



Allocation Scheme

**Draft subject to
consultation**



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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, Bourneville Housing Trust, Bromford Group, Bromsgrove District Housing Trust, Elgar Housing Association, Fosseway 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, Spa Housing Association, Stonham Housing Association, Warwickshire Rural Housing Association, Waterloo Housing Association, Worcester Community Housing, Wyre Forest Community Housing, Wyre Forest Sheltered Housing.

1. Introduction

Home Choice Plus is a scheme used to advertise and or allocate social rented and privately rented properties which has been agreed by the Home Choice Plus Partnership 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.

What are “Allocations” under this Scheme?

The following are “allocations” of accommodation under this Scheme:

1. The nomination of an applicant to be an Assured or an Assured Shorthold tenant of housing accommodation held by a Registered Provider (via a Council’s Nomination Rights Agreement with the Registered Provider). Often the nomination will be that of a ‘Starter Tenant’ of a Registered Provider whereby the Registered Provider will grant an Assured Short Hold Tenancy for a set “probationary” period (usually 12 months) and provided the tenant successfully completes the “probationary” period the Registered Provider will grant an Assured Tenancy.

Or

2. The selection of an applicant to be a secure or introductory tenant of a Council (including notifying an existing tenant or licensee that the tenancy or licence is to be a secure tenancy) this includes properties that are owned by a Council and managed by agents. This also includes the granting of a new tenancy to an existing tenant by way of “transfer” upon the tenants request or the granting of a new tenancy under a Council’s (non statutory) contractual and/or discretionary succession policy set out below

By ‘affordable housing’ we mean social rented and affordable rented, 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.

In the Home Choice Plus partnership area the demand for social housing is greater than the number of homes available. Home Choice Plus and its partner Registered Providers work in partnership to register applicants looking to rent a social home on the Home Choice Plus Housing Register.

This Allocations Scheme describes how Home Choice Plus prioritises housing applicants to identify their housing need in accordance with the legal definition of Reasonable Preference.

Whilst all applicants are assessed in accordance with this scheme, the allocation of properties may be subject to the Registered Providers' own allocation policies / schemes and 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.

This scheme sets out in detail who can or cannot be accepted onto the scheme and how this assessment is made. It also sets out how applicants can apply for and access housing and what service standards an applicant can expect.

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

Aims of the partnership

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

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.

Delegation of Authority

The Home Choice Plus Scheme operates alongside the separate allocation policies and activities of partner Registered Providers.

The Council may delegate or contract out functions to Registered Provider partners and will not abrogate any of its legal duties and powers to any Registered Provider partner.

The Legal Framework

This Home Choice Plus Allocations Scheme sits within a tight and complex legal framework of Part VI of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended). 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 Scheme and general principles is available through the Home Choice Plus website www.homechoiceplus.org.uk Partner Local Authority and Registered Providers 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 what its position is 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.

This Allocations Scheme complies with the requirements of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) and takes into account the three codes of guidance - Allocation of Accommodation: Code of Guidance for Housing Authorities 2002 issued by the ODPM, the Allocation of Accommodation: Choice Based Lettings Code of Guidance for Housing Authorities 2008 and Fair and Flexible: Statutory Guidance on Social Housing Allocations for Local Authorities in England 2009, issued by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG). All of these documents can be obtained through the DCLG website.

The scheme 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 scheme.

This Scheme 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 Scheme.
- 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.

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 Home Choice Plus, 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 a duty under s190 (2), 193 (2) or 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 The Bands that make up the scheme.

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 cost.
- Any behaviour of a person (or member of their household) which affects their suitability to be a tenant (which can include both good and bad behaviour).
- Any local connection (pursuant to s199 Housing Act 1996 (as amended)) that a person has with the Home Choice Plus area.
- The length of time they have been waiting within their current band

Details and examples of how Home Choice Plus determines priority between applicants is detailed in section The Bands that make up the scheme.

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

The following are not allocations under this Scheme:

- Succession to a tenancy on a tenant's death pursuant to s89 Housing Act 1985 (this will be dealt with by the landlord under the relevant legislation and policies).
- Assignment of a tenancy by way of mutual exchange.
- Assignment of a tenancy to a person qualified to succeed to the tenancy on the tenant's death.
- Transfer of the tenancy by a court order under family law provisions or under the Civil Partnership Act 2004.
- An introductory tenancy becoming an assured / secure tenancy.
- Council / Registered Providers initiated transfers (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
- 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 Registered Provider needs to make a management move or a direct letting
- Extra care accommodation
- Changes to joint tenancies (the individual Registered Provider will decide whether to allow a Joint Tenancy depending on the circumstances of the case).

Choice and Constraints

We are committed to offering the greatest choice possible in the allocation of housing through the Home Choice Plus scheme.

It must be recognised that there is a very high demand for affordable housing in the area covered by this allocations scheme, and this demand cannot be fully met by the properties becoming available.

