a number of factors including officers reviewing all expenditure on non essential items. In addition there had been a saving on some vacant posts which had proved difficult to fill and additional income from Housing Benefit Subsidy. There was a continuing emphasis on a need for good budgetary control and it was intended that the £647k be returned to balances which could be used to deliver the priorities of the Council.

RESOLVED that the financial outturn position 2013/14 on Revenue and Capital as detailed in the report be noted, together with the transfer to balances of £647k.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) that the movement of £88k in existing reserves as included in Appendix A to the report which reflects the approval required for April 2013 to March 2014 be approved;
- (b) that the addition of new reserves of £495k as included in Appendix 1 to the report which reflects the approval required for April 2013 to March 2014 be approved; and
- (c) that the Capital bid of £80k for Hagley teenage provision to be funded from Section 106 contributions be approved.

The meeting closed at 7.10 p.m.

Chairman

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BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE CABINET

WEDNESDAY, 20TH AUGUST 2014 AT 4.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors M. A. Sherrey (Leader), C. B. Taylor (Deputy Leader),
D. W. P. Booth, M. A. Bullivant and R. L. Dent

Observers: Councillor H. J. Jones and Councillor L. C. R. Mallett

Officers: Mr K Dicks, Ms C Flanagan, Mrs C Felton, Ms J Pickering, Ms A
de Warr, Mr D Riley and Mrs S Jones

20/14 **TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hollingworth and Webb.

21/14 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

22/14 **COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME REVIEW**

The Cabinet considered a report from the Head of Customer Access and Financial Support, which set out proposals to reduce the financial impact to the District and other precepting bodies in relation to Government changes to the Council tax support scheme. Cabinet had been asked by Council to reconsider the Council Tax Support Scheme consultation (minute 22/14, 16th July 2014).

The Overview and Scrutiny Board had considered the proposals in depth at a special meeting on 18th August and the comments of the Board were circulated to the Cabinet. Councillor Mallett, Chairman of the Board, was invited to speak to the minutes but did not have any items he wished to add.

The S151 Officer and Head of Customer Access and Financial Support summarised the main points in the report around the timeline, costs including the costs of consultation, the impact of the Council tax support scheme and actions that could be taken to mitigate this for vulnerable people.

In response to questions, the officers reported that a hardship scheme would aim to provide transitional support. Officers would continue to support those affected towards becoming more financially independent. Due to the Council decision to ask Cabinet to reconsider the matter, the period for consultation had reduced to approx. 6 weeks, but officers had prepared for this so that it could be started immediately if the Council decided to consult.

RECOMMENDED:

- a. That the options set out at Appendix 1 to the report be put to public consultation in order to inform potential changes to the Council's Council Tax Support Scheme for 2015/16 and/or later years;
- b. That the Head of Customer Access and Financial Support be authorised to consult on the options, set out in Appendix 1 to these minutes;
- c. That the Head of Customer Access and Financial Support report back to Cabinet on the outcome of that consultation and any proposals for changes to the scheme, for further consideration and resolution by Cabinet, to consult on a draft scheme;
- d. That further to the outcome of Cabinet's decision on the draft regulations, the Head of Customer Access and Financial Support be authorised to carry out the statutory consultation required on the draft scheme;
- e. That the final Scheme be presented to Cabinet to make recommendations to Council in January 2015, to allow for the necessary regulations to be published by 31st January 2015.

The meeting closed at 4.25 p.m.

Chairman

Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) Scheme – Consultation Options

OPTION	Number of Working Age Claimants affected (out of total of 1762)	Estimated Total Saving	Estimated Saving to Bromsgrove	Average Annual Increase		Comments
				Median	Mean	
Cap maximum amount of support that can be claimed to:						
80%	1,762	£345,000	£49,680	£179.10	£196.15	Council Tax Support continues to be calculated in the same way as the present scheme, however the maximum amount of support that a claimant can receive is capped at a certain % of their overall liability.
75%		£259,000	£37,296	£134.32	£147.11	This option results in all working age claimants having to pay something towards Council Tax and provides an incentive to claimants to increase their income.
70%		£172,000	£24,768	£89.62	£98.12	
Cap support at a lower band	1,762	£59,000	£8,496	£168.07	£159.40	Entitlement to LCT Support is capped at a maximum of Band D charge for those in a Band E, F, G or H property and restrictions on band A – D properties to limit support to the next lowest Band. This option would result in claimants entitled to support having to pay more of the cost of occupying a higher –band property. This reduces the likelihood of low-income claimants occupying higher value properties than they otherwise would. This can have a positive impact on more efficient use of housing stock.

<p>Removal of Second Adult Rebate</p>	<p>116</p>	<p>£19,950</p>	<p>£2,872</p>	<p>£71.16</p>	<p>£171.97</p>	<p>SAR is paid where only one person is liable for a household's Council Tax and there is a low income non-dependent living with them.</p> <p>SAR reduces the householder's liability by 25% regardless of the Council Tax payers income, if the second adult is in receipt of Income Support, Income based JSA, ESA or Pension Credit.</p> <p>There are few claimants of SAR and the changes will not significantly reduce expenditure on the LCTS scheme.</p> <p>The retention of SAR may be incompatible with the introduction of a scheme which caps support for all working age claimants, and could result in low income working age adults who live in their own property making a contribution from a single limited income, whilst this contribution would not apply to a low income non-dependent living with people who may have sufficient means to pay the Council Tax.</p>
<p>Removal of backdating claims</p>	<p>Information on the costs of backdating are not available.</p>					<p>Restrict or remove the ability to backdate claims would not result in a significant saving in the overall cost of the LCTS scheme however it would result in reduced administration.</p> <p>Vulnerable persons could be protected through the use of discretionary powers which allow for the reduction of Council Tax liability on a case by case basis.</p>

Reduce capital/savings limit	Information on savings is not available for reductions to Capital/savings Limits				<p>In reality very few working age claimants have a high level of non-pension fund assets and therefore this option will not significantly reduce expenditure on the LCTS scheme.</p> <p>However the change may be appropriate as part of any effort to concentrate support on the most vulnerable</p>
Changes to Non-dependent deductions	Information on savings is not available for this option.				<p>This amendment to the scheme would end the anomaly in the existing scheme which allows non-dependents with significant incomes to be resident in a household and make no contribution to the Council Tax liability if the liable person is in receipt of DLA or Attendance Allowance.</p> <p>The non-dependant is not liable for Council Tax and therefore consideration would be given to protecting vulnerable people.</p>
Reduce Council Tax discount on short term empty property to 50% for 1 month (excluding new developments)	N/A	£105,000	£15,120		<p>This option is not subject to statutory consultation and can be agreed by Council at any stage of the process.</p> <p>Reducing the discount on empty properties can provide an incentive to ensure properties are not left empty, thus increasing the supply in the rented sector.</p>

Agenda Item 3

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BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE AUDIT BOARD

THURSDAY, 19TH JUNE 2014 AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors S. J. Baxter, M. T. Buxton, S. J. Dudley (during Minute No's 1/14 to 12/14), H. J. Jones, R. J. Laight (substituting for Councillor P. A. Harrison and C. J. Spencer (substituting for Councillor B. T. Cooper)

Invitees: Ms Z. Thomas, Grant Thornton

Officers: Ms. J. Pickering, Mr. A. Bromage, Ms. A. De Warr, Mr. K. Hirons and Mrs. P. Ross

1/14 **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

RESOLVED that Councillor H. J. Jones be elected as Chairman of the Board for the ensuing municipal year.

2/14 **ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN**

RESOLVED that Councillor M. T. Buxton be elected as Vice-Chairman of the Board for the ensuing municipal year.

3/14 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors B. T. Cooper, P. A. Harrison and P. M. McDonald.

4/14 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were received.

5/14 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Audit Board held on 20th March 2014 were submitted.

The Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Resources provided the Board with a verbal update with regard to Minute No. 42/13. There was a Human Resources approval checklist for commencement and termination forms, which included payments and annual leave entitlement. Internal Audit had recommended that the Council's Whistleblowing Policy be updated. The Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Resources to ensure that the policy details that staff would be able to raise any concerns with Councillors.

With regard to Minute No. 44/13, Members agreed to a verbal update on ICT Resilience from the Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Resources and that the Democratic Services Officer be tasked to email details of the verbal update to all Audit Board Members.

RESOLVED that, subject to the information as detailed in the preamble above, the minutes be approved as a correct record.

6/14

GRANT THORNTON - AUDITING STANDARDS 2013/2014

The Chairman welcomed Ms. Z. Thomas (Engagement Manager) from Grant Thornton to the meeting.

The Board was asked to note the Grant Thornton Auditing Standards Report 2013/2014 and the Management responses within the report.

Ms. Z. Thomas introduced the report and briefly explained the purpose of the report. Members' attention was drawn to the Fraud Risk Assessment questions, as detailed on pages 16 to 19 in the report. With regard to an unanswered question, Question 4 – "Are there any areas where there is a potential for override of controls or inappropriate influence over the financial reporting process (for example because of undue pressure to achieve financial targets)". The Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Resources informed Members that with regard to financial reporting, all reports were subject to a number of validation and controls by finance and Heads of Service therefore the potential for override was of a low risk.

The Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Resources informed Members that the Council's fraud and corruption polices were in the process of being updated and that the updated polices would be presented to the next meeting of the Board.

RESOLVED that the Grant Thornton Auditing Standards report for 2013/2014 be noted.

7/14

GRANT THORNTON AUDIT PLAN 2013/2014

The Board was asked to note the Grant Thornton Audit Plan 2013/2014.

Ms. Z. Thomas introduced the report and briefly explained that in planning their audit, Grant Thornton needed to understand the challenges and opportunities the Council was facing; the challenges / opportunities had been detailed on page 42 in the report. Grant Thornton would undertake a review of the Financial Resilience as part of their Value For Money (VFM) conclusion. They would review the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and consider whether improvements had been made in budgetary control to support the successful delivery of the plan. As part of the VFM conclusion they would continue to monitor the Council's path to transformation. Where savings had been specifically attributed to transformation in the MTFP they would consider how these savings were being identified and reported.

As a result of interim audit work there were some concerns that the Corporate Risk Register provided did not link directly with the Council's strategic priorities. The Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Resources informed Members that the updated Corporate Risk Register now linked to the Council's strategic priorities; and that the updated Corporate Risk Register had been included on the agenda, Agenda Item No. 15, to be discussed by the Board. The Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Resources responded to further questions from Members on the results of the interim audit work with regard to the financial services manager posting journals.

Ms. Z. Thomas further informed the Board that with regard to VFM and in view of future financial commitments to capital schemes, Grant Thornton would undertake a high level review of planning around these projects.

RESOLVED that the Grant Thornton Audit Plan 2013/2014 be noted and agreed.

8/14 **GRANT THORNTON PROGRESS UPDATE 2013/2014**

The Board was asked to note the Grant Thornton Audit Board Update for 2013/2014.

Ms. Z. Thomas introduced the report and drew Members' attention to page 61 in the report, Progress at June 2014. Ms. Z. Thomas agreed to provide Members with a copy of Grant Thornton's publication, 'A guide to local authority accounts'. The guide was designed to help Members of Audit Committee's discharge their responsibilities for the financial statements. It aimed to help Members to understand and challenge the accounts, supporting notes and other statements. Ms. Z. Thomas highlighted page 65 in the report – Audit Commission Value for Money (VFM) Profiles and suggested that Members viewed their Council's VFM Profile on the Audit Commission VFM Profiles website, as detailed on page 65 in the report.

With regard to page 63 in the report – Accounts – our top issues, the Chairman raised the question "How do Audit Board Members pick up the top issues"? The Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Resources responded and agreed to provide Members with an update before the next meeting of the Board.

RESOLVED that the Grant Thornton Audit Board Update for 2013/2014 be noted.

9/14 **DEPARTMENTAL RISK REGISTER PRESENTATION - ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES**

The Chairman welcomed Mr. K. Hirons, Environmental Services Manager to the meeting.

Mr. K. Hirons expressed sincere apologies from Guy Revans, Head of Environmental Services. Mr. K. Hirons provided Members with a presentation

detailing operational risks for environmental services. The presentation slides detailed the services provided by environmental services, risk management principles and operational risks. Mr. K. Hirons responded to Member's questions with regard to Health and Safety for employees and members of the public. Members questioned the lack of detail in the presentation. The Executive Director, Finance and Corporate resources informed Members that each service area also completed a very detailed risk management programme. The detailed programmes would be time consuming to present to an Audit Board Meeting, due to the level of detail, but Members could meet with senior officers to look at the more detailed risk management programme for their service area. Members agreed with this suggestion and the Democratic Services Officer was tasked to coordinate requests received from Audit Board Members to view detailed risk management programmes.

