

BABERGH AND MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCILS

From: Corporate Manager – Housing Options	Report Number: R70
To: Strategy Committee Executive Committee	Date of meeting: 3 December 2015 7 December 2015

HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 Babergh and Mid Suffolk are part of a wider choice based lettings scheme called Gateway to Homechoice which has been in operation since 2009.
- 1.2 Eight authorities Babergh, Braintree, Colchester, Ipswich, Maldon, Mid Suffolk, Suffolk Coastal and Waveney share a common policy and IT system for allocating Council and Registered Provider rented properties.
- 1.3 The current policy, adopted in 2012, has been reviewed to take account of legislative changes and to improve the clarity of some sections. The revised policy is at Appendix A and the main changes are itemised in Appendix C.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the revised policy (attached as Appendix A) be adopted with effect from a date to be agreed.

The Committee is able to resolve this matter.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 The proposed changes do not have any financial implications.

4. Risk Management

- 4.1 This report is not linked to any Strategic Business Risks detailed in the Integrated Significant Business Risk Register.

5. Consultations

- 5.1 Members of staff at each of the local authorities in the scheme have been consulted as well as Registered Providers who allocate their properties through Gateway to Homechoice. The revised policy has also been considered and approved by the Joint Housing Board.

6. Equality Analysis

- 6.1 An equality impact assessment has been completed (by Colchester Borough Council) see Appendix B.

7. Shared Service / Partnership Implications

- 7.1 An integrated Babergh / Mid Suffolk team administers the housing register and allocation of Council and registered provider properties. Sharing a policy and IT system provides benefits to both staff and customers.

Being part of a wider scheme of eight authorities has afforded financial advantages in procuring a single IT system and sharing some costs such as a scheme co-ordinator.

8. Key Information

- 8.1 Every local housing authority is required to have a scheme for determining priorities for allocating housing accommodation. Legislation dictates certain categories of applicant are to be given priority. These are termed reasonable preference categories and include those with a medical or welfare need to move, homeless households and those living in overcrowded or unsuitable conditions.
- 8.2 Gateway to Homechoice is a choice based lettings scheme operating in eight authorities in Suffolk and Essex. The main principles of the scheme are:-
- an online application form
 - assessment of housing need using a banding system from A - E
 - advertising properties on a website – www.gatewaytohomechoice.org.uk
 - applicants bid (express an interest) in properties which are advertised
 - support for applicants who are unable to participate either due to disability or not having access to the internet
 - opportunities to apply for properties across local authority boundaries
- 8.3 The original policy was devised following consultation with members, applicants, tenants and partner organisations in 2008 followed by reviews in 2011 and in 2012 to take account of changes in legislation. The current review recommends some minor changes to policy (see Appendix C), clarification of wording and the removal of procedural matters. Current good practice suggests having a policy which outlines key policy decisions and separate working procedures. Procedures can be updated as necessary without the need to make further changes to the policy itself.
- 8.4 The structure of the policy has been changed with the aim providing a document which is clearer for staff and customers to understand and interpret.
- Chapter 1 is an introduction and lists the aims and objectives of the scheme
 - Chapter 2 sets out the reasonable preference categories in the legislation, additional preference and how former armed forces personnel are assessed
 - Chapter 3 explains who is and isn't eligible to join the housing register
 - Chapter 4 gives details of how the housing register operates, how to apply and what counts as a local connection
 - Chapter 5 explains the banding system
 - Chapter 6 sets out the sizes of property households are entitled to bid for
 - Chapter 7 provides information about how properties are advertised and when location or time restrictions apply

- Chapter 8 explains how properties are allocated from the list of people who have bid
- Chapter 9 details the two stage appeal process
- No changes have been made to Appendix 1 of the policy which relates to discharge of the homeless duty

8.5 Most properties are available for anyone to bid for regardless of where they currently live. However certain applicants are restricted to bidding for properties within their local authority area, for example applicants who have been accepted under the homelessness legislation.

Inward and outward movement for each authority is monitored and restrictions applied if there is an imbalance.