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.

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:

- 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.

The majority of these exceptional circumstances will be made clear when the property is advertised. However others will be discussed with the applicant at the point of allocation.

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

Who is and who is not eligible under this Scheme.

Who can apply to be part of the Home Choice Plus scheme?

Any United Kingdom resident aged 16 years or over can apply for accommodation by completing an application form. However a Registered Provider will not normally grant a tenancy to anyone under the age of 18 years unless they are able to provide a guarantor to cover rent and a support worker. For young people under the age of 18 years the Registered Provider may grant permission to allow the occupation of a property by way of an "Equitable Agreement".

Childless couples seeking larger family type accommodation are unlikely to successfully access properties through this scheme. Applicants of this type will be encouraged to explore options in the private sector and express an interest in larger non family type accommodation.

Anybody can make joint applications including group such as married, civil partners and 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.

Those applicants who are not eligible to join the housing register.

Home Choice Plus shall only register people who are eligible under this Allocation Scheme. The following persons are not eligible:

- People who are "*subject to immigration control*" (unless they fall within a class prescribed by regulations as eligible)
- People who are not subject to immigration control, but are nevertheless prescribed by regulation as being "*persons from abroad*" (this may include British citizens).
- People not residing in the United Kingdom.
- Any other person as prescribed by the Secretary of State.
- Applicants (or a member of their household) who have been guilty of "unacceptable behaviour" and at the time of their application for housing they are still considered unsuitable to be a tenant by reason of that behaviour.

Subject to immigration control and persons from abroad

Access to housing for foreign nationals is governed by Housing and Immigration legislation.

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.

At the point of registration for housing all applicants are asked for information about their housing history and legal status, including whether they are persons from abroad or subject to immigration control. Home Choice Plus then carries out checks to establish eligibility to the Scheme under the relevant legislation.

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

If you are in doubt about your status, please seek advice from housing options advisers at your Local Authority or their agent.

The eligibility of applicants to be on the Housing Register will also be checked at the point of allocation.

Unacceptable behaviour

Unacceptable behaviour is defined as behaviour which would, if an applicant or member of their household was a secure tenant, entitle a landlord to 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 or past tenancy agreement with a Council, Registered Provider or private landlord to such an extent that a Court would grant a possession order.
- Failing to adhere to the terms of an agreed payment plan in relation to rent arrears or housing debt.
- Conviction for illegal or immoral purpose.
- Causing nuisance and annoyance to neighbours or visitors.
- Committing certain criminal 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 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 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 have obtained outright 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 his household?

The exclusion from the housing register will last for a period of six months and can then be reviewed by the Local Authority. However the applicant does have a right to appeal against this decision. An applicant may be rendered ineligible at anytime during the process should Home Choice Plus become satisfied that they are ineligible.

Applicants classified as being ineligible through “unacceptable behaviour” can make an application for accommodation in the future if they can demonstrate a changed pattern of behaviour. It is for the Council (delegated as appropriate) to determine whether the changed behaviour claimed makes the applicant eligible under the Scheme. This is determined at the point of re-application to the scheme.

Each application will be assessed on its own merits and a decision regarding eligibility will be made accordingly. Anyone subsequently made ineligible from 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 and Appeals.

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
- via Digi TV

An advocate (for example family, friend or support Agency) can complete the registration form on behalf of a vulnerable person.

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 registrations 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 vulnerable households who find it hard to fully participate with the scheme.

This document and others are available in a range of formats on request from the Home Choice Partnership including audio, large print and other languages.

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, Registered Providers 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 Registered Providers 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

Single person (under 60)	One person household and with no resident children
Couple	Married, cohabiting, civil partnership and same sex couples without resident children
Family	Single parent or couple with minimum of one dependant child, who lives with parent (s) as the main or principal home
Pensioner / DLA	One person household and couples over 60 or person in receipt of Disability Living Allowance
Other	Any other household group including friends, brother and sister and families with children over 18

In certain circumstances the Local Authorities, and there agents, may need to put you into a different household to enable you to bid for an appropriate property;

Example – if you are a single person with a medical need that means you require a larger property, your household type may be family or other to enable you 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.

The Banding Structure

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

Applicants who are statutorily homeless	Priority	Time limit of 3 months (Subject to review)
Local Connection and High Housing Need	Gold Plus	Time Limit of 6 months
Local Connection and Housing Need	Gold	Time Limit of 12 months
No Local Connection and High Housing Need	Silver Plus	Time Limit of 6 months
No Local Connection and Housing Need	Silver	Time Limit of 12 months
Local Connection and Low Housing Need	Bronze Plus	No time limit applied
No Local Connection and Low Housing Need	Bronze	No time limit applied

The bands within the scheme 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 criteria which applications have to satisfy to be awarded the appropriate band;

Priority (3 month time limit – subject to review)

Statutorily homeless with a duty to re-house *

Gold Plus (6 months time limit)