The Chairman thanked the Environmental Services Manager for his presentation.

10/14

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2013/2014

The Board considered the draft Annual Governance Statement 2013/2014 for inclusion in the Statement of Accounts 2013/2014.

The Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Resources introduced the report and in doing so informed Members that authorities were expected to publish the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for 2013/2014 with their Statement of Accounts. The preparation and publication of an Annual Governance Statement was necessary in order to meet the statutory requirement set out in Regulation 4(2) of the Accounts and Audit (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2006 to prepare a Statement on Internal Control (SIC) in accordance with 'proper practices'.

Appendix 1 to the report detailed the draft Annual Governance Statement 2013/2014. In response to Councillor Buxton, the Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Resources agreed that reference to staff 1-2-1- meetings and the recent staff survey be included in the Annual Governance Statement. The Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Resources drew Members' attention to page 77 in the report and informed Members that during 2013/2014 only one complaint had been made to the Standards Committee with no further action taken.

The Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Resources responded to Ms. Z. Thomas and agreed that reference to the limited assurance audits should be included within the Annual Governance Statement.

RESOLVED that, subject to the amendments as referred to in the preamble above, the Annual Governance Statement 2013/2014 be included in the Statement of Accounts for 2013/2014.

11/14

BENEFITS FRAUD INVESTIGATIONS UPDATE - QUARTER 4

The Board considered a report which detailed the performance of the Benefits Services Fraud Investigation service for the period 1st January 2014 to 31st March 2014, Quarter 4.

As agreed at the Audit Board meeting held on 20th March 2014, information on the new benefit system and the potential for increased fraud was included in the report, along with temporal data as requested by Members.

The Head of Customer Access and Financial Support introduced the report and in doing so informed the Board that as detailed in the report, during the three month period overpayments of £189,046.77 in Housing Benefit were identified. Council Tax Reduction caused by claimant error was no longer measured.

Fraud investigation could impact upon other areas of benefit administration. The biggest impact was upon the identification of overpaid Housing Benefit and excess payments of Council Tax Benefit/Reduction. Some of these overpayments could be large and could distort the apparent recovery rate of overpayments. Overpayments on the files closed during quarter 4 totalled £8,730.38 in Housing Benefit and £4,926.07 in Council Tax Benefit/Reduction.

During Quarter 4, 39 fraud referrals were received and considered for investigation by the team. The report highlighted where the referrals had been received from, data-matching, official sources and members of the public. 17 of the 20 referrals from members of the public were allegations relating to undeclared partners.

Many fraud referrals related to benefits paid by both Bromsgrove District Council and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). In these cases a joint approach was taken to ensure that the full extent of offending was uncovered and the appropriate action was taken by both bodies. This also maximised staffing resources by preventing duplicate investigation work and depending on workloads either body could take the lead.

Appendix 3 to the report detailed the numbers of referrals and subsequent outcomes for 2013/14, compared with the two previous years. The trend indicated a reduction in referrals but this was largely due to changes in the way some were recorded and also the automation of a large number of changes which had reduced the likelihood of changes not being picked up.

Quite a large number of the referrals would not be taken up. This could be for a variety of reasons such as duplicate referrals where an investigation was already taking place; no benefit in payment, the information in the allegation was already correctly declared alleged or would have no effect on the claim.

Cases where the allegation would have no effect on the Housing Benefit / Council Tax Support claim but could impact on DWP benefits or Tax Credits were referred to the appropriate organisation to investigate.

The timescale for the implementation of the Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS), as announced as part of the Government's Welfare reform plans had now been released and despite the rest of the county joining in November this year, Bromsgrove and Redditch would not join the organisation until February 2016. Staff were being kept fully informed and work would commence six months prior to the start date of February 2016.

The Head of Customer Access and Financial Support highlighted that it was important to note that the local authority would not be responsible for monitoring fraud in the Universal Credit system. This would transfer to the Single Fraud Investigation Service. However we would retain responsibility to manage non-welfare fraud such as the Council Tax Support Scheme. Readiness planning was taking place and the team were looking at how we could help our customers, digital by default, there would be a need for support to be in place for those who absolutely needed help. The team would look at on-line offerings, voluntary sector groups and budget helping assistance.

RESOLVED that the Benefits Services Fraud Investigations update for 1st January 2014 to 31st March 2014, quarter 4 be noted

12/14

INTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL REPORT 2013/2014

The Board considered the 2013/2014 Internal Audit Annual Report for the period 1st April 2013 to 31st March 2014 along with the Audit Opinion and Commentary.

The Service Manager, Worcestershire Internal Audit Shared Service introduced the report and in doing so informed the Board that the Annual Report was a combination of all the reports presented to the Board during the last twelve months. As detailed in Appendix 1 to the report, during 2013/2014 there were 285 chargeable audit days delivered. This equated to a delivery of 95% against a target for the year of 90%. Appendix 2 to the report provided a breakdown of the audits completed and the overall assurance. Appendix 3 to the report provided the audit opinion and commentary.

The Worcestershire Internal Audit Shared Service (WIASS) had achieved and delivered the full 2013/2014 internal audit plan.

The majority of the completed audits had been allocated an audit assurance of either 'moderate' or above meaning that there was generally a sound system of internal control in place, no significant control issues had been encountered and no material losses had been identified during a time of continued significant transformation and change.

The data received from the Client Feedback Analysis 2013/2014, showed that clients were satisfied with the audit process and service. The feedback was used to assess the effectiveness of internal audit and to help improve and enhance the internal audit function.

RESOLVED that the 2013/2014 Internal Audit Annual Report for the period 1st April 2013 to 31st March 2014 along with the Audit Opinion and Commentary, be noted.

13/14 **INTERNAL AUDIT MONITORING REPORT**

The Board considered a report which detailed the monitoring report of internal audit work and performance for 2013/2014.

The Service Manager, Worcestershire Internal Audit Shared Service introduced the report and in doing so informed Members that the report provided commentary on Internal Audit's performance against the performance indicators agreed for the service. The report also included the 2012/2013 audit where further work was requested and had been undertaken throughout the 2013/2014 audit year.

The Service Manager, Worcestershire Internal Audit Shared Service responded to Councillor S. J. Baxter with regard to trend analysis and implementation dates being changed. Members were informed that implementation dates were managed. The Section 151 officer would be made aware and if there was a genuine reason as to why the implementation date was to be changed the Section 151 officer would sign it off. If concerns were noted with regard to implementation dates being changed for no apparent reason the Audit Board would be made aware.

RESOLVED that the monitoring report of internal audit work and performance for 2013/2014 be noted.

14/14 **ICT RESILIENCE - VERBAL UPDATE**

As referred to in Minute Number 5/14 above.

15/14 **CORPORATE RISK REGISTER**

The Board received a report on the updated 2014/2015 corporate risks to be included in the Corporate Risk Register.

The Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Resources introduced the report and in doing drew Members' attention to the Corporate Risks 2014/2015 as detailed at section 3.5 in the report. As requested by the Board Corporate Fraud and Individual Election Registration had been added to the risks. The Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Resources responded to Ms. Z. Thomas and agreed that the Corporate Risks should link to the Council's strategic purposes and this would be raised with the Corporate Management Team.

RESOLVED that, subject to the amendment as detailed in the preamble above, the Corporate Risks 2014/2015 be agreed.

16/14 **AUDIT BOARD DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT 2013/2014**

Members considered the draft Audit Board End of Year Report 2013/2014. The report was a factual report with input from Board Members for the municipal year 2013/2014.

RESOLVED that the draft Audit Board Annual Report 2013/2014 be presented as the final report to the next meeting of Council for information.

17/14 **AUDIT BOARD WORK PROGRAMME 2014/2015**

The Board considered the Work Programme for 2014/2015.

Following a brief discussion on the number and volume of reports presented to Audit Board meetings, the Board agreed that officers be tasked to review the Work Programme for 2014/2015.

RESOLVED:

- (a) that the Work Programme for 2014/2015 be noted; and
- (b) that officers be tasked to review the Work Programme for 2014/2015.

The meeting closed at 7.27 p.m.

Chairman

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

MONDAY, 14TH JULY 2014 AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors L. C. R. Mallett (Chairman), H. J. Jones (Vice-Chairman),
C. J. Bloore, J. S. Brogan, R. A. Clarke, S. R. Colella, R. J. Laight,
P. Lammas, R. J. Shannon, C. J. Spencer and C. J. Tidmarsh

Officers: Mr. K. Dicks, Ms. J. Bayley and Ms. A. Scarce

17/14 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors B. T. Cooper and S. P. Shannon.

18/14 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS**

Councillors J. S. Brogan and C. J. Spencer declared other disclosable interests in respect of Item No. 5 as members of the Artrix Operating Trust.

Councillors R. A. Clarke, R. J. Laight and P. Lammas declared other disclosable interests in respect of Item No. 5 as members of the Artrix Holding Trust.

Councillor R. J. Shannon declared an other disclosable interest in Item No. 5 due to a close personal relationship with an employee of the Artrix.

Members agreed that a general declaration of an other disclosable interest in respect of Item No. 9 should be made for every member of the Board as it was acknowledged that all Members (or their families) would use the leisure facilities provided by the Council at some point.

19/14 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 16th June 2014 were submitted.

Members commented that there had been a single spelling mistake on page 7 of the minutes where "n" had been recorded rather than "on".

The Chairman advised Members that the Cabinet had considered the Board's two recommendations on the subject of the staff survey. In relation to the first recommendation, on the subject of a statement in favour of a zero tolerance approach to bullying and harassment of staff being added to the top ten recommendations arising from the survey, the Cabinet had fully endorsed the Board's proposals. However, the Cabinet had debated for some time the

Board's second proposal, in respect of providing elected Members with access to the staff finder system on the Council's intranet. This proposal had subsequently been referred on to the Chief Executive for further consideration.

The four recommendations proposed on behalf of the Leisure Provision Task Group had also been debated. In respect of the first of these recommendations Cabinet had concluded that it was not necessary for the Audit Board to consider the financial implications of the proposed new leisure centre. Members expressed some concerns about this response and suggested that due to the significant amount of funding involved and the proposed borrowing levels there was a need for the Audit Board to investigate this matter further. Members also noted that they had the power to refer the recommendation to the Audit Board directly.

In respect of the group's second proposal the Cabinet had suggested that it would not be appropriate for them to make a decision about the work of a Task Group as this needed to be determined by the Overview and Scrutiny Board. However, they had no objections to this proposal. The Cabinet had noted the third and fourth recommendations proposed by the Board but had made it clear that they did not agree with the Board's conclusions in relation to their fourth recommendation.

RECOMMENDED to the Audit Board that financial concerns around the increased membership that will be needed to ensure good annual revenue should be addressed through an Audit Board investigation of the figures; and

RESOLVED that, subject to the amendment to the minutes detailed in the preamble above, the minutes be approved.

20/14

WRS JOINT SCRUTINY TASK GROUP - FINAL REPORT

Councillor R. J. Laight, the Council's representative on the Joint Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) Scrutiny Task Group and Chairman of the review, presented the Task Group's recommendations.

During the delivery of this presentation the following issues were highlighted for Members' consideration.

- Meetings of the group had been co-ordinated by the Council's Democratic Services team because Bromsgrove District Council was the host authority for WRS.
- The subject had been reviewed as a joint scrutiny exercise partly because all of the 7 Councils in Worcestershire were members of the shared service. Members were also advised that it had been a requirement of the original partnership agreement that WRS would not be subject to scrutiny by the Overview and Scrutiny Boards at each partner authority.
- The review had been detailed and lengthy, holding a total of 15 meetings.
- There had been cross party consensus within the group on its final recommendations.