Priority for some registered provider properties, which have been built to meet a local housing need, is given to applicants who have a local connection to the village in which they are located.

8.6 Further changes to the policy and/or the IT system will be required when “pay to stay” is introduced.

9. Appendices

	Title	Location
A	Revised Allocations Policy	Attached
B	Equality Impact Assessment	Attached
C	Table of policy changes	Attached

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Allocations Policy – November 2015

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This is the Allocations policy for Gateway to Homechoice choice based lettings scheme which consists of a single housing register and a choice based lettings scheme for allocating social housing. The Partner Organisations (POs) are listed below along with information of each POs housing arrangements:

PO Name	Housing Arrangements
Babergh District Council	Stock Holding
Braintree District Council	LSVT Transferred their housing stock to Greenfields Community Housing.
Colchester Borough Council	Stock holding but management of their housing stock is undertaken by their ALMO, Colchester Borough Homes.
Ipswich Borough Council	Stock Holding
Maldon District Council	LSVT Transferred their housing stock to Moat Homes Ltd.
Mid Suffolk District Council	Stock Holding
Suffolk Coastal District Council	LSVT Transferred their housing stock to Flagship
Waveney District Council	Stock Holding

1.2 Partnership Arrangements

The scheme is managed by a Project Board, made up of housing managers from the participating POs and Registered Providers. The scheme is subject to a consortium agreement. Registered Providers (RPs) allocate properties using this scheme and are subject to a Service Level Agreement. The list of RPs which participate in the scheme are listed on the Gateway to Homechoice website: <http://www.gatewaytohomechoice.org.uk/Data/ASPPages/1/277.aspx>

We aim to provide a consistent approach to accessing housing across the diverse area of operation of the scheme and where possible, to ensure that applicants have choice over where they live.

1.3 Monitoring of the Policy

The Project Board will be responsible for ensuring the policy meets its stated objectives and is reviewed every three years, unless there are significant changes in legislation and meets its stated objectives and complies with legislative changes.

1.4 Objectives

The Key Objectives of the Choice Based Lettings (CBL) Scheme are:

1. To maintain a system that customers can understand and which is open, fair, user-friendly and offers a high level of operational consistency across the Gateway area of operation;
2. To facilitate genuine opportunities for mobility across the Gateway area of operation;

3. To meet the legal requirements for the allocation of housing as set out in the Housing Act 1996 Part VI as amended by the Homeless Act (2002) and the Localism Act 2011. This policy also has regard to the following:

- Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England (June 2012)
- Providing social housing for local people: Statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England (December 2013)
- Right to Move (2015) Statutory Guidance
- Gateway policy for discharging duties to statutory homeless applicants
- POs housing strategies
- POs homelessness strategies
- POs tenancy strategies

4. To deliver efficiency savings and share good practice across the Gateway area of operation;

5. To recognise the needs and potential difficulties of social groups which may be less able to participate in the CBL Scheme and to ensure that such groups are able to take part in the CBL Scheme;

6. To assist in minimising homelessness and reducing the use of temporary accommodation;

7. To build partnerships relevant to the CBL Scheme across all sectors across the Gateway area of operation, statutory and voluntary as well as the private sector;

8. To build community cohesion, enabling tenants to have choice in where they live and encouraging people to contribute positively to their community;

9. To ensure that the CBL scheme enables the best use of stock

1.5 Demand

The demand for social housing is greater than levels of available social housing. The housing register exists to enable the POs to prioritise households who are in the greatest housing need and to maximise their opportunities for rehousing.

1.6 Statement on choice

Applicants on the Housing Register will be allowed to bid on properties for which they are eligible in any part of the Gateway area of operation, subject to any restrictions which will be highlighted to the applicant if relevant.

Homeless applicants have less choice over where they live and are restricted to bid for properties in the local authority which owes them a statutory duty.

1.7 Equal Opportunities

This partnership promotes equality of opportunity and will ensure that all applicants are treated fairly and without unlawful discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity.