- Homeless cases where no statutory duty to re-house (excludes intentional homeless)*
- Properties subject to Notices of Emergency Remedial Action, Demolition or Clearance Orders, or Notice Prohibits Occupation
- Verified high medical need / disability, that is directly affected by the current housing situation and would be immediately improved by moving
- Threat of homelessness, through no fault of own* (excludes those in priority band)
- Move on from supported accommodation
- Tenants who are under-occupying affordable housing or an adapted property

Gold (12 months time limit)

- Households in priority need who have been determined to have become homeless intentionally*.
- Households suffering from harassment and domestic abuse (excludes priority band cases)
- Overcrowding
- Living in exceptional circumstances
- Households with children under 10 yr and living in upstairs flat
- Category 1 and 2 Hazards

Silver Plus (6 months time limit)

- Homeless cases where no statutory duty to re-house (excludes intentional homeless)* (excludes those in priority band)
- Properties subject to Notices of Emergency Remedial Action, Demolition or Clearance Orders, or Notice Prohibits Occupation
- Verified high medical need / disability, that is directly affected by the current housing situation and would be immediately improved by moving
- Threat of homelessness, through no fault of own*
- Move on from supported accommodation
- Tenants who are under-occupying affordable housing or an adapted property

Silver (12 months time limit)

- Households in priority need who have been determined to have become homeless Intentionally*
- Households suffering from harassment and domestic abuse (excludes priority band cases)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overcrowding ▪ Living in exceptional circumstances ▪ Households with children under 10 yr and living in upstairs flat ▪ Category 1 and 2 Hazards
<p>Bronze Plus (no time limit)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does not meet any of the above housing need criteria, but has some housing need and a local connection
<p>Bronze (no time limit)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does not meet any of the above housing need criteria, but has some housing need

* Banding due to homeless criteria will only apply in the Local Authority area where the assessment was made.

Priority Band – awarded for 3 months.

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.

This group comprises all applicants who are homeless under the definition of homelessness contained in sections 175 -177 of Part VII of the Housing Act 1996. This definition includes a person who does not have accommodation which is legally and physically available to him or her, or has accommodation that is not reasonable for him or her to continue to occupy.

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

Gold Plus –Local Connection and High housing need – awarded for 6 months.

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.

This band can only be used in the Local Authority area where the current homeless decision has been made.

Properties subject to certain enforcement notices

Gold Plus band is awarded where an applicant is living in sub-standard accommodation and the local authority has determined that formal action is required under the Housing Act 2004 which includes;

- Emergency Remedial Action
- Demolition or Clearance Orders
- Notice Prohibits Occupation or
- Notices for Category 1 hazard.

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

Home Choice Plus will need to liaise with the Private Sector Enforcement 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 applicants banding will need to be reassessed.

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 following an assessment of the applicant's household and their current living situation.

An applicant's circumstances will normally be referred for a medical assessment if an applicant has indicated that there is a medical or disability problem that is made substantially worse by their current housing. Otherwise 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.

Priority will be given depending on how unsuitable the current accommodation is in relation to their medical, welfare or disability needs. The assessment is not of the applicant's health but how their accommodation affects their health or welfare.

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 such as severe chest condition requiring intermittent hospitalisation as a result of chronic dampness in the accommodation.
- A person with a severe disability requiring substantial adaptations to a property which is not provided for 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.

Threat of Homelessness, through no fault of their own

This status is awarded if following investigation it is proven that the applicant is homeless or threatened with homelessness through no fault of their own,

This priority will only be awarded where the applicant is co-operating with the local authority or its agent to try to prevent their homelessness.

Tenants who are under – occupying affordable housing or an adapted property

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

Some examples would be;

- a) applicants currently living in family sized accommodation, who wishes to 'downsize' and free up at least one bedroom.
- b) 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 that they no longer require.

Checks will be made by Home Choice Plus partners to verify the details of the registration. Rent arrears and property condition will also be taken into account

Move on from Supported Accommodation.

This status is awarded where an agreement is in place for applicants to move on from supported accommodation in the Home Choice Plus area.

The following cases in supported accommodation or care will qualify for this band:

- An applicant is ready to move to independent settled social housing on the recommendation of the support provider
- That 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 protocols between the Housing Service and the County Council's Children Services Department. Applicants must be a former "Relevant Child" as defined by the Children Leaving Care Act 2002 and be a young person at risk.

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.
- That an ongoing support package has been assessed and where required, is in place.

Home Choice Plus may use its 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 support worker where relevant.

Silver Plus - No Local Connection and High Housing Need – awarded for 6 months

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

Gold – Local Connection and Housing Need - valid for 12 months

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.

Households suffering from harassment and domestic abuse

Applicants who cite harassment as the main reason for making the application will lead to enquiries of all the circumstances surrounding the application and each case will be assessed separately. 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.