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- The report had already been considered by Redditch Borough Council and Wychavon District Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees which had both endorsed all of the group's recommendations.
- Wyre Forest District Council had also considered the report, but had deferred making a decision.
- The report would be presented for the consideration of the Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee on 2nd October 2014. The findings of the Joint Committee would subsequently be reported back to the Cabinets at each partner authority for further consideration.
- Members were informed that meetings of the Joint Committee were open to the public. It was suggested that Members might be interested in attending the meeting of the Committee in October to observe the decision making process in action.
- Any feedback from the Board on this report would be detailed in the minutes of the meeting and attached as an addendum to the report when presented to the Joint Committee.
- Members of the group had been concerned that further reductions in partners' financial contributions could have a detrimental impact on public safety, due to the nature of the services provided by WRS.
- The Task Group had been particularly concerned about the approach that had been adopted by some partners to funding the shared service. Members were suggesting that in some cases partners had prioritised their interests, particularly during discussions about finances, which was not necessarily conducive to effective partnership working.
- The Task Group had also been concerned about the governance arrangements for WRS and were proposing significant changes designed to enhance the shared service.
- Members had received evidence from a number of expert witnesses during the review. Councillor Laight was particularly keen to thank the Head of Regulatory Services for his constructive contributions to the review.

Following delivery of the presentation a number of points were raised during discussion of the group's recommendations:

- The Head of Regulatory Services had advised the group that any further reductions beyond the current budget level would have an impact on service provision as there would be fewer Officers than was needed to deliver services at their current levels.
- Budget reductions would potentially lead to further job losses and could result in a reduction in Officer capacity to react to major crises (such as outbreaks of foot and mouth disease).
- A reduction in the budget available to the shared service could also impact on the potential for Officers to undertake preventative work. In this context there was a risk that WRS would become a purely reactive service.
- Concerns were raised about accountability for WRS and the difficulties that had been encountered in the first 4 years of operation. It was confirmed that the Joint Committee was accountable for the shared service as the elected Members appointed to it made decisions in respect of the partnership and monitored the performance of services.

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- The partnership had been established in 2010. At that time the significant changes to local government that would subsequently occur, particularly those resulting from financial austerity, had not been anticipated and it had not been possible to predict that challenges would arise in the way that they had.
- Communication problems involving the Worcestershire Hub Service were highlighted within the review. It was anticipated that the new in house communications service would address these problems and improve the service to the customer. The designated Member Liaison Officer, if introduced, would also help to resolve this problem.
- Attempts had been made to consult with Worcestershire County Council regarding their proposed budget cuts. However, a letter sent to the Leader of the Council and relevant Officers had not been taken into account as part of the budget setting process and a response had only been received following further enquiries.
- The Board noted that the County Council and the district Councils had different statutory responsibilities in relation to regulatory services.
- Some Members suggested that if the budget reductions proposed by Worcestershire County Council were critical consideration might need to be given in future to the district Councils working together alone in order to make sure that the partnership remained sustainable. However, the Board acknowledged that this idea would need to be subject to further investigation.
- The review had not necessarily been undertaken at the most appropriate time as it coincided with significant changes for the partnership, including initial discussions about the potential for WRS to enter into a strategic partnership with an external partner.
- Some concerns were expressed that due to the criticisms contained within the report some organisations might be deterred from entering into a strategic partnership with WRS and this could therefore weaken any final partnership arrangements. However, Officers confirmed that four organisations had already expressed an interest in the potential to enter into a strategic partnership with WRS, though no detail could be provided on the progress that had been made with this matter at the time of the meeting.
- Officers confirmed that any decision to enter into a strategic partnership with an external partner would need to be made by the Cabinets at each local authority.
- Members expressed an interest in learning more about the proposed strategic partnership and the implications for the future of WRS. As Officers had already delivered briefings on this subject to other partners, it was agreed that a similar briefing should be requested for Bromsgrove.
- The Council's two elected representatives on the Joint Committee had both been consulted as part of the review. However, whilst they had been advised of the outcomes of the review it had not been felt that it would be appropriate to invite them to speak to the Board on this matter because they had been expert witnesses.
- Amanda Scarce and Jess Bayley, the Democratic Services Officers who had supported the review, were thanked for their help with the exercise. There was a suggestion that further joint scrutiny exercises would be

useful in the future. However, for those to be effective, participating Councils would need to provide more constructive support to the host authority.

The level of funding reductions that had been proposed by Worcestershire County Council for the following three year period were discussed in particular detail. Members were disappointed to learn that this could lead to a significant reduction in the number of Trading Standards Officers employed by WRS and that this could have a detrimental impact on the quality of the trading standards service in the county. Members also noted that in order to manage any future crises involving trading standards WRS might need to hire staff on a temporary basis from other regulatory services which could potentially lead to an increase in financial costs for the partnership. Alongside these considerations Members expressed concerns that the proposed contribution from Worcestershire County Council would not cover the overheads and other costs of the partnership.

Members also noted that a number of district Councils had also requested that specific savings be achieved, particularly Worcester City Council and Wyre Forest District Council. Officers advised that any reductions in financial contribution would be accompanied by a corresponding reduction in service levels within those Councils' boarders. However, Members were concerned that the cumulative impact of all these reductions would be detrimental for the partnership as a whole and, in particular, would undermine the sustainability of the shared service in the long-term.

Whilst Members concurred that the Group's proposals should be endorsed the Board agreed that the concerns they had raised during their debate should also be highlighted for the consideration of the Joint Committee. The Board therefore

RECOMMENDED to the Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee that

1. the 12 recommendations of the Joint WRS Scrutiny Task Group be endorsed; and
2. the Board's concerns, that further reductions in the financial contributions from partners could risk the future of the partnership and the safety of residents, be noted;

RESOLVED that

1. the Head of Regulatory Services be invited to a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board, together with the Council's Member representatives on the Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee, to deliver a briefing on the subject of the strategic partnership plans for WRS; and
2. the report be noted.

The Board considered the Cabinet's response to the Artrix Outreach Provision Task Group's report. Officers confirmed that the Cabinet had endorsed the recommendations subject to minor amendments. These recommendations would be added to the Board's Recommendation Tracker and updates would be requested from relevant Officers and partners.

The Chairman commented that he had discussed the Cabinet's response with Councillor S. P. Shannon, who had chaired the Task Group exercise. Councillor Shannon had welcomed the Cabinet's response to the Group's proposals and had asked the Board to note his thanks to all the other members of the group for their hard work. The Board also thanked Councillor Shannon for his work in chairing the review.

22/14

TO REVIEW THE TASK GROUP GUIDELINES & SCOPING DOCUMENTS

The Board considered the Inquiry/Task Group Procedure Guidelines. During consideration of these guidelines the following points were discussed:

- The guidelines were followed by the Board when considering any requests to launch Task Groups. However, they were not included in the constitution and there was the potential to formalise the requirements.
- Short, Sharp Reviews could be undertaken to explore subjects relatively quickly and these exercises could help Members to determine whether a more detailed Task Group review of the subject would be appropriate.
- The Board had launched only one Short, Sharp Review to date; the MUGA (Multi Use Games Area) in Alvechurch in 2010.
- There was the potential to combine the topic proposal form and the scoping checklist. This would ensure that the Board could consider more detail when deciding whether a subject was suitable for further scrutiny and help to reduce the timescales involved in launching a review.
- Interest had recently increased amongst Members in participating in Task Group exercises resulting in competition for places on groups.
- There was the potential to review the minimum and maximum number of Councillors. The Board could also consider the option of reintroducing a form that would need to be completed by Councillors explaining what they could contribute to a review.
- Nominations to Task Groups could also be reviewed. Officers explained that at some other local authorities group leaders nominated Members to groups.
- The timeframes for Task Group exercises could be assessed. Whilst Task Groups were required to complete reviews within 2 – 5 months at present the Board could consider providing greater flexibility over timescales if considered appropriate for the subject.
- Task Group Chairmen already provided verbal updates to the Board on the progress of a review. Interim reports could also be introduced as a requirement to enable the Board to identify any problems with a review as and when they occurred as well as to determine whether it was worth continuing with an exercise.

- The arrangements for presenting task group final reports to both the Board and Cabinet could also be assessed. Members were advised that at some other Councils the Chairman of a task group would deliver a short presentation to the Board and then Cabinet, supported at the table by the lead Democratic Services Officer for the task group.

The Chairman explained that he would discuss all of these suggestions in further detail with Officers. He suggested that Members consider any additional changes that could be made to the scrutiny process and report back to him prior to the following meeting of the Board. Members agreed that this subject should also be considered in further detail at that meeting, subject to the Board's work programme.

RESOLVED that the subject be considered in detail at a future meeting of the Board.

23/14

QUARTERLY RECOMMENDATION TRACKER

The Board considered the Recommendation Tracker Report and noted that there were a number of recommendations where action remained outstanding.

The Chairman suggested that the outstanding recommendations in respect of the Planning Policy Task Group could be discussed with the Head of Planning and Regeneration at the next meeting of the Board.

A number of the recommendations that had been proposed by the Air Quality Task Group in 2013 were in the process of being implemented. In particular, Officers reported that the Worcestershire Health and Wellbeing Board was due to consider relevant recommendations at its meeting on 22nd July.

Members expressed concerns about the lack of information that had been received in respect of the recommendations made by the Youth Provision Task Group. Members agreed that as the 12 month review of the Task Group Report was due in September a more detailed response should be brought back to the Board at that time..

The Chairman also suggested that it was not appropriate for Democratic Services Officers to have to spend time chasing other Officers for updates on progress that had been made in implementing recommendations. The Board was therefore advised that he would undertake to chase relevant Officer for an update on progress with this matter.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

24/14

JOINT INTEGRATED WASTE SERVICES SCRUTINY TASK GROUP

Following the previous meeting of the Board Officers had contacted Worcestershire County Council (WCC) to discuss the terms of reference for the review. The lead support Officer from WCC had confirmed that as a district Council remained a member of this Task Group (Worcester City

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Council) this exercise would continue to be classified as a Joint Task Group review. There were no plans to alter the terms of reference.

The reasons why other district Councils had decided not to participate in this exercise were briefly debated. In particular, it was noted that Redditch Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee had decided not to participate as there had been cross party consensus that a shared waste collection and disposal service was not suitable for the Borough.

The suitability of the Council remaining involved in this Task Group exercise was debated in some detail. Some Members suggested that it was important to provide the Council with an opportunity to influence the work of this group. Members noted that as this review was being undertaken as a scrutiny exercise participation in the review would not commit the Council to entering into a shared waste collection and disposal service as Task Groups did not have any decision making powers. There was also no guarantee that the Task Group would recommend the introduction of a countywide shared service. However, concerns were expressed by other Members about the time that would be required and the potential for constructive outcomes to be achieved when only a limited number of district Councils would be participating in the exercise.

Officers advised that the scrutiny team at WCC had requested further information from the Head of Environmental Services about the Council's waste collection service. A number of Members expressed concerns about providing this information, particularly if it would require Officers to spend a significant amount of time responding. However, Members also noted that out of courtesy it would be appropriate to respond to this request for information. It was noted that this response could be highlighted as good practice if and when the Council co-ordinated any future joint scrutiny exercises.

Members noted that the group's final report would need to be referred back to the Council if proposals were brought forward to introduce an integrated waste service in Worcestershire. The Board would have the option to scrutinise the report at this stage.

RESOLVED that

1. Officers should respond to the Joint Integrated Waste Services Scrutiny Task Group's request for information about the Council's waste collection service as and when appropriate and should use their discretion when determining the level of information that could reasonably be provided; and
2. Bromsgrove District Council's Overview and Scrutiny Board withdraw from the Joint Integrated Waste Services Scrutiny Task Group.

25/14

LEISURE PROVISION TASK GROUP

Councillor C. J. Spencer, Chairman of the Leisure Provision Task Group, explained that the next meeting of the group would take place on Thursday 17th July.

Councillor C. J. Bloore explained that following the previous meeting of the Board he had discussed leisure provision within the district with local sports clubs. Many of these clubs had reported that costs at the Ryland Centre for use of sports hall facilities had increased recently and they were therefore using facilities in Redditch. Members agreed that this issue and the implications for participation in leisure activities in the district should be considered further by the Task Group.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Spencer for producing a detailed written report for Members' consideration at the previous meeting of the Board and that this had helped to facilitate a constructive debate of the matter.

26/14

WCC HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chairman read out a statement that had been provided by Councillor B. T. Cooper, the Council's representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) in which Councillor Cooper had explained that the most recent meeting of the HOSC was devoted to a presentation by Worcestershire Health and Care Trust on 'Community Services development: the next phase of integration'.