Chapter 2 - Reasonable Preference

2.1 Reasonable Preference

The Housing Act 1996 section 167 (2) sets out the five groups of applicants for whom reasonable preference must be considered. These groups are:

- Applicants who are homeless (within the meaning of Part VII (7) of the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002).
- Applicants who are owed a duty by any local housing authority under section 190(2), 193(2) or 195(2) of the Housing Act 1996 (or under section 65(2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985) or who are occupying accommodation secured by such authority under section 193(3).
- Applicants occupying unsanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions.
- Applicants who need to move on medical or welfare grounds (including grounds relating to disability).
- Applicants who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or to others).

Under this Allocations policy, priority bands A, B and C, reflect the reasonable preference categories

2.2 Additional Preference

Under section 167 (2) of the Housing Act 1996, the following groups of people are given additional preference if they meet the statutory reasonable preference categories (above) and have an urgent housing need:

- **Applicants who need to move urgently because of a life threatening illness or sudden disability** – applicants who meet this criterion will be assessed for additional priority on medical and/or welfare grounds
- **Families with severe overcrowding which poses a serious health hazard** – applicants meeting this criterion will be assessed for additional priority on medical or welfare grounds.
- **Applicants who are homeless and require urgent re-housing as a result of violence, threats of violence (including intimidated witnesses) and those escaping serious anti-social behaviour or domestic violence** – applicants who meet this criterion will normally be assessed in accordance with homeless legislation

2.3 Armed forces, reserve forces personnel and bereaved spouses or civil partners of armed forces personnel, under the following circumstances:

- (i) former members of the armed forces;
- (ii) serving members of the armed forces who need to move because of serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service;
- (iii) bereaved spouses, partners and civil partners of members of the armed forces, leaving services family accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner; or
- (iv) serving or former members of the reserve forces who need to move because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service

2.4 Main or joint applicants who meet the reasonable preference criteria and any of the criteria listed in points (i) – (iv) above, will be awarded additional preference by being prioritised within their band when they apply for eligible properties.

2.5 Local Authority registered and approved foster carers who are responsible for “looked after children” may be considered for additional preference and extra bedroom entitlement. Applicants who

meet this criterion will be assessed for additional priority on welfare grounds and will be expected to provide verification of their approval and registration from Social Services.

Chapter 3 - Who qualifies for housing?

3.1 This policy sets out arrangements for allocating housing accommodation within the meaning of Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996. It also sets out the arrangements for the following allocations which fall outside of Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 – Allocation of Housing Accommodation. These include:

3.2 The following fall outside of this scheme and are not covered by Part 6 of the Housing Act:

- Mutual exchanges
- Succession or assignment to someone entitled to succeed
- Transfer of tenancy by court order in children and family proceedings
- Properties empty for major repairs and alterations (decants)

3.3 Who is eligible to join the housing register?

Anyone over the age of 16 can apply to join the housing register, but not everyone will be eligible to join the housing register. The eligibility criteria for joining the housing register are as follows:

- The main applicant must not be subject to immigration control or be a person from abroad, unless they are a ‘qualifying person’. They must pass the habitual residence test (as defined in section 161 of the Housing Act 1996 and meet the criteria in SI 2006/1294 - Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) Regulations).
- The main applicant and their household must be resident in the UK or the Common Travel Area. (The Common Travel Area includes the United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland, Channel Islands and Isle of Man).
- If an applicant is 16 or 17 they will not be offered a tenancy unless they have a guarantor. This could include an applicant whose partner is 18 or older.

3.4 POs will not be able to register anyone who is not eligible to be housed.

Who may not be eligible to join or remain on the housing register?

3.5 Exclusions

Section 160 (7) of the Housing Act 1996 states that a local housing authority may decide that an applicant is to be treated as ineligible for an allocation of housing accommodation by them if they are satisfied that:

- (S)he or a member of the household has been guilty of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make him unsuitable to be a tenant of the authority ; and
- In the circumstances at the time the application is considered (s)he is unsuitable to be a tenant of the authority by reason of that behaviour.