Overcrowding

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		
	Number of bedrooms	
Household Members	1	2
Single Adults over 16	✓	

Couple (married or cohabiting) wishing to live together	✓	
25+ weeks pregnant woman with or without partner and no other children		✓
One child	✓	
2 children of a different sex under the age of 8.	✓	
2 children of the same sex aged between 8 and 16.	✓	
2 children of a different sex when the oldest reaches 8		✓

Example - Using the table above to calculate the size entitlement of a family comprising 2 parents plus a female child aged 9 and a male child aged 14;

- Parents entitlement is 1 bedroom
- Each child is entitled to a separate bedroom
- Total size eligibility for this household is 3 bedrooms.

In exceptional circumstances the Home Choice Plus delegated officer appropriate may exercise discretion in deviating from the Bedroom Standard. Examples would where extra room is required to accommodate a carer, on health grounds or where the applicant is a registered foster carer.

The accommodation you will be considered for is determined by the individual Registered Provider criteria. Registered Providers may have policies or local letting plans where they will allow properties to be under-occupied especially on new build developments, where there are areas of very high density occupation or where properties are deemed to be hard to let.

Overcrowding will apply to applicants needing to be re-housed on the application even where they have no bed spaces available to them.

Where the applicant is lacking three or more rooms then we will also award them the exceptional circumstance band and applicants would therefore move from Gold to Gold Plus. The overcrowding would need to be evidenced at the point of allocation of accommodation.

Anyone with access to children would need to demonstrate the regularity of contact and level of care provided and the officer would need to have regard to homeless legislation, the codes of guidance and case law in determining which parent had responsibility for the children and the scope of the accommodation they are eligible to bid for.

Living in exceptional circumstances

This banding on Home Choice Plus should only be awarded in those instances where the applicant's living circumstances are viewed 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.

- Adequately housed but needs to give or receive support on grounds of disability or illness that is substantial and on-going and it is not possible for the person giving care to use public transport or their own transport to provide assistance.
- Adequately housed but needs to move on welfare grounds e.g. hardship.
- Overcrowding coupled with medical issues that do not accrue medical priority e.g. ADHD, autism.
- Those who need to take up or continue employment, education and/or training that is not available elsewhere and who do not live within reasonable commuting distance
- Other prevailing housing issues not reflected within the existing banding structure.

Households with Children living in upstairs flats or maisonettes

This status is awarded to households with children under 10 and living in an upstairs flat or maisonette.

Silver – No Local Connection and Housing Need – valid for 12 months

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

Bronze Plus –Local Connection and Low Housing Need – no time limit applied.

All applicants who live, work or have a local connection to a particular district in the Home Choice Plus partnership and do not meet any of the housing need criteria, as set out above, but still have a housing need.

Bronze – No Local Connection and Low Housing Need - no time limit applied.

All applicants who have No local connection to any of the districts in the Home Choice Plus partnership and do not meet any of the housing need criteria, as set out above, but still have a housing need.

Local Connection

Applicants are able to apply to Home Choice Plus from anywhere within the United Kingdom. However, in order to ensure that Home Choice Plus meets the needs of the local community, reduced priority will be given to those applicants without a Local Connection to each 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 Local Authorities.

Local connection will be assessed in accordance with the definition of local connection contained in Section 199 Housing Act 1996 Applicants without a local connection will have their priority reduced to Silver Plus, Silver or Bronze Band until they acquire a Local Connection with the Local Authorities participating within the Scheme .

The following factors as set down in s199 Housing Act 1996 will be taken into account in determining whether or not an applicant has a local connection with the Local Authority area. An application is awarded a local connection if an applicant or a member of their household included in their application:

- has lived in Home Choice Plus partnership area by choice for a certain time (usually for six months out of the last 12 months or for three years out of the last five years);
- has close family living in Home Choice Plus area, who have been permanently resident for at least the previous five years;
- has settled employment in the Home Choice Plus partnership area;
- has special circumstances that give rise to a local connection

For the purposes of determining Local Connection, 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 main and principal home or
- 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 HMP, Bail Hostels or other such accommodation.
- In-Patient of Hospitals/specialist centres

Exceptions for Special Circumstances

There may be occasions not predicted by this Allocation Scheme where the application of the Local Connection Policy is deemed inappropriate by Home Choice Plus and accordingly there is a Managers Discretion available not to invoke the Policy in these Special Circumstances.

One example might be someone who has been placed out of Home Choice Plus partnership area for a period of time, whilst being looked after by Children's Services – although each case would need to be considered on its merits.

Reduced Priorities

Financial Resources

Applicants who have an income and or capital that will enable them to access private accommodation will be encouraged and supported to take this option.

Home owners who are adequately housed or whose housing needs can be met through sale or adaptation will be advised of their options and given advice and assistance. The level of income / capital required will vary throughout the Home Choice Plus area and so there isn't a minimum threshold but this will be determined by District Councils taking into consideration the South Housing Market Assessment

In this case applicants may be placed in the bronze bands unless they can demonstrate a housing need for which they have no financial means to resolve. The final decision will be made by the partner housing association at the point of allocation.