In view of the concerns expressed by the Board, about possible charging for incontinence pads, Councillor Cooper had raised the issue at the HOSC. The Chairman of HOSC had reported that he was aware of the issue and would be discussing the matter further with the Chairman of Worcestershire County Council's Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board to ascertain whether HOSC could deal with the matter in the future. Councillor Cooper understood that this conversation had subsequently taken place and that the issue of charging for pads had been raised but no decision had been made.

At the request of Councillor Cooper copies of the draft minutes from the meeting of the HOSC held on 17th June were circulated for the consideration of the Board.

27/14

CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the Cabinet Work Programme for the period 1st August to 30th November 2014.

The Chairman expressed disappointment that the layout of the Cabinet Work Programme had not changed as discussed at previous meetings of the Board. Members also suggested that it remained unclear whether some items listed on the Cabinet Work Programme were key decisions. In particular, Members requested further clarification as to whether the Council-owned land on Aintree Close, Catshill, was worth more than £50,000 and therefore likely to be the subject of a key decision.

The Town Centre Public Realm Phase 2 was also discussed and Members commented that they had received a presentation on the first phase of this

project the previous year. It was agreed that a further presentation to the Board on the second phase would therefore be useful.

The Chairman explained that due to the timing of the Board meetings, which took place a week after the Cabinet met, it was currently difficult for the Board to pre-scrutinise items listed on the Cabinet's Work Programme constructively. He informed Members that he would therefore approach the Leader to discuss the potential to alter the order of the meetings of the two Committees in future years to enable the Board to undertake pre-scrutiny more effectively.

RESOLVED that

1. a presentation be delivered at a future meeting of the Board on the subject of the Town Centre Public Realm Phase 2; and
2. the Cabinet Work Programme for the period 1st August to 30th November 2014 be noted.

28/14

ACTION LIST

Officers explained that information received regarding the parts for CCTV equipment had been circulated for Members consideration outside the meeting.

RESOLVED that the Action List be noted.

29/14

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman commented that following the addition of a number of items to the Board's Work Programme during the meeting the agenda for the September meeting of the Board was relatively large. He suggested that consideration should therefore be given to holding an additional meeting. Members commented that any additional meeting should take place in September as it was likely that many Members and Officers would be on leave in August. Members agreed that a suitable date should therefore be identified in September and that Officers should work with the Chairman to identify any items that could be postponed for consideration at a later meeting in the municipal year.

RESOLVED that

1. Officers investigate the potential to hold an additional meeting of the Board in September in consultation with the Chairman;
2. Officers draft a series of questions for the consideration of the Head of Planning and Regeneration and the relevant Portfolio Holder and circulate for the consideration of Board Members; and
3. the Committee's Work Programme be noted.

The meeting closed at 8.10 p.m.

Chairman

WORCESTERSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCILS AND COUNTY COUNCIL

WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES

MEETING OF THE WORCESTERSHIRE SHARED SERVICES JOINT COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 26TH JUNE 2014 AT 4.30 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors M. A. Bullivant, D. Hughes, B. Clayton, D. Wilkinson, Mrs. L. Hodgson, A. N. Blagg, R. Davis, K. Jennings, P. Harrison and M. Hart (during Minute No's 4/14 to 12/14)

Observers: Ms. R. Mullen, Corporate Director, Service Delivery, Worcester City Council and Mr. V. Allison, Deputy Managing Director, Wychavon District Council

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

Officers: Ms. J. Pickering, Mr. S. Jordan, Ms. C. Flanagan, Mr. M. Kay, Mr. S. Wilkes and Mrs. P. Ross

1/14 **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

RESOLVED that Councillor M. A. Bullivant, Bromsgrove District Council be elected as Chairman of the Joint Committee for the ensuing municipal year.

2/14 **ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN**

RESOLVED that Councillor Mrs. B. Behan, Malvern Hills District Council be elected as Vice-Chairman of the Joint Committee for the ensuing municipal year.

3/14 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R. L. Dent, Bromsgrove District Council, Mrs. B. Behan, Malvern Hills District Council and A. Roberts, Worcester City Council.

4/14 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were received.

5/14 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee held on 20th February 2014 were submitted.

Councillor Mrs. L. Hodgson requested that with regard to Minute No. 37/13, that it be noted that there was a shortfall of £222,000 in relation to the part year effect to meet the level of reduction required for 2014/2015 for County Services and that it was accepted that due to the timing of potential restructures that there would be this level of shortfall. Her concern was that this information was not clearly detailed in Minute No. 37/13.

RESOLVED that, subject to the amendment as detailed in the preamble above, the minutes be approved as a correct record.

6/14

WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT 2013/2014

The Committee considered the Worcestershire Regulatory Services Annual Report for the period 1st April 2013 to 31st March 2014.

The Head of Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) informed the Committee that under the Worcestershire Shared Services Partner Agreement the Joint Committee was required to receive the annual report at its annual meeting. The report covered the performance of the service for the period 1st April 2013 to 31st March 2014.

The Head of WRS informed Members that the report covered the performance of the service. This year had seen continued discussions around future operating and financial models for the delivery of the service. Budget reductions requested by partners had been delivered by way of efficiencies and reductions identified for 2014/2015 that included reductions in service level. The year 2013/2014 was still an excellent year for work activity with excellent results across a range of service areas, some good outcomes from Court cases and a wide range of other project work delivered.

The Head of WRS drew Members' attention to the performance information as detailed on pages 19 to 22 of the Annual Report. Members were briefly informed of the recent Joint Overview and Scrutiny exercise. Members from the seven partner authorities had formed a Joint Overview and Scrutiny Task Group focusing on what WRS had delivered since its inception. Interviews had been held with WRS officers and the Management Board. The findings of the Task Group would be brought to a future meeting of the Joint Committee.

Councillor Mrs. L. Hodgson highlighted that one of the criticisms of the Task Group was information from Joint Committee meetings not being cascaded down to all partner authorities Members. She raised the question "How did we ensure information was cascaded down to Members of each partner authority". Councillor M. Hart responded that he felt that Joint Committee Members had a huge role to play and was of the opinion that it was down to Joint Committee Members to feedback to their respective Members to ensure they were kept fully informed. Further discussion followed with Members agreeing on the importance of information being cascaded down to partner authorities Members, so as any concerns identified could then be raised via their Joint Committee Member at Joint Committee meetings. Members also

agreed that it would be good practice to send a copy of the WRS Annual Report each year to all partner authorities Members as well as partner authorities Chief Executives and Managing Directors.

The Head of WRS responded to Members' questions with regard to the savings for partner councils as identified on page 47 of the Annual Report. Highlighting that WRS were working with partner authorities to develop savings over the next two years, strategic partnering would help with savings.

The Head of WRS drew Members' attention to 'Other Highlights' on pages 23 to 30 of the Annual Report. The Head of WRS responded to Members' questions with regard to press releases being issued and informed the Committee that WRS had a robust approach and proactive role when it came to areas of successful working or successful prosecutions which were publicised via press releases.

RESOLVED:

- (a) that the Worcestershire Regulatory Services Annual Report 2013/2014 be noted; and
- (b) that a copy of the Worcestershire Regulatory Services Annual Report 2013/2014 be forwarded to the Chief Executive, Managing Director and Members of each partner authority.

7/14

STRATEGIC PARTNERING HIGHLIGHT REPORT

Members were provided with a highlight report – June 2014.

The Head of Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) introduced the highlight report and in doing so informed the Committee that four bidders had been invited to participate in the next phase, the dialogue process. A set of draft templates had been developed for the Invitation to Participate in Dialogue (ITPD) stage. A Suppliers Day was being held on Monday 7th July 2014 at Redditch Borough Council commencing at 1:00pm. The purpose of the Suppliers Day was to highlight to the bidders what the Worcestershire partners were looking for in a Strategic Partnership and the principles of which they were seeking in any proposals. This was an opportunity for WRS and South Worcestershire Building Control to showcase what they could do and their significant achievements to date. An invite had been extended to Joint Committee Members to attend the Suppliers Day.

The bidders would then be asked to go away and prepare their questions for the dialogue phase which would begin week commencing 28th July and 11th August 2014. Timeline for Competitive Dialogue had been developed but was really tight in order to achieve a contract signature in early 2015. The project plan would be monitored carefully at each project team meeting. The project manager would report any slippages to the Management Board. The project was on budget but due to the complexities involved in running two lots in the same process more of the project manager's time had been called upon than had been anticipated.

The Head of WRS further informed the Committee that the outline of the project plan and key dates would be presented to a future meeting of the Committee. WRS staff had been kept fully informed. The Head of WRS highlighted that he was happy to attend any Council meetings in order to inform and update all partner authorities.

The Head of WRS responded to Councillor B. Clayton with regard to the status of the project, would additional funds be required as a result of the additional time required of the project manager. The Head of WRS explained that complex paperwork had required more time than anticipated in the early stages of the project which had resulted in an increased spend, so hopefully no additional funding would be required.

The Chairman expressed his thanks for the highlight report.

8/14

WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES - BUSINESS MODEL REVIEW

The Committee was asked to consider the Worcestershire Regulatory Services, Business Model Review which had been developed to reflect the changing needs of the Worcestershire Shared Services Partnership.

Mr. I. Pumfrey, Chairman, Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS), Management Board introduced the report and in doing so informed Members that the business model review had been prompted by the fact that partner authorities were currently in a very different place today compared to when the partnership was initially developed in 2010.

With the exception of minor revisions to the scope of work contained within the Statement of Partner Requirements, the agreement had not been revised since it was completed in 2010. Significant revisions to the agreement were now needed to ensure it continued to be fit for purpose given the substantial changes that had occurred in the operating environment over the last four years.

All partners were in a very similar situation with regard to budget cuts. It was however increasingly difficult to achieve a common approach to service delivery because of the marked difference in financial pressures confronting partner councils compared to 2010.

Negotiating agreement on the "Core Matrix" service level and new activity based cost sharing mechanism agreed by this Committee in September 2013 was both complex and challenging because of increasing differences in financial pressures faced by partners. The Management Board considered that these challenges and pressures meant that continued pursuit of a common approach could no longer be sustained and recognised that by 2016/2017 there needed to be a greater differentiation in partner contributions to, and associated service levels received from, WRS. A new business model was required which would accommodate these different requirements as well as deliver current savings and efficiency plans. This view was echoed by Worcestershire Chief Executives who were concerned to avoid repetition of

the difficulties in agreeing a WRS budget and service position for the current year.

The report sets out the proposals for modification to the business model of WRS to reflect the changing needs of the partnership. The proposals were intended to provide an interim solution recognising that further changes would be necessary once the outcome of the current procurement for a strategic partnership was known.

The Chairman, (WRS), Management Board highlighted that the proposed changes to the partnership agreement would require unanimous approval of all participating authorities to enable them to be incorporated.

RESOLVED that the revisions to the Worcestershire Regulatory Services business model as detailed in the report be endorsed.

RECOMMENDED that partner Councils approve the changes to the Worcestershire Shared Services Partnership Agreement as detailed at Appendix 1 to the report at the earliest opportunity.

9/14

WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES REVENUE MONITORING APRIL - MARCH 2014

The Committee considered a report which detailed the financial position for the period April 2013 to March 2014.

The Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Resources, Bromsgrove District Council introduced the report and in doing so informed the Committee that Worcestershire Regulatory Services Joint Committee had been classified as a small relevant body by the Audit Commission as its income was less than £6.5 million. As a result of this classification the requirement of the formal accounting statements for 2013/2014 was limited to the return as detailed at Appendix 3 to the report.

The Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Resources, Bromsgrove District Council drew Members' attention to the detailed revenue report, as detailed at Appendix 1 to the report. This showed a final outturn underspend of £147,000. This underspend was mainly due to a number of vacant posts within the service together with savings resulting from maternity leave, long term sick etc. The underspend was offset by the costs associated with additional agency staff being used to cover the vacancies and to backfill for staff seconded to support the service transformation project.

As previously reported there was a saving of £282,000 from the costs originally included in the business case, another £250,000 had been released during 2013/2014 making a total saving of £533,000 from the original business case.

The Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Resources, Bromsgrove District Council informed Members that Appendix 5 to the report detailed the Worcestershire Internal Audit Shared Services Manager's Audit Opinion on

the effectiveness of the System of Internal Control at Bromsgrove District Council.