3.6 The only behaviour which may be regarded by the authority as unacceptable is:

- Behaviour of the person concerned which would if (s)he was a secure tenant of the authority entitle the authority to a possession order under section 84 of the Housing Act 1985 on any ground mentioned in Part 1 of Schedule 2 of the Act other than Ground 8.
- Behaviour of a member of his/her household which would if (s)he was a person residing with a secure tenant of the authority, entitle the authority to such a possession order.

3.7 If an applicant is ineligible, the PO will inform the applicant of this and also the right to request a review of this decision. For further information on reviews, please see [Chapter 9](#).

Suspensions

3.8 Some applicants will be eligible to join the register but may be suspended, that is they will not be allowed to participate in the scheme by bidding for properties for a temporary period. These include:

- a) **Applicants successfully housed into a social housing property through the Gateway to Homechoice or via mutual exchange** – except in exceptional circumstances these applicants will be permitted to re-join the housing register but will be suspended for 12 months from the start of their tenancy. Their effective date will be 12 months from start of the tenancy or the date of their application, whichever is later
- b) **Applicants housed temporarily in a PO's private lettings scheme/non-secure/private landlord under a homeless duty** – these applicants may have an Assured Shorthold Tenancy with a private landlord with a mandatory six month period. Therefore, except in exceptional circumstances they will be suspended until 28 days before the end of the fixed term of their tenancy
- c) **Applicants who are not considered ready to sustain a tenancy because of their age or need for specialist support or who are currently residing in supported housing** - except in exceptional circumstances these applicants will be suspended. The PO will be responsible for carrying out regular reviews of the applicant's circumstances and their readiness to move on and sustain a tenancy in conjunction with any specialist support providers
- d) **Applicants who have accepted an offer of housing but the property is not yet ready** – these applicants will normally be suspended from bidding
- e) **Joint applicants of an existing social housing tenancy who no longer wish to live together and require separate housing applications** – these applicants will be suspended until their existing joint tenancy has been resolved except where the PO has assessed that a homeless duty is owed to both parties. In such situations, the PO reserves the right to allow the parties to participate in the scheme.
- f) **Applicants who repeatedly select and/or view properties which they have no intention of taking** – in exceptional circumstances applicants can be suspended from participating if they repeatedly select and or view properties which they have no intention of accepting.
- g) **Applicants who accept properties** – applicants who sign a tenancy agreement but either do not move into the property or give notice within 12 months of moving in. These applicants will be suspended for up to 12 months

3.9 The decision to suspend an eligible applicant from bidding for properties will be considered following a full assessment of the individual circumstances. If a decision is taken to restrict an eligible applicant from participating in the scheme, the PO will decide on these cases explaining to the applicant:

- the reasons why they are temporarily not able to take part in the scheme;
- the date or circumstances when they will be able to resume participation in the scheme or request a review of the original decision;
- the right to a review of the PO decision – for more information on this see [Chapter 9](#)

False Information

3.10 Any applicant who deliberately attempts to deceive or defraud the POs in order to secure a home to which they are not entitled, may lose any home provided for them, and may also be prosecuted. The law imposes severe penalties, including substantial fines or imprisonment, where an offence is proved.

Chapter 4 - How the housing register operates

4.1 How to apply for housing

Those who want to apply for housing are required to complete an online application form. Applications can also be taken over the phone. The information given in this form will be used to assess the applicant's need for housing and to determine which Band the applicant will be placed in.

The application form can be found here:

<https://www.gatewaytohomechoice.org.uk/Data/ASPPages/1/88.aspx>

4.2 All POs will ensure that:

- advice and information is available free of charge to persons in their area about the right to make an application for an allocation of housing accommodation; and
- any necessary assistance in making such an application for housing is available free of charge to persons in their area who are likely to have difficulty in doing so without assistance.

4.3 As part of the online application process, applicants will be asked to select a PO to hold their application. Applicants should select the PO for the district or borough where the person is currently living. If an applicant does not currently live in any of the 8 PO areas, they should apply to the PO area where they hold a local connection. If an applicant does not have a local connection to any of the eight POs, they should apply to the PO where they wish to live.