Financial thresholds may 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.

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, no additional priority will be given. Applicants will retain any priority they held (or would have held if they had been registered) before worsening their circumstances. At the applicants request this decision may be reviewed after a period of at least 12 months.

Any applicant whose priority is reduced (because of deliberately worsening circumstances or financial resources) 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.

- 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 appeal and any appeal against the decision must be made in writing within 21 days of written notification of the decision.

Reasons why you may not be offered a property?

Time limited Temporary Accommodation

Some forms of temporary accommodation are let to households for a specific length of time e.g. 6 month assured shorthold tenancies within the private sector or under Housing Association as Management Agents (HAMA). To avoid the household incurring costs on two properties they will be advised not to bid for a minimum period and they are unlikely to be offered a property.

Housing related debts

Where households have housing related debts they will be encouraged to make arrangements to pay and it is likely that they will not be made an offer of a property until an arrangement has been reached with the Local Authority or Registered Social Landlord to whom they owe the money.

Anti – social behaviour and other tenancy breaches

A landlord may refuse to offer you a property in accordance with their allocations policy where there has been a breach of tenancy such as anti-social behaviour or property condition.

Applicants requiring an adaptation via a grant

Applicants who are applying for a disabled facility grant, and this has been approved, will not be considered for an allocation on the Home Choice Plus scheme. There may be exceptional circumstances where an applicant will still be considered for a move.

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 with the earliest priority 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 Association may adopt specific lettings criteria in relation to particular developments or areas in order to address identified problems. This would be a local lettings policy.
- Partner Housing Association will also be entitled to advertise properties as available only for existing Housing Association tenants in order to facilitate transfers.

Local Lettings Plans

Home Choice Plus reserves the right to apply any criteria while meeting the statutory obligations for Reasonable Preference. The partnership may, in the interests of promoting balanced and sustainable communities agree with participating registered providers local lettings plans for specific areas, estates, or blocks. This is to ensure that there are local lettings plans which are tailored to the needs of an area, which protect the interests of existing residents and the wider community.

The principles in applying Local letting Plan (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 review.
- LLPs must be subject to a clear consultation with all stakeholders, which must be evidenced to show that this has taken place.
- LLPs must be developed and approved in accordance with an agreed procedure that must have specific aims and will be reviewed on an annual basis.

The decision to implement a local lettings policy will be developed and approved either solely 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 bidder with the earliest priority date in that group who meets the eligibility criteria of the LLP and also meets the entitlement rules around size eligibility.

LLP will be publicised on the Home Choice Plus website.

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.

Please note the above reasons for not offering a property are not exhaustive.

Where any other reasons given above apply and the landlord decides not to make an offer to someone on the housing register they will add into the shortlist a reason for skipping the applicant. It is good practise, with the applicant at the top of the list, from the landlord to notify them personally of the reason why they have been skipped.

Refusing Offers of Accommodation

Where applicants have bid on a property and subsequently refuse the property then the Local Authority, or their agent, will review their banding. The Local Authority or its agent will take into consideration suitability of the property in any review undertaken.

Waiting Time

New applicants are placed into a band and their waiting time will be from the date of registration, this will be the date the form is received and date stamped at the Local Authority office or its agent.

If an applicant is moved up into a higher band then the date they moved into that band will override the registration date. Exceptions to this will be where a circumstance relates to a homeless decision where the date used will be the date of the homeless decision only in the area where that decision was made.

If the applicant moves down to a bronze or bronze plus band then the registration date will apply, if they move to a reasonable preference band then it will be the band start date.

Assessing Multiple Need

In circumstances where an applicant has more than one housing need within the gold and silver bands this will be reflected by moving the applicant into a suitable band to reflect this need.

If applicants have become homeless intentionally, this will not count towards multiple need.

Advertising Empty 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 registered provider landlords are committed to advertising their available properties as widely as possible. Properties will be advertised on a weekly basis in the following ways.

- Website – available to anyone with access to the internet. The website enables applicants to view all available properties on line at www.homechoiceplus.org.uk
- Interactive (Digi) TV - available to anyone with an interactive digital television.
- Property Line - A local number for each area will be available for applicants to call to hear what properties are available. This service is particularly

beneficial to disabled applicants, those who are blind or partially sighted, and for those who are unable to read.

- Hub, Landlord and Local Authority Offices – computers will be available to view and bid for available properties. Staff will be on hand to assist where needed.
- Community Outlet – newsletters will be displayed in many community outlets for example libraries, parish councils, supermarkets etc.

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

Eligibility for types of dwelling

In certain circumstances the landlord will use their individual policies to determine an applicant's eligibility for a size and type of dwelling. Broadly the landlord 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 two bed properties.
- Where the applicant has been approved as a foster carer 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.