RESOLVED:

- (a) that the financial position for the period April 2013 to March 2014, be noted;
- (b) that the ICT funding required from partner Councils for 2013/2014 as detailed at Appendix 2 to the report, be approved;
- (c) that the refund of the 2013/2014 underspend of £147,000 to the participating Councils, as set out below, be approved:

Council	Refund of Savings £'000
Bromsgrove	16
Malvern Hills	14
Redditch	16
City of Worcester	20
Wychavon	24
Wyre Forest	15
Worcestershire County Council	42
TOTAL	147

- (d) that the Annual Return as set out at Appendix 3 to the report, including the Accounting Statements for the Joint Committee for the period 1st April 2013 – 31st March 2014 be approved; and
- (e) that the Worcestershire Internal Audit Shared Services Manager's Opinion on the Effectiveness of the System on Internal Control at Bromsgrove District Council for the year ended 31st March 2014, as detailed at Appendix 5 to the report be noted.

10/14

WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES REGULATORS CODE

The Committee considered a report that provided information on the Regulators Code which had replaced the Regulators Compliance Code, previously published by the Better Regulation Delivery Office.

The Head of Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) introduced the report and informed Members that WRS had taken the lead regionally to ensure consistency. The Regulators' Code was published in July 2013, ahead of its statutory implementation, in order to allow regulators time to comment, review their existing practices and to identify any steps they needed to take in order to meet the expectations of the revised Code. The Code came into force on April 6th 2014. From this date, local authorities had a statutory duty to have regard to the Code when developing the principles and policies which guided their regulatory activities.

The code required Regulators to:

- Carry out activities in a way that supports those they regulate to comply and grow
- Provide simple and straightforward ways to engage with those they regulate and hear their views
- Base their regulatory activities on risk
- Share information about compliance and risk
- Ensure clear information, guidance and advice is available to help those they regulate meet their responsibilities to comply
- Ensure that their approach to their regulatory activities is transparent

RESOLVED:

- (a) that the headline requirements of the Code be noted; and
- (b) that the Joint Committee endorses the approach being taken by Worcestershire Regulatory Services in relation to embedding these requirements.

11/14

ACTIVITY DATA QUARTER 3 AND 4 2013/2014

The Committee considered a report which detailed the Worcestershire Regulatory Services Activity Data for Quarter 3 and 4, 2013/2014.

Mr. S. Wilkes, Business Manager, Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) introduced the report and reminded Members that they had requested that the service provided data on activity levels to help reassure local Members that WRS actively continued to tackle issues broadly across the county. The report showed three full quarters of data for comparison.

In the last report presented to Joint Committee Members, it was noted that complaints from Citizens Advice Consumer Service (CACS) were down. This appeared to be a national issue, with authorities in many regions reporting this. It was raised with CACS through the Association of Chief Trading Standards Officers representative on the CACS Board who engaged with partners. The situation would be monitored. Locally we may need to ensure that the number was published and broadcast as much as possible.

The report highlighted a number of cases which had been concluded in quarter 4. These cases were detailed on page 93 in the report. Members agreed that successful cases should be publicised in order to make the public aware of the activities of WRS.

Mr. S. Wilkes responded to questions from Members with regard to the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (formerly referred to as Scores on the Doors,) which rates the level of hygiene at local catering establishments and contributed to the performance indicators agreed for the service. There was not a statutory requirement for premises to display their Food Hygiene Rating Certificate.

The data continued to highlight the large volumes of demand coming into the service for Licensing, although there was a reduction in quarter 4. This was likely to be a post-Christmas effect with fewer temporary events taking place.

The Chairman expressed thanks to officers for the comprehensive report.

Agenda Item 6

Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee
26th June 2014

RESOLVED that the Worcestershire Regulatory Services Activity Data Quarter 3 and 4 report be noted.

12/14 **REVISED MEETING DATES 2014/2015**

The Committee considered the revised meeting dates 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 2nd October 2014
- Thursday 27th November 2014 – Budget Meeting
- Thursday 19th February 2015

The meeting closed at 5.40 p.m.

Chairman

Worcestershire Regulatory Services

Supporting and protecting you

Joint Committee: 26 June 2014

Title: Worcestershire Regulatory Services – Business model review

Recommendation

The Joint Committee is recommended to:

1. Endorse the revisions to the WRS business model detailed in this report and;
2. Recommend partner Councils approve the changes to the Worcestershire Shared Services Partnership Agreement set out in appendix 1 to this report at the earliest opportunity.

Contribution to Priorities

The recommended changes to business model directly support delivery of current WRS priorities.

Introduction / Summary

This report sets out proposals for modification to the business model of WRS to reflect changing needs of the partnership.

These proposals are intended to provide an interim solution recognising that further changes will be necessary once the outcome is known of the current procurement for a strategic partnership.

Background

WRS was established on 1 June 2010 when the county and six district councils delegated their environmental health, licensing and trading standards functions to the South Worcestershire Shared Services Partnership Joint Committee (hereafter referred to as the Joint Committee).

The Joint Committee is established under section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972. The arrangements governing the operation of the Joint committee, how it discharges its functions and the relationship between the Joint Committee and partner councils including how the Joint Committee is funded are set out in a detailed partnership agreement. Part I of the agreement contains general provisions relating to the

Report

Joint Committee and Part II contains provisions relating specifically to WRS.

With the exception of minor revisions to the scope of work contained within the Statement of Partner Requirements, the agreement has not been revised since it was completed in 2010. Significant revisions to the agreement are now needed to ensure it continues to be fit for purpose given the substantial changes that have occurred in the operating environment over the last four years.

The partnership agreement reflects the business model underpinning the detailed business case for WRS developed in 2009/10. This model achieves cost reductions by vigorous pursuit of a common approach to service delivery. Part I, clause 9.2 commits the participating authorities to work together to achieve consistent and standardised service delivery.

This commitment to a common approach is reinforced by other checks and balances built into the agreement, in particular the variation provisions in Part II, clause 9 which permits a participating authority to vary the nature and extent of services that it receives from the partnership but also obliges it to meet all the contingent financial consequences. This clause further permits the Joint Committee to decline to implement any variation sought by a participating authority if it considers it impracticable or to do so would have an adverse impact upon other participating authorities. These provisions follow through into the arrangements for apportionment of costs which were modified by this committee in 2013.

There is no doubt that this business model for WRS has enabled delivery of savings well in excess of the planned 17% over baseline in the detailed business case. It is however increasingly difficult to achieve a common approach to service delivery because of the marked difference in financial pressures confronting partner councils compared to 2010.

Negotiating agreement on the “Core Matrix” service level and new activity based cost sharing mechanism agreed by this committee in September 2013 was both complex and challenging because of these increasing differences in financial pressures faced by partners. Management Board considers that these challenges and pressures mean continued pursuit of a common approach can no longer be sustained and recognises that by 2016/17 there needs to be a greater differentiation in partner contributions to, and associated service levels received from, WRS. A new business model is required which will accommodate these

different requirements as well as deliver current savings and efficiency plans. This view is echoed by Worcestershire Chief Executives who are concerned to avoid repetition of the difficulties in agreeing a WRS budget and service position for the current year.

Management Board proposes achieving differentiated partner service levels and attendant financial contributions by replacing the current common “core matrix” service as the basis for agreed variations with a “core base plus” service. This will involve reducing the current “core matrix” service to a much lower “core base” cost and service level and building back up from this base to meet individual partner requirements. The “core base” will be the fundamental minimum managerial and technical infrastructure on which scaleable service delivery is then built.

The currently identified future gross running cost envelope of £3.250m in 2016/17 agreed by this Committee in February 2014 will be used to establish the new lower cost “core base” level of service. This will inevitably be significantly below the current “core matrix” service level and carry higher risks. Partners wishing to maintain, and fund, a level of service above this “core base” will purchase agreed additional services from WRS. As noted this approach will incorporate existing efficiency plans and is consistent with the revised activity based cost sharing model. These proposals also accord with recommendation 6 of the draft report of the Joint Worcestershire Regulatory Services Scrutiny Task Group.

Incorporation of the changes to business model and business processes described above into the partnership agreement to provide the necessary clarity and accountability will be accomplished through the revisions detailed in appendix 1.

Financial Implications

The recommendations in this report will ensure that the Worcestershire Shared Services Partnership and WRS can respond effectively to the financial pressures facing individual participating authorities.

Legal Implications

The changes proposed to the partnership agreement will require unanimous approval of all participating authorities to enable them to be incorporated. Partners are requested to progress recommendations from the Joint Committee as quickly as possible.



Changes to the agreement, once approved, will be undertaken by Bromsgrove District Council Legal Services.

Risk

Failure to implement the recommendations in this report are very likely to result in difficulty in securing a mutually acceptable financial settlement for WRS for 2015/16 and beyond.

Not only will this make setting of a budget for WRS this November exceptionally challenging but it also risks setting of individual partner budgets in 2015.

Sustainability

Management Board believes the recommendations in this report will ensure the financial sustainability of the Worcestershire Shared Service Partnership and WRS for the immediate future.

Contact Points

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Background Papers

Worcestershire Shared Service Partnership Joint Committee
– 26 September 2013 – Item 8 “Core Service Matrix for WRS”

Worcestershire Shared Service Partnership Joint Committee
– 26 September 2013 – Item 9 “WRS Financial Planning Assumptions”

Worcestershire Shared Service Partnership Joint Committee
– 26 September 2013 – Item 10 “Review of Apportionment of Costs”

Appendix 1 Schedule of proposed revisions to partnership agreement

Part, clause, schedule	Proposed revision
Part I, clause 3.4	Delete clause as partners no longer wish partnership to be expanded
Part I, sub-clause 6.1.3	Delete sub-clause as roles have not rotated and this is not advantageous as linked to hosting costs.
Part I, clause 8	Revise 8.1 requirement for annual business plan to incorporate requirement for production of rolling 3 year financial plan setting gross running cost envelopes linked to future partner contributions.
Part I, clause 9.2	Modify to make clear no obligation on consistency beyond new reduced “core matrix”
Part II, clause 8.1	Reference to replacement schedule 4
Part II, clause 8.2	Delete clause as its provisions are satisfied by the new schedule 4
Part II, clause 9.1	Modify to refer to individual partner service agreement based on new reduced “core matrix” plus additional components.
Part II, schedule 3	Update to reflect current service standards
Part II, schedule 4	Replace with new cost sharing arrangements schedule
Part II, Appendix 1	Replace statement of partner requirements with new reduced core matrix and statement of individual additional partner requirements.



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CABINET

3rd September 2014

Home Choice Plus Allocations Policy Review

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Cllr Kit Taylor
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Sue Hanley
Wards Affected	All
Ward Councillor Consulted	N/A

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

- 1.1 Following amendments to the legislation governing housing allocations in the Localism Act 2011, the Home Choice Plus Partnership proposed changes to the allocations policy and has subsequently held a consultation exercise.
- 1.2 This report summarises the outcome of the Home Choice Plus Housing Allocations Policy consultation with partner authority portfolio holders, members of the public and stakeholders.
- 1.3 Members are asked to approve the updated Home Choice Plus allocations policy (Appendix 1) and complete further work to ensure the Council is effectively meeting the strategic purpose of 'Help me to find somewhere to live in my locality'.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet is asked to recommend that

- 1) The Home Choice Plus Allocations Policy (Appendix 1) is approved and;**
- 2) Officers undertake a review of the policy to commence after 12 months from the implementation date to establish whether it is the most effective way of meeting the Council's strategic purpose 'Help me to find somewhere to live in my locality'.**
- 3) The Council works closely with Bromsgrove District Housing Trust during the next year to establish whether, from a "system – thinking" perspective, choice-based lettings is the most effective way of meeting the strategic purpose: 'Help me to find somewhere to live in my locality'.**
- 4) The remaining funds of 26k available from the 2014-15 DCLG homelessness grant be utilised in supporting Bromsgrove District Housing Trust in implementing the approved policy**

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3rd September 2014

and its impact and to support Fry Housing to continue its housing scheme for ex-offenders in Bromsgrove..

3. KEY ISSUES

Financial Implications

- 3.1 The cost to undertake the necessary alterations to the Home Choice Plus software will be covered by monies held by the Partnership.
- 3.2 The DCLG provides an annual homelessness grant of 112k to Bromsgrove Council, and it is proposed to use the remaining £26k from this grant to fund:
 - Additional work required of BDHT to implement the changes to the allocations Policy, review the existing housing waiting list and deal with customer enquiries resulting from these changes. Up to £21K
 - A one-off contribution of £5K to support Fry Housing continue their housing scheme for ex-offenders in Bromsgrove.