4.4 Local Connection

Applicants will have a local connection to the area of operation of Gateway to Homechoice if they meet one or all of the criteria below:

- Their only or principle home is within the boundaries of the district or borough covered by the scheme.
- They were placed in specialised housing which is not available in the area of the scheme, but had a local connection previously through residence.
- They (not a member of their household) are in permanent paid work in one of the partner districts or boroughs.
- They have a son, daughter, brother, sister, mother or father, who is over 18 and lives in the area of the scheme, and has done so for at least five years before the date of application.

4.5 The following people will also be deemed to have a local connection to the Gateway area of operation if:

- The main or joint applicant is serving in the regular forces or who has served in the regular armed forces within five years of the date of their application

- The main or joint applicant has recently ceased or will cease to be entitled to reside in accommodation provided by the Ministry of Defence following the death of that person's spouse or civil partner where the spouse or civil partner has served in the regular forces and their death was attributable (wholly or partly) to that service
- The main or joint applicant is serving or has served in the reserve forces and who is suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is attributable whether wholly or partly to that service

4.6 An applicant will lose their local connection if:

- Since applying to join the register they have moved outside the Gateway area of operation and no longer meet any other local connection conditions
- They had a local connection through a close relative but the relative no longer resides in the area
- They had a local connection through their employment but this no longer applies

4.7 Each applicant's connection to the area of operation of the scheme will be assessed on an individual basis. Applicants who do not have a local connection are permitted to join the Housing Register but once their housing needs have been assessed, they will be placed in the band that is one lower than if they had a local connection. For example, if someone is assessed and would ordinarily be placed in Band B, if they don't have a local connection to one of the districts or boroughs they will be placed in Band C instead.

4.8 Right to Move

Existing social tenants who need to move due to work are exempt from the local connection requirements in Chapter 4 subject to them meeting the following requirements:

- They have reasonable preference under s.166(3)(e) because of a need to move to the local authority's district to avoid hardship; and
- They must work in the Gateway area of operation, or have an offer of work in the Gateway area of operation with a genuine intention of taking up the offer of work and be able to provide evidence of this; and
- The work must not be short-term (less than 12 months) or marginal in nature be ancillary to work in another district; or voluntary work. Work will normally be regarded as marginal in nature if it is less than 16 hours a week, unless the work is regular and payment substantial.

Government guidance says each local authority should aim to make 1% of lettings in this way; we will monitor to see if we achieve this.

4.9 Verification

On receipt of the complete application form, the relevant PO will assess the application and will request additional information, supporting evidence and references from current and previous landlords so that the applicant's housing need can be verified. Once the application has been assessed and the information has been verified, the PO will write to the applicant and will let them know:

- whether they have been accepted onto the Housing Register;
- which Band they are in;
- their effective date;
- the type and size of property for which the applicant can bid; and
- if an adapted property is required

If they have not been accepted onto the register, they will be told the reasons why and for how long they will be excluded.

An applicant will be given a maximum of 28 days to provide info for verification process after which time their application will be closed.

Effective Date

4.10 The effective date of an application will be the date that the application form is received by the PO, except in the following situations:

- When an applicant is moved from one band to a higher band. Their new effective date will be the date that their circumstances changed or when the PO is advised of this
- Where an applicant receives priority on medical or welfare grounds. Their effective date will be the date that they the application for the award is received by the PO
- Where an applicant has been accepted as homeless their effective date will be the date that they applied as homeless unless they already qualify for Band B with an earlier date
- Where a woman is pregnant and the baby will make her eligible for a larger property, her effective date for the larger property will be the date that the baby is born

Applicants' consent and declaration

4.11 When an applicant applies for housing, they must complete a declaration. The submission and confirmation of the declaration section contained in the on line application form, will be taken as the applicants formal declaration and agreement, confirming that:

- The information provided by the applicant is complete, true and accurate.
- The applicant will inform the POs immediately of any change in circumstances.
- The applicant understands that information will be shared with all the POs and all participating RPs together with other relevant organisations in order to complete or verify information or to prevent fraud or protect public funds in other ways.
- The applicant consents to POs making enquiries of any relevant persons to confirm the information on the application form is correct, or to add to the information given where this is necessary to complete an assessment of need or consider suitability for housing.
- The applicant gives permission to take up references from current and previous landlords
- The applicant gives consent for the PO to carry out a risk assessment

Who can be included on an application?