Including a carer on the application

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 the need to live with them or near 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 in a housing application will be considered if the carer has been assessed by Social Care and Health as needing to provide overnight support. 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. Under these circumstances it will still be necessary for the applicant to demonstrate that the person looked after is in receipt of one of the following benefits:

- Carers Allowance
- Disability Living Allowance – paid at either the middle or higher rate for personal care.
- Attendance Allowance
- Constant attendance Allowance
- Disablement benefit.

Applying for a Property

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 on Appendix 1
- **Interactive (Digi) TV/WAP enabled Mobile phones**
Press the Red button for interactive services through Virgin Media or Sky. Go to 'Looking Local' and find your area.

When to bid for a Property

Vacant properties will be advertised 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.

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 asked for their preference as they will only be considered for one of those properties.

Statutory Homeless Households

Applicants who have been placed into the Priority Band on Home Choice Plus to reflect the fact that they have been accepted as statutorily priority homeless by a Local Authority in the partnership area.

The allocation of this banding comes with certain requirements under the Home Choice Plus policy;

1. Within two weeks of the date of your s184 acceptance letter or priority band letter, you must place at least one bid on a suitably sized property in this local authority area.
2. Should you be unsuccessful in securing accommodation through any bids made in these two weeks, you will then be required to bid each and every week where there are suitably sized properties for you to bid on until you successfully bid for a property.
3. You must bid on the maximum amount of properties available and suitable for you in each weekly cycle.

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

All bids in this banding must be on suitably sized properties and must be within this local authority area to meet the requirements of the policy.

* Please note that if you only bid on one property when there are three suitable for you, then we may bid on the two remaining properties to ensure you are re-housed as soon as possible.

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.

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 send in 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

Applicants should notify the Home Choice Plus Partner of any change in their circumstances either in writing, or online, using a secure log-in. 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.
- Change of address
- Any confirmed pregnancy
- Changes in household members
- Changes of name
- Change in financial circumstances
- Accommodation issues
- Medical or other housing needs

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

Selection process

The suitability of the property will be considered in line with the allocating Housing Provider's policy at point of allocation.

All eligible bids for each property are placed in priority order. Priority is decided first by band and then by date within the band as follows;

- 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.
- Pregnant households will be recognised as a family by Home Choice Plus at 25 weeks.
- If more than one person from the same band bids for a property, the offer will be made to the person who has the longest waiting time within that band.

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

Applicants must note that individual Housing providers will apply their own allocation policies.

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

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

If you are matched to a property you will not be able to bid for other properties until you have decided to either to accept or refuse the offer.

If the applicant is at the top of the shortlist the local authority or landlord will check your application to ensure the banding is correct and there aren't any other factors that would limit your offer e.g. rent arrears/ housing services related debt, property in poor condition

The Home Choice Plus partnership have agreed a set of service standards, these are shown at Appendix 3.

Direct Lettings

In some exceptional circumstances, the local authority or its agent may allocate properties directly; these are shown at Appendix 4.

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.

Review of Bandings

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

An applicant will be notified of the review. Failure to respond to correspondence in relation to the review will result in the application being closed. If good reason can be shown why there was a failure to respond to the review then the application may be reinstated.

When the date is reached for reviewing the banding, the Local Authority or its agent will look at your application to check if you have been bidding on suitable properties, in suitable locations.

Closing of Registrations

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 2 years of applying to join the Scheme
- An applicant's circumstances have changed and they are no longer eligible under this allocations scheme.
- Where an applicant does not inform Home Choice Plus they have moved and given a forwarding address.

When an applicant is re-housed through Home Choice Plus then their application will be automatically closed.

Applicants will have to complete a new registration form if they want to continue to remain within Home Choice Plus.

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 scheme 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 information the applicant 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 review of the application. An offence is also committed if a third party provides false information whether or not on 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 review 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 for 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 tenants 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 rendered Ineligible.

Reviews and Appeals

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 including decisions to exclude from registration, the level of priority awarded or the way in which the application has been dealt with. The applicant should request an internal review within 21 days of the date of the decision letter. Applicants will be able to appoint an advocate, and once appointed, the Home Choice Plus partner will deal directly with the advocate.

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 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.

Applicants should request a review in writing within 21 days of being notified of a decision. We will determine the review within 56 days of the request or such longer period as may be agreed with the applicant. The applicant will be notified of the outcome of the review including the reasons if the original decision is confirmed. You will also have the right to seek judicial review or appeal to county court on a point of law or in the decision making undertaken by the Local Authority or its agent.

The Council's decision on review is final and any challenge to that decision can only be made through judicial review proceedings.

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.

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.

Local Ombudsman

Having exhausted the Review or Complaints process applicants may also contact the Local Government Ombudsman or the Independent Housing Ombudsman.

Applications from employees, Board Members

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

Monitoring Home Choice Plus and Review of Policy

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 Partnership and associated groups).