Legal Implications

- 3.3 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 then allocate in accordance with that scheme.
- 3.4 The provisions of the Localism Act 2011 relating to housing allocation 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.

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- 3.5 Part VI Housing Act 1996 specifies 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 homeless 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 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. Whatever classes of persons who do not qualify for social housing, it is important to consider exceptional circumstances where it may be necessary not to apply these criteria in the case of individual applicants.
- 3.7 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.
- 3.8 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."
- 3.9 The Localism Act and subsequent consultation paper on Providing Social Housing for Local People focuses on the need to provide housing for local people and to categories of household that the local stakeholders, members and residents think are important, as well as housing the "reasonable preference groups", as listed at 3.5. The new allocations policy seeks to encompass these points.

Service / Operational Implications

- 3.10 Members will be aware that on the 8 January 2014, Cabinet considered the proposed amendments to the Home Choice Plus housing allocation scheme prior to giving approval to go out to consultation. Cabinet approved the consultation and requested updating on the outcome of discussions with the Home Choice Plus Partnership regarding the "local connection" statutory provisions.

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- 3.11 Members have been keen to explore local connection, ensuring local homes go to local people, and to look into whether choice-based lettings is the best way of allocating housing in the community. Members had some concerns about local connection and how best to prioritise the housing needs of Bromsgrove residents when allocating properties in the District.
- 3.12 The Strategic Housing Manager agreed to contact the relevant Portfolio Holders at partner authorities outlining the Council's position in this regard. Responses were subsequently received from all partner Portfolio Holders – whilst they sympathised with and understood the Council's wish to ensure local homes go to local people, respondents also expressed a strong wish that the Council remain within the existing arrangements, pointing out that the number of families coming into Bromsgrove without a local connection is small, certainly when coupled with the number of households moving out of the area and into another part of Worcestershire.
- 3.14 Analysis of the Home Choice Plus register was undertaken to analyse the data available about moves in and out of Bromsgrove District according to local connection. Although perception can often be that homes are going to people with no local connection to the area, this perception is not borne out by analysis of the data, which shows that the number of applicants with a local connection to Bromsgrove being allocated properties in other partner areas is higher than the number of applicants without a local connection to Bromsgrove District being allocated properties in the District. In the last two years as below the data shows that more customers move out of Bromsgrove District than move in in terms of local connection.

	2012/13	2013/14	Total
No local connection moving in	27	47	74
Local connection moving out	17	62	89

- 3.15 Overall, the new Home Choice Plus allocations policy will reduce the number of people able to register from outside of the Partnership area, so Bromsgrove's position should remain unaffected as a result, and it may be likely that fewer allocations are made to applicants without a connection to Bromsgrove District.

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- 3.16 As a result of the relatively small-scale nature of the issue in real terms, the Council may consider that staying in the existing arrangements is an acceptable position in the short term, especially if it monitors allocations for twelve months and reviews the impact of the new policy a year after it has been implemented.
- 3.17 Another aspect that Members have wished to examine is the value of using a choice based lettings system for housing allocations in Bromsgrove. As a result, some early high-level scoping work has been done to begin to understand the value of the choice-based lettings model in Bromsgrove, and BDHT have offered to work with the Council to better understand how well the existing model supports the strategic purpose “help me to find somewhere to live in my locality.”
- 3.18 Internal Auditors undertook an audit of strategic housing/choice based lettings during April 2014 and their report concluded that there is value in considering whether the current system provides value for money in Bromsgrove.
- 3.19 This work will need resourcing by both organisations but it could well prove fruitful in terms of looking at whether choice-based lettings is the best way of allocating homes in Bromsgrove District. The outcomes of this analysis could feed into a review of the new Home Choice Plus allocations policy one year after implementation, enabling the Council to draw meaningful conclusions about the best way forwards at that point in time.
- 3.20 Whichever direction the Council ultimately decides to pursue, there will be costs associated with these choices, together with risks and challenges for service continuity for both the Council and Bromsgrove District Housing Trust. The cost of staying within the existing arrangements are known, and would increase temporarily to support BDHT in applying the changes to the system, reducing the size of the waiting list and dealing with enquiries coming out of this activity.
- 3.21 Costs are less easy to predict in detail should the Council choose to give notice to the Partnership and withdraw from the existing arrangements - to do so would require a brand new approach to allocating housing and could well therefore mean ‘starting from scratch.’
- 3.22 The Recommendation 3) above is to enable the analysis to be undertaken that should provide a sound basis for evaluating and deciding, in the future, whether the Council should continue to participate in the Partnership.

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Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 3.22 In framing the qualification criteria, the council has had regard to its duties under equalities legislation.
- 3.23 Consultation was carried out throughout March and April 2014 with members of the public through the Home Choice Plus and Council websites. A special stakeholder meeting was also held for all Registered Provider partners who use the allocations policy and HC+ system. In total we received 650 survey responses in addition to the stakeholder's responses on the day of the meeting.
- 3.24 The consultation responses received were supportive of the changes particularly around local connection and housing need. It was identified that in order to meet the requirements of Rural Exception Site Allocations Policies there was a need to extend the local connection criteria for accessing the Housing Register for households who have lived for 3 out of the last 5 years in the area. It is now proposed that this is incorporated into the policy.
- 3.25 The comments from both the stakeholder event and survey have been considered and a new allocations policy developed. The key changes from the existing allocations policy and the new allocations policy are shown in the table Appendix 2 to this report.
- 3.26 The Home Choice Plus website links to an Enhanced Housing Options system which allows a self-service option to obtain basic housing options advice which can be followed up by interview and case work if required.
- 3.27 The Home Choice Plus Timeline for implementation of the new policy is as follows:

Aug 14 - Abritas system changes.

Sept/Oct 14 - Mail out to applicants requesting new information

Oct/Nov 14 - Test System

Dec/Jan 14 – Review every application where a form is returned.

Feb 2015 - Go Live.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 4.1 The risks associated with remaining in the partnership in the short term are minimal and finances are available to implement the changes required by the new policy.

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- 4.2 Should the Council decide to come out of the existing arrangements without a suitable replacement the risks are considerably higher if financial terms and from a service continuity perspective.

5. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Allocations Policy

Appendix 2: Allocations Policy current and proposed changes

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

N/A.

7. AUTHOR OF REPORT:

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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, Cottsway Housing Association, 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.

Wyre Forest
District Council

Bromsgrove
District Council

Worcester City
Council

Stratford-on Avon
District Council

Malvern Hills District
Council

Wychavon
District Council

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 the policy for more details.
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 abroad	people subject to immigration control and any other persons from abroad where the secretary of state makes regulations

Qualification Criteria	To join the Housing Register the applicant must meet the eligible qualification criteria including connection to the Partnership, Housing Need and Unacceptable Behaviour
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
Shared Ownership	Affordable housing option where the applicant parts buys and part rents a property. The Registered Provider owns the remaining share of the property.
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, low cost home ownership 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 Policies which they will apply when allocating to their properties. This means applicants at the top of the Housing Register 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 challenge the perception that the way social housing is allocated is unfair by ensuring that Home Choice Plus is easy to understand, transparent and fair.
- We will work to ensure that 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 affordable housing stock.
- We will ensure that local people will have an enhanced priority within the banding structure.

- We want to encourage and recognise 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 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 relevant code of guidance Allocation of Accommodation Code of Guidance 2012 which replaced the previous codes of guidance. All of these documents can be obtained through the DCLG website. The Scheme also complies with the Localism Act 2011, Welfare Reform legislation and Equalities Act 2010 where applicable.

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 applicants to bid for properties where required
- Respond to applicants 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. However this is in the context of considerable pressure on allocations within our affordable housing stock and which means 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.
- Where the applicant is statutory homeless

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.

Applicants who bid on and subsequently refuse properties for no reason will be moved into the Reduced Priority Band – for further details please see the relevant section in the Allocations Policy.

The Home Choice Plus Partnership will collect information from applicants about 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) . 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 applicant(s) must have lived in the partnership area (by choice) for a minimum period of two years.
- Where the applicant(s) 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 and the applicant(s) 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 applicant(s) has a close family member living in the HC+ partnership area and has done so for a minimum period of five years
- Where the applicant has resided in the Partnership area for three out of the last five years
- 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(s) hasn't got a connection that meets the qualification criteria and claims a connection on the basis of special circumstances e.g. a care leaver from the partnership area accommodated elsewhere, then the decision about allowing them on the list must be made by a senior officer or manager.

Where the applicant is a member of the armed forces there are special arrangements – please see further details within this policy.

Applicants with a local connection to the Partnership area will be awarded Gold Plus, Gold or Bronze Plus band depending on their housing need for Districts where they have a connection. For Districts where they do not have a connection, they will be awarded Silver Plus, Silver or Bronze in accordance with their housing need.

Residency of Choice

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 where they have a connection elsewhere

Housing Need

Applicant(s) wishing to join the Home Choice Plus Housing Register must have a housing need recognised by the Allocations Scheme. This will include those applicant(s) with reasonable preference, those who are underoccupying social housing stock and those covered by the categories outlined on page 37 under the Bronze Plus / Bronze sections. Applicant(s) not satisfying this criteria will not be registered and will be offered alternative housing options. Applicant(s) will also be offered the right to request a review of this decision.

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.

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
- 4) 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 area will not be eligible to join Home Choice Plus.

However the following categories will be exempt and will be eligible to register;

- Households accepted as statutory homeless under the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by Homelessness Act 2002) by a Local Authority (or its agent) in the Home Choice Plus Partnership which has not yet been discharged
- Households where one of the Local Authorities are satisfied that the applicant(s) 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.
- Households where one of the Local Authorities (or its agent) has agreed to rehouse the applicant under a reciprocal agreement with their current landlord or local authority

- Households where 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 the armed forces as outlined in the Allocations Scheme
- 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 for any reason can make an application for accommodation in the future if their circumstances have changed for any reason. It is for the Local Authority (or it's agent) to consider behaviour, at the point of application to the housing register, and whether they are 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.

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.

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
- Any community contribution made by the household

Households with a reasonable preference can have their banding reduced because of their behaviour or circumstances

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.

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

An Applicant(s) type determines the size and type of housing they 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
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)	One person household and couples over 60 or person in receipt of DLA / Personal Independence Payment (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 re-housed 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 the household contains "a child who cannot share a bedroom". This definition applies to a child who (1) is entitled to the care component of disability living allowance at the highest or middle rate, and (2) by reason of their disability is not reasonably able to share a bedroom with another child.
- where the household has care and supervision responsibilities for other children not normally residing with the household

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

Where the household includes a disabled child and the child isn't able to share a room with another child because of it's disability then an additional bedroom requirement can be considered. The disabled child would need to be in receipt of the care component of the disability living allowance at the highest or middle rate.

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 band.

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 the housing options service. Any household in receipt of a means tested benefit will not be subject to this reduced banding criteria (this does not include Child Benefit).

Applicants will be asked to provide 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 (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.

Applicants who are registering for shared ownership purposes only, who have an income above 35k but below 60k will not be adversely affected by the reduced banding category as it doesn't apply to shared ownership schemes.

Where applicant(s) have an exceptional need that can only be met through the provision of affordable housing then the reduced banding won't be applied.

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.

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.

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).

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 higher banding. The Local Authority will exercise its discretion, depending on individual circumstances where there are mitigating factors or an urgent need to move.

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

By successful bids we mean where the applicant(s) have been offered the property and invited to view it (where applicable).

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.

How will the reduced banding be applied

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.

Bronze Plus

(Local Connection)

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

This applies to 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.

Examples of applicant(s) accepted onto the waiting list and awarded Bronze Plus include the following;

- 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

The 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

(Limited Local Connection - closed after one year where no bids have been placed)

This applies to applicants who meet the eligibility criteria on connection grounds with one of the districts in the Home Choice Plus partnership but no connection to the other partners and do not meet any of the reasonable preference criteria, as set out above, but have a low housing need (please see list in Bronze Plus section above).

Time Limited Bands

All bands are awarded on a time limited basis, i.e. for 3, 6, and 12. 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. For applicant(s) in Bronze Plus and Bronze applications will be closed after 12 months if there are no bids. Please see the Reviews / Complaints Section for more information.

Local Connection for Banding Purposes

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
- 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.

Removing Applicant from Reduced Band

Where an applicant is promoted from the Reduced Priority band to a reasonable preference band, the band start date should be back-dated to the date they were originally placed in the Reduced Priority band.