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

The policy will be reviewed every two years or earlier if there are changes to legislation.

Home Choice Plus Advise and Contact Points Appendix 1

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-Severn 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

44 Telegraph Street, Shipston-on-Stour, Warks, CV36 4DA
01608 661458

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

Worcester Community Housing

Customer Service Centre Independent House, Farrier
Street, Worcester, WR1 3BH
0800 1972 805 wchtalk@wchnet.co.uk
www.wchnet.co.uk

Warndon Office

56 Cranham Drive, Warndon, Worcester, WR4 9PA
0800 1972 805

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

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,	0800 0850 160	info@bdht.co.uk	www.bdht.co.uk

	Worcestershire, B60 3DJ			
Elgar Housing Associations	Partnership House, Grovewood 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 Group	Partnership House, Grovewood Road, Malvern, Worcestershire, WR14 1GD.	01684 579579	housingneeds@festivalhousing.org.uk	www.festivalhousing.org
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@glosha.co.uk	www.glosha.co.uk

Housing 21	The Triangle, Baring Road, Beaconsfield, HP9 2NA.	0370 192 4000	enquiries@housing21.co.uk	www.housing21.co.uk
Jephson Housing Association	Jephson House, Blackdown, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, CV32 6RE	01926 339 311	info@jephson.org.uk	www.jephson.org.uk
Marches Housing Association	Benedict Court, Southern Avenue, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 0QF	01568 610100	home@marchesha.co.uk	www.marchesha.co.uk
Mercian 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 Group	Garden Court, Harry Weston Road, Binley Business Park, Binley, Coventry, CV3 2SU	0247 643 8000		www.orbit.org.uk

Rooftop Housing Group	70 High Street, Evesham, Worcestershire, WR11 4YD	0800 0421 800	info@rooftopgroup.org	www.rooftopgroup.org
Sanctuary Housing	Sanctuary Midlands, 164 Birmingham Road, West Bromwich, Birmingham, B70 6QG	0800 131 3329	midlands@sanctuary-housing.co.uk	www.sanctuary-group.co.uk
South Shropshire Housing Association Ltd	The Gateway, The Auction Yard, Craven Arms, Shropshire, SY7 9BW	01588 676200		www.sshropsha.co.uk
Spa Housing Association	The Royal Exchange, 9 Queen Street, Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire, WR9 8AL	01905 823100	housingneeds@festivalhousing.org.uk	www.festivalhousing.org
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	0121 444 6666	wmids@viridianhousing.org.uk	www.viridianhousing.org.uk

	7AA			
Warwickshire Rural Housing Association	Whitwick Business Centre, Stenson Road, Whitwick Business Park, Coalville, Leicestershire, LE67 4JP	01530 278080		www.warwickshirerha.org.uk
Waterloo Housing Association	Waterloo House, 76-78 Boldmere Road, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands, B73 5TJ	0121 355 7771		www.waterlooha.org.uk
Worcester 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

	Process	Timescales
1.	Application processed	Within 2 weeks
2.	Supporting documents scanned onto system	Within 2 days of receipt
3.	Basic information entered on system – i.e. support worker	Within 2 days of receipt of information
4.	Information request	Response within 24hrs
5.	Further information supplied by customer to be entered onto system	Within 2 weeks
6.	Checking local connection and eligibility	if no information, will check ASAP, but if address and Local Connection type entered, this will not be checked. Eligibility – this will only be checked if applicant has indicated that they have come from abroad
7.	RSL providing advert, including photo	Dependent on Local Authority
8.	Adverts should have no abbreviations	N/A
9.	Photographs to be provided for all adverts	N/A
10.	Match Suggested once advertising cycle complete	Within 5 working days
11..	Workflow always fully completed on offers	Within 5 working days
12.	Always request supporting information when skipping, not just taking the word of a note on the system (may be out of date)	N/A
13.	Always enter tenancy start date on system	N/A
14.	When offering to a Priority applicant, ensure a formal offer made so LA is able to discharge its homeless duty	N/A
15.	Notes to be added for all skipped applicants	N/A
16.	All skipped households to be notified	Within 5 days of bidding cycle ending
17.	LAs to produce monitoring report	Annual / Bi-annual RSLs to be consulted on info to be included
18.	Regular training	Ongoing

Introduction

The Home Choice Plus partnership covers the six district councils of Malvern, Bromsgrove, Worcester, Wychavon, Wyre Forest and Stratford and all Registered Social Landlords/providers operating in these areas who allocate their accommodation through the Home Choice Plus system.

Social housing is allocated through Home Choice Plus (HC+), which utilises a banding system and has a set of policies and procedures common to all participants.