Please note that even once an applicant has been promoted from the Reduced Priority band to a reasonable preference band, housing associations may still refuse to accommodate them due to their own allocations policies and they may therefore continue to be skipped. Applicants demoted to the Reduced Priority band should be encouraged to pursue private rented housing wherever possible and appropriate advice given to assist them to do so.

The decision to promote an applicant from the Reduced Priority band should be undertaken as part of a full review of the applicant's circumstances to ensure that the applicant is awarded the correct banding.

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 and ambition to promote sustainable communities. The following criterion applies to either the applicant or joint applicant. The responsibility 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 only qualify for one six months waiting time period regardless of how many of the below are relevant).

We will verify all claims of community contribution at the point of registration, at review and at the offer stage.

Applicants in Employment

This applies 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.

Applicants Volunteering

This applies to 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.

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 who are 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 and have done so for a minimum period of six months (before applying) and are in receipt of carers allowance (due to disability or frailty).

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 additional waiting time will be awarded.

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 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) and does not have sufficient resource to meet their own housing need, 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
- 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

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 suitable 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. They may also remove bids that an applicant has placed if they are not suitable e.g. where a victim of domestic abuse selects a property near to the perpetrator.

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 suitable properties (e.g. suitable size, location 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 may 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

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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. Once the review has been decided upon there is no further right of review on the same matter unless there is a material change of circumstance.

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
Cottsway Housing Association	Cottsway House Avenue Two Witney OX28 4XG	01993 890000	contact@cottsway.co.uk	www.cottsway.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,	01905 823100	housingneeds@festivalhousing.org.uk	www.festivalhousing.org

	WR9 8AL			
Fosseway Housing	1 Venture Court, Broadlands, Wolverhampton, WV10 6TB.	0330 1234 031	customerservices@bromford.co.uk	www.bromfordgroup.co.uk
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	Benedict Court, Southern Avenue,	01568 610100	home@marchesha.co.uk	www.marchesha.co.uk

Association	Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 0QF			
Mercian Housing	Gee Business Centre, Holborn Hill, Aston, Birmingham, B7 5JR	0121 322 7373	info@mercian.org.uk	www.mercian.org.uk
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, WARKS 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,	0800 131 3329	midlands@sanctuary-housing.co.uk	www.sanctuary-group.co.uk

	West Bromwich, Birmingham, B70 6QG			
South Shropshire Housing Association Ltd	The Gateway, The Auction Yard, Craven Arms, Shropshire, SY7 9BW	01588 676200		www.sshropsha.co.uk
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	0121 355 7771		www.waterlooha.org.uk

	Coldfield, West Midlands, B73 5TJ			
Worcester Community Housing	Progress House, Midland Road, Worcester, WR5 1DU	0800 197 2805	wchtalk@wchnet.co.uk	www.wchnet.co.uk
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

Appendix 2 - Allocations Policy Changes

Current allocations policy	Proposed allocations policy	Survey responses / comments
<p>Local Connection:</p> <p>No current restrictions on local connection as we operate an open waiting list. However banding is driven by whether you have a connection to a District or not.</p> <p>This means we register households from outside the partnership who have no likelihood of being rehoused by us.</p>	<p>Local Connection:</p> <p>Applicants must have a 2 year local connection to the Home Choice Plus Partnership area, have a close family member who has resided here for 5 years, have resided 3 out of the last 5 years or have been in permanent paid employment in the Partnership area for six months.</p> <p>Those applicants who have a local connection to Bromsgrove, under the 1996 Housing Act, will still 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. There will be some exceptions to the local connection qualification criteria, for example ex service personnel.</p> <p>Persons with no local connection to the Partnership: Applicants who do not have a 2 year local connection to the Partnership will not be eligible to join Home Choice Plus. The exceptions to the local connection criteria are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Households accepted as homeless and one of the Local Authorities has 	<p>79% of respondents were in favour of this change.</p> <p>In addition, in order to assist with the allocation of rural housing under exception site policy, it has been agreed to include those applicants who have previously resided for 3 out of the last five years in the partnership area.</p>

	<p>accepted a full duty to them under the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by Homelessness Act 2002) which has not yet been discharged.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of the Local Authorities are satisfied that the applicant needs to live in the area to provide on-going, regular and significant care and support to a relative and friend 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. <p>In addition, 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</p>	
<p>No Housing Need: The current waiting list is open to all</p>	<p>No Housing Need: Where an applicant is deemed to have no</p>	<p>61% of respondents supported this change. Of those that didn't, many were asking for groups to be included that</p>

<p>regardless of whether they have a housing need or not. This means we register a large number of people who aren't assessed as having a housing need.</p>	<p>housing need they will not be eligible to join the housing register. Exceptions to this will be existing tenants requesting a transfer, those requiring sheltered housing or applicants who would like to apply for shared ownership properties.</p>	<p>already are and wont be affected by the change.</p> <p>As these households will not be allowed to register we will need to ensure they are aware of their rights to request a review of the decision and ensure they can access Housing Options. We will deliver this through access to the Enhanced Housing Options system and the bdht housing options service.</p>
<p>Reduced Banding:</p> <p>Households with an income, of more than £60,000 will be placed into the reduced banding.</p>	<p>Reduced Banding:</p> <p>Households with an income, of more than £35,000 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.</p>	<p>75% of respondents supported this change</p> <p>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.</p>
<p>Bedroom Standard:</p> <p>The current policy says that a family are overcrowded if they have two children that are sharing of opposite sex, when the older child reaches 8</p>	<p>Bedroom Standard:</p> <p>The proposed policy says that a family are overcrowded if they have two children that are sharing of opposite sex, when the older child reaches 10</p>	<p>52% of respondents were in favour of this change. Although this was a lower % in support the partnership believe the bedroom standard needs to be aligned with the way that housing benefit assessments of a household's bedroom requirements are made. This will prevent applicants being affected by the spare room subsidy as soon as they are</p>

		rehoused. If there are some exceptional circumstances around requiring an additional bedroom these may be taken into consideration.
<p>Applicants in Employment</p> <p>Not currently recognised</p>	<p>Applicants in employment</p> <p>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.</p>	58% of respondents supported this change.
<p>Applicants Volunteering</p> <p>Not currently recognised</p>	<p>Applicants volunteering</p> <p>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).</p>	41% of respondents supported this change and 40% opposed. We feel that supporting volunteers is still important and would wish to carry on with this policy change.
<p>Applicants in Education and Training</p> <p>Not currently recognised</p>	<p>Applicants in Education and Training</p> <p>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</p>	40% of respondents supported this change and 42% opposed. The partnership agreed that by supporting applicants who are in education and training they will encourage applicants to improve their employability and therefore supports central and local government policies to help to tackle worklessness.

	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 Not currently recognised.	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 (due to disability or frailty) will also qualify for the additional preference.	68% of respondents supported this change.
Severely Disabled Applicants Who are Unable to Participate in any of these Activities Not currently recognised.	Severely Disabled Applicants Who are Unable to Participate in any of these Activities Applicants who have a severe disability (e.g. are awarded the support element of Employment Support Allowance or higher rate Disability Living Allowance / Personal Independence Payment) and cannot participate in community contribution activities will be awarded additional waiting time.	77% of respondents supported this change.
Bronze and Bronze Plus Currently applicants can remain on the waiting list for two years without bidding	Bronze and Bronze Plus Applicants can remain on the waiting list for one year without bidding	75% of respondents supported this change.

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3 SEPTEMBER 2014

APRIL - JUNE (QUARTER 1) FINANCE MONITORING REPORT 2014/15

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Roger Hollingworth, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Partnerships and Economic Development
Relevant Head of Service	Jayne Pickering, Executive Director Finance and Corporate Resources
Non-Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

- 1.1 To report to Cabinet on the Council's financial position for the period April -June 2014 (Quarter 1 – 2014/15)

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Capital Programme for the Public Realm within the High Street be increased by £20k in 2014/15 to be met from existing S106 funds received in relation to land at Sherwood Road.

3. KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 This report provides details of the financial information across the Council. The aim is to ensure officers and members can make informed and considered judgement of the overall position of the Council. The report is currently based on the departments within the Council. The aim is to report the financial position across the strategic purposes in future reports.
- 3.2 This report includes both revenue and capital expenditure with a summary for the Council followed by the departmental analysis of expenditure.

**Revenue Budget summary
Quarter 1 (April – June) 2014/15 – Overall Council**

Service Head	Revised Budget 2014/15 £'000	Profiled budget April - June £'000	Actual spend April - June £'000	Variance to date £'000	Projected Outturn 2014/14 £'000	Projected Variance £'000
BDC Reg Client	612	26	22	-4	596	-16
Business Transformation	110	569	558	-31	68	-42
Community Services	2,507	215	172	-42	2,432	-76
Corporate Resources	1,832	566	557	-9	1,818	-14
Customer Access & Financial Support	951	-742	-736	6	956	5
Environmental Services	3,682	59	52	-7	3,731	49
Finance & Resources	0	101	101	0	0	0
Legal & Democratic Services	1,330	176	174	-2	1,330	0
Leisure & Cultural Services	1,965	593	594	1	1,966	1
Planning & Regeneration	1,276	157	165	8	1,243	-33
SERVICE TOTAL	14,264	1,720	1,660	-79	14,140	-124
Interest Payable	283	71	0	-71	283	0
Interest on Investments	-58	-15	-14	0	-58	0
COUNCIL SUMMARY	14,489	1,776	1,646	-150	14,365	-124

Financial Commentary:

The position at the end of the first quarter shows that there is projected underspend for the financial year of £124k across all departments.

The underspends are mainly as a result of vacant posts and renegotiation of contracts. These savings are offset by a number of income shortfalls in car parking and additional maintenance costs on the environmental services fleet.

**Capital Budget summary
Quarter 1 (April -June) 2014/15 – Overall Council**

Department	Revised latest Budget 2014-15 £'000	Profiled budget April - June £'000	Actual spend April - June £'000	Variance to date £'000	Projected Outturn 2014-15 £'000	Projected Variance £'000
Business Transformation	9	9	9	0	9	0
Community Services	939	939	414	-524	939	0
Environmental Services	2,540	245	209	-36	2,540	0
Leisure & Cultural Services	2,835	113	112	-1	2,834	-1
Planning & Regeneration	4,920	4,920	1,035	-3,885	4,929	8
Regulatory Services	0	0	0	0	19	0
COUNCIL SUMMARY	11,243	6,226	1,780	-4,447	11,295	7

Financial Commentary

The Capital schemes represent expenditure incurred on developments and purchase of new plant, fleet and machinery. The majority of projects are anticipated to be fully committed by the end of the year however there are a number currently underspent due to the timing of the project or procurement being undertaken.

**Environmental Services
Quarter 1 (April - June) 2014/15**

Revenue Budget Summary

Service Area	Revised Budget 2014- 15 £'000	Budget April - June £'000	Actual Spend April - June £'000	Variance to date £'000	Projected Outturn 2014-15 £'000	Sum of Projected Variance £'000
Car Parks/Civil Enforcement Parking	-475	-34	-17	17	-431	44
Bereavement Services	82	10	8	-2	70	-12
Cesspools/Sewers	-94	-29	-18	11	-56	38
CMT	0	13	13	0	0	0
Depot	15	207	180	-27	-49	-64
Grounds Maintenance	635	95	93	-2	622	-12
Highways	250	38	31	-7	237	-13
Refuse & Recycling	1,963	-441	-423	18	2,046	82
Street Cleansing	1,274	191	176	-15	1,257	-16
Transport	-40	-15	-15	0	-42	-2
Waste Management, policy, promotion, management	-5	-1	-1	0	-3	3
Climate Change	16	4	4	0	17	1
Land Drainage	61	21	22	0	62	1
Grand Total	3,682	59	52	-7	3,731	49

Financial Commentary:

- Income from off street/on street parking enforcement is less than anticipated. Wychavon District Council who provide the parking service under an SLA agreement are currently investigating the variances.
- There is a projected overspend on cesspools due to additional costs associated with the pumping station at Frankley Green. This is currently being investigated by officers.
- Salary savings account for most of the underspend on Depot Services.
- Major vehicle repairs have taken place during the first quarter within the Refuse and Recycling service and accounts for the majority of the projected overspend. Officers are reviewing all vehicles to ensure that maintaining remains better value than purchase of new fleet. However vehicle replacement is due to take place during the latter stages of 2014/15.

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Capital Budget Summary

Capital Project Description	Revised Budget 2014-15 £'000	Profiled budget April - June £'000	Actual spend April - June £'000	Variance to date £'000	Projected Outturn 2014-15 £'000	Projected Variance £'000
North Cemetery Phase 2	479	1	1	0	479	0
Refuse collection vehicle replacement programme	2,025	208	208	0	2,025	0
Cemetery Toilets	0	0	0	0	0	0
Depot Security	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rollout of bins for round extensions	0	0	0	0	0	0
Flooding Mitigation Measures	36	36	0	-36	36	0
Total	2,540	245	209	-36	2,540	0

Financial Commentary:

- North Cemetery Phase 2 - the infrastructure review is now taking place. Budget has been reprofiled to reflect expenditure taking place at end of second quarter.
- Refuse Vehicle replacement programme is for Environmental Services Vehicles and plant. Procurement of vehicles is currently taking place.
- Flood Mitigation Measures - replacement of culvert grilles - the work has been undertaken but invoices have not yet been received

**Community Services
Quarter 1 (April - June) 2014/15**

Revenue Budget summary

Service Area	Revised Budget 2014-15 £'000	Budget April - June £'000	Actual Spend April - June £'000	Variance to date £'000	Projected Outturn 2014-15 £'000	Sum of Projected Variance £'000
Housing Strategy	1,821	219	222	3	1,782	-39
Community Safety & Transport	580	-34	-80	-45	544	-35
Community Cohesion	107	30	30	0	105	-1
Grand Total	2,507	215	172	-42	2,432	-76

Financial Commentary:

- There has been a reduction in the cost of running the community transport scheme due to the contract being renegotiated.
- Within Housing Strategy there is a saving due to BDHT not increasing their contract by inflation for 2014/15.

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Capital Budget summary

Capital Project Description	Revised Budget 2014-15 £'000	Profiled budget April - June £'000	Actual spend April - June £'000	Variance to date £'000	Projected Outturn 2014-15 £'000	Projected Variance £'000
Disabled facilities Grant	515	515	399	-116	515	0
Energy Efficiency Home Insulation Project	17	17	0	-17	17	0
Grants - affordable housing	313	313	10	-303	313	0
Implementation of Localism Changes	5	5		-5	5	0
Discretionary Home Repair Assistance & Housing Renewal Grants	89	89	5	-84	89	0
Total	939	939	414	-524	939	0

Financial Commentary:

- There has been less demand for Disabled Facilities grants during the first quarter of the year. Officers are continuing to work with residents to ensure all support is in place in their homes.
- Affordable Housing grants relate to funds to support Registered Social Landlords and these have not yet been drawn on for 2014/15

**Leisure and Cultural Services
Quarter 1 (April – June) 2014/15**

Revenue Budget summary

Service Area	Revised Budget 2014-15 £'000	Budget April - June £'000	Actual Spend April - June £'000	Variance to date £'000	Projected Outturn 2014-15 £'000	Sum of Projected Variance £'000
Business Development	110	309	311	2	110	0
Cultural Services	297	89	89	0	297	0
Leisure & Cultural Mgt	-4	24	24	0	-6	-2
Parks & Green Space	479	32	30	-2	476	-3
Sports Services	1,083	138	140	2	1,088	6
Grand Total	1,965	593	594	1	1,966	1

Financial Commentary:

- There are no significant variances to report at this quarter.

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Capital Project Description	Revised Budget 2014-15 £'000	Profiled budget April - June £'000	Actual spend April - June £'000	Variance to date £'000	Projected Outturn 2014-15 £'000	Projected Variance £'000
Sports Facilities	2,224	0	0	0	2,224	0
Play Areas	494	113	112	-1	493	-1
Other Schemes	117	0	0	0	117	0
Total	2,835	113	112	-1	2,834	-1

Financial Commentary:

- Officers have advised that all schemes are scheduled to take place before the end of the financial year, so the budgets have been re-profiled to reflect the fact that expenditure will be in Quarter 2 - Quarter 4 (July 2014 – March 2015).

- The revised full year budget has been re profiled by £170k to reflect expenditure planned for 2015/16.

**Planning and Regeneration
Quarter 1 (April - June) 2014/15**

Revenue Budget summary

Service Area	Revised Budget 2014-15 £'000	Budget April - June £'000	Actual Spend April - June £'000	Variance to date £'000	Projected Outturn 2014-15 £'000	Sum of Projected Variance £'000
Building Control	-26	-32	-6	26	-37	-10
Development Control	493	43	68	25	458	-35
Economic & Tourism Development	192	30	35	5	198	6
Emergency Planning / Business Continuity	14	3	3	0	16	2
Strategic Planning	550	101	53	-48	535	-15
Town Centre Development	53	12	13	0	55	1
Grand Total	1,276	157	165	8	1,225	-51

Financial Commentary:

- The overspend in quarter 1 within Economic & Tourism Development is due to the shortfall in income as a result of the changes to the market location. It is anticipated that this will not increase during the remainder of the year and the aim is to encourage further use of the new market stalls from September.

- Strategic Planning has a saving from a vacancy in the 1st quarter of 2014/15 however this has now been filled going into the 2nd quarter.

- Development Control and Building Control have seen shortfalls in income for the first quarter. It is anticipated that this will be offset by further income and savings within the service by the end of the financial year

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Capital Budget summary

Capital Project Description	Revised Budget 2014-15 £'000	Profiled budget April - June £'000	Actual spend April - June £'000	Variance to date £'000	Projected Outturn 2014-15 £'000	Projected Variance £'000
Town Centre Development - Project Management	38	38	0	-38	38	0
Town Centre - Public Realm	1,533	1,533	177	-1,356	1,533	0
Market Hall development site	0	0	8	8	8	8
Stourbridge Road development site	0	0	1	1	1	1
Parkside School	3,350	3,350	850	-2,500	3,350	0
Total	4,920	4,920	1,035	-3,885	4,929	8

Financial Commentary:

- There are a number of projects that are under construction within this service area. Both the redevelopment of Parkside and the High Street Improvements are committed to be fully spent by the end of the financial year.

Regulatory - Client
Quarter 1 (April - June) 2014/15

Revenue Budget summary

Service Area	Revised Budget 2014-15 £'000	Budget April - June £'000	Actual Spend April - June £'000	Variance to date £'000	Projected Outturn 2014-15 £'000	Sum of Projected Variance £'000
Environmental Health	798	69	63	-6	778	-20
Licensing	-186	-42	-41	2	-182	4
Grand Total	612	26	22	-4	596	-16

Financial Commentary:

- There is currently an expected underspend on the Worcestershire Regulatory Services function for BDC.

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**Worcestershire Regulatory Services
Quarter 1 (April - June) 2014/15**

Capital Budget summary

Capital Project Description	Revised Budget 2014-15 £'000	Profiled budget April - June £'000	Actual spend April - June £'000	Variance to date £'000	Projected Outturn 2014-15 £'000	Projected Variance £'000
BDC share of Regulatory - WETT shared service	0	0	0	0	19	0
Total	0	0	0	0	19	0

Financial Commentary:

• The expenditure for a new IT System is jointly funded by all partners in accordance with the business case. The £19k represents the financial cost for Bromsgrove and it is expected to be fully spent by the end of the financial year.

**Customer Access & Financial Support
Quarter 1 (April - June) 2014/15**

Revenue Budget summary

Service Area	Revised Budget 2014-15 £'000	Budget April - June £'000	Actual Spend April - June £'000	Variance to date £'000	Projected Outturn 2014-15 £'000	Sum of Projected Variance £'000
Customer service centre	0	103	117	14	12	12
Financial Support	0	14	14	0	0	0
Revenues & Benefits	951	-863	-871	-9	944	-7
Valuation Services	0	4	4	0	0	0
Grand Total	951	-742	-736	6	956	5

Financial Commentary:

- The projected outturn variance for Customer Services is due to the reduction of income being received for the Worcestershire Hub which has been offset by savings within Revenues & Benefits.
- A review of Benefits & Fraud has been undertaken and further savings will be identified at Qtr 2.

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**Finance and Resources
 Quarter 1 (April - June) 2014/15**

Revenue Budget summary

Service Area	Revised Budget 2014-15 £'000	Budget April - June £'000	Actual Spend April - June £'000	Variance to date £'000	Projected Outturn 2014-15 £'000	Sum of Projected Variance £'000
Accounts & Financial Management	0	101	101	0	0	0
Central Overheads	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grand Total	0	101	101	0	0	0

Financial Commentary:

- There are no significant variances to report this quarter.

**Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services
 Quarter 1 (April - June) 2014/15**

Revenue Budget Summary

Service Area	Revised Budget 2014-15 £'000	Budget April - June £'000	Actual Spend April - June £'000	Variance to date £'000	Projected Outturn 2014-15 £'000	Sum of Projected Variance £'000
Democratic Services & Member Support	1,137	96	96	0	1,137	0
Election & Electoral Services	242	16	15	-1	242	0
Professional Legal Advice & Services	7	83	82	-1	7	0
Land Charges	-56	-19	-18	1	-56	0
Grand Total	1,330	176	174	-2	1,330	0

Financial commentary:

- There are no significant variances to report this quarter.

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**Business Transformation
Quarter 1 (April - June) 2014/15**

Revenue Budget summary

Service Area	Revised Budget 2014-15 £'000	Budget April - June £'000	Actual Spend April - June £'000	Variance to date £'000	Projected Outturn 2014-15 £'000	Sum of Projected Variance £'000
ICT	95	481	486	4	94	-1
Human Resources	0	76	46	-30	-38	-38
Transformation	0	4	6	3	0	0
Equalities	34	8	10	2	32	-1
Policy	-19	20	10	-10	-21	-2
Grand Total	110	569	558	-31	68	-42

Financial Commentary:

- There are a couple of posts within the HR department that are currently vacant and maternity leave cover is being provided internally. One of the posts has been filled and therefore the savings will not be as significant at the end of the financial year.

Capital Budget summary

Capital Project Description	Revised Budget 2014-15 £'000	Profiled budget April - June £'000	Actual spend April - June £'000	Variance to date £'000	Projected Outturn 2014-15 £'000	Projected Variance £'000
Infrastructure refresh and PSN	9	9	9	0	9	0
Total	9	9	9	0	9	0

Financial Commentary:

No significant variances at this quarter.

**Corporate Services
Quarter 1 (April - June) 2014/15**

Revenue Budget summary

Service Area	Revised Budget 2014-15 £'000	Budget April - June £'000	Actual Spend April - June £'000	Variance to date £'000	Projected Outturn 2014-15 £'000	Sum of Projected Variance £'000
Corporate Resources	1,832	496	486	-11	1,818	-14
Corporate Admin/ central post & printing	0	70	72	2	1	1
Grand Total	1,832	566	557	-9	1,818	-14

Financial Commentary:

- Communications have a projected saving of £14k on various budgets relating to marketing/promotion.

4. TREASURY MANAGEMENT

- 4.1 The Council's Treasury Management Strategy has been developed in accordance with the Prudential Code for Capital Finance prudential indicators and is used to manage risks arising from financial instruments. Additionally treasury management practices are followed on a day to day basis.
- 4.2 The Council receives credit rating details from its Treasury Management advisers on a daily basis and any counterparty falling below the criteria is removed from the list of approved institutions.
- 4.3 Due to market conditions the Council has reduced its credit risk for all new investments by only investing in the highest rated instruments and has shortened the allowable length of investments in order to reduce risk.
- 4.4 At 30th June short term investments comprised:

	31st March 2014 £000	30th June 2014 £000
Deposits with Banks/Building Societies	10,000	13,000
Total	10,000	13,000

Income from investments and other interest

4.5 An investment income target of £58k has been set for 2014/15 using a projected return rate of 0.5%. During the past financial year bank base rates have remained 0.5% and current indications are projecting minimal upward movement for the short term.

4.6 In the 3 months to 30 June the Council received income from investments of £14k.

5. REVENUE BALANCES

5.1 Revenue Balances

The revenue balances brought forward at 1 April 2014 were £3.74m (subject to audit). Excluding the impact of any projected over or under spends it is anticipated that £124k will be transferred to balances during 2014/15.

Legal Implications

None.

Service/Operational Implications

All included in financial implications.

Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications

None as a direct result of this report

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

7.1 Risk considerations covered in the report. There are no Health & Safety considerations

8. APPENDICES

None

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Available from Financial Services

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