Where possible all lettings should be made through the HC+ to ensure fairness and transparency in the system and to give our customers confidence. However, the District Councils understand that it may not always be possible to meet all housing needs, especially where they are urgent, through the banding mechanism and understand that Registered Social Landlords (RSL) will need to have the ability to undertake direct matching of applicants to properties where there is an urgent and exceptional need. In certain circumstances the direct matching might also occur because of the type of accommodation e.g. because of the adaptations.

To support this process we have developed this Direct Matching Policy to outline where we believe it is appropriate and to give some indications of the process we would expect to be followed by officers. We would encourage all RSL's to give consideration to this policy and, where they currently don't have a policy of their own, consider adoption of this one for all stock within our area.

Some RSL's may already have Direct Matching Policies that apply to the housing stock set aside for transfers (often 25% of all lettings) and in this case, if they do not choose to adopt this policy, then the HC+ policy will only apply to applicants who wish to become rehoused through Home Choice Plus but who do not currently hold a social housing tenancy within the districts covered by the scheme.

In developing this policy the direct matching processes of Bromsgrove District Housing Trust, Community Housing Group and Worcester Community Housing were considered. The policy was consulted with amongst the broader RSL and district council partnership through the full partnership meeting.

General Principles

The development and implementation of a choice based letting system was well supported by both District Councils and RSL's in the area because it supported some fundamental principles around the transparency of lettings and made it easier and clearer for applicants to both access the system and

understand the process around why certain categories of people are allocated accommodation.

In addition to this, to support housing management, corporate priorities and making the best use of existing stock, a good allocation scheme should also allow landlords to do the following;

- Make best use of existing stock by tackling under occupation and overcrowding and assisting households requiring adaptations to move into a property that is already adapted or capable of being adapted (where present property cannot)
- Assist people living in unsuitable accommodation including where it has become unsuitable due to medical, social or environmental factors, to get a move due to exceptional circumstances
- To redevelop areas of housing that are no longer fit for purpose, or to allow for re-designation, redesign or refurbishment
- To participate in regional / national schemes, where appropriate, such as Witness Mobility Scheme
- To resolve issues with tenancy succession.

Direct Matching Categories

Taking into consideration the need for Housing Providers to be able to manage their stock effectively we believe the following categories can be considered for direct matching (please note that some of the Registered Social Landlords/Providers may choose not to apply all of these categories), subject to the process laid out below being followed;

- 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
- 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
- Those with critical health or social needs where an immediate move is necessary for their health and well being and this can only be achieved through direct matching such as a person requiring urgent adaptations and their property not being suitable for such adaptations
- Tenants who are required to decant from their premises due to re-designation, demolition or refurbishment
- To support a move through the witness mobility scheme or similar
- Employees (of the housing provider) coming out of tied accommodation when they retire

The Direct Matching Process

A report should be made outlining the details of the case including the household circumstances, property required and reasons for treating the case as exceptional and passed to a senior officer / manager who has the authority to make a decision regarding the policy. If the decision to direct match is

made by a Registered Social Landlord then a designated senior officer / manager within the Local Authority (where the tenancy is) must be passed the details of the case and support the decision¹. The direct matching process should only be followed where there is sufficient evidence to support the household's claims and where there is no other solution to the problem other than an immediate move. For instance a move on medical grounds should be supported by medical reports from health professionals, domestic abuse or harassment should be supported by the Domestic Violence Unit / Police and include a written statement from them expressing their support for a move.

The property offered will usually be based on what the allocation policy / RSL policy deem to be appropriate depending on the household's circumstances and requirements. Unfortunately it will not be possible for the household to specify areas or types of accommodation but the housing provider will try to meet needs and desires where possible and where this would not delay the re-housing process or cause undue suffering to other households on the waiting list.

Where large scale decanting projects are planned the Housing Provider should ensure Home Choice Plus applicants and tenants are made aware of how the decanting process will affect the ability of other people to be rehoused. For all other instances of direct matching anonymised reporting back of the direct match should be made as part of the bidding cycle on the HC+ website.

Some households might be excluded from consideration for direct matching due to their current tenancy conduct e.g. where there are substantial rent arrears or anti-social behaviour that has resulted in the serving of a notice. In these circumstance the household must be contacted and given an opportunity to correct their tenancy conduct e.g. by clearing arrears.

Process for appeals

Where households request a direct match and are refused they do have a right to appeal in the same way as they can appeal against other decisions under the scheme.

It certain circumstances the applicant may appeal against a property (as it is unsuitable) that they have been directly matched to and will therefore have the right to appeal where this may affect their banding status or waiting time.

The applicant should make an appeal to the relevant partner organisation that made the decision. Households will be able to appoint an advocate, and once appointed, the HC+ partner will deal directly with the advocate. Should the outcome of the appeal still not satisfy the household they will still be able to contact the Ombudsman, or their ward member / Member of Parliament.

¹ Please note individual Local Authorities can decide that the RSL ('s) within their area can have full delegated authority to make this decision without LA approval if necessary but this should be made clear to the steering group members on an annual basis.