4.12 An applicant may include anyone on their application if they usually reside with the main applicant as a member of the family/household. This includes any close blood relative, marital or co-habiting partners or someone who might reasonably be expected to reside with the main applicant. Lodgers or live-in carers are not usually included as part of the main applicant's household and so would not be included in a housing application. If an applicant requires an extra bedroom for their carer, they should apply for this under the [Welfare criteria](#).

Two households forming one household on an application

4.13 When two households wish to form one household on one housing application, the PO will complete a full assessment of the housing situation. The assessment will establish if either applicant's existing accommodation is adequate to meet the needs of the new household structure.

4.14 If either applicant's accommodation is deemed adequate for the needs of the new household structure, the PO will advise the household to reside in the suitable property and will award them Band E (adequately housed).

4.15 If both applicants' accommodation is assessed as being unsuitable for the new household structure, if appropriate, the household will qualify for additional bedroom entitlement but overcrowding priority will not be considered for 12 months from the date the application with the intention to form a new household was received.

4.16 The PO will assess to see if the application is eligible for additional priority on [welfare grounds](#). If welfare priority is not applicable, the application will be reviewed after 12 months (from the date the new household was formed or the date of application, whichever is later), and if appropriate at that point, overcrowding priority will be applied. If the priority band increases, the effective date will be amended to the date the priority changes

Joint applications

4.17 Where more than one eligible applicant wishes to have a shared application, they will be considered as joint applicants. This will include married couples, civil partners, co-habiting couples and couples living apart. The PO may also include others, such as friends and relatives. The landlord will decide at the time of letting whether to offer a joint or sole tenancy.

4.18 For a joint application, both applicants have to be eligible to join the housing register.

4.19 Joint tenants of a social housing tenancy, who no longer want to live in the same property, can apply to join the housing register. Applicants will be suspended from the scheme (i.e. unable to bid for properties) until the issues of assignment relating to the existing tenancy have been resolved. POs will advise the applicants to seek advice from their current landlord or professional legal services, before signing over any rights to the existing tenancy (as this could result in one party being made homeless). POs may accept applications from one or both parties. In this situation, an application will be reassessed according to their current circumstances

4.20 **An applicant or household member can only be part of one active housing register application.**

Applications from previous applicants (those housed or whose application has been closed)

4.21 Applicants who have previously been registered and their application has been closed can re-apply to join the register using their existing log in number. Previous joint applicants who wish to apply separately will need to have their application split and will be provided with another log in number.

4.22 Applicants previously housed into social housing will be permitted to re-apply to join the housing register; however, if they apply during the first 12 months after moving, they will receive an effective date of 12 months after their tenancy began.

4.23 Types of applicants

Applicants who apply to join the housing register will be in one of the following categories:

Transfer applicants - are those who are existing tenants of a council or housing association property within the Gateway area of operation

Homeless applicants – these are applicants to whom one of the POs owes the full housing duty under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002

Direct applicants - all other applicants

Renewals

4.24 The POs carry out an annual renewal process to ensure applications are accurate and up-to-date. Applicants will be notified of the need to complete the renewal through their Gateway account. It is the responsibility of an applicant to complete the renewal and provide any updates to their current circumstances.

Applicants will usually be given 28 days to complete a renewal. If an applicant fails to complete the renewal, their application will be closed at the discretion of the PO.

4.25 Closing a Housing Register Application

A housing register application will be closed in the following circumstances:

- at the applicant's request;
- if the applicant becomes ineligible for housing;
- when the applicant has been housed through the scheme;
- when a statutory homeless applicant has been housed into private sector accommodation;
- when a tenant of social housing completes a mutual exchange;
- where an applicant does not maintain their application through the re-registration process or where they move and do not provide a contact address; or
- if the applicant fails to respond to a request for further information within a reasonable time; or
- if a sole applicant has died

4.26 If an applicant whose application has been closed wishes to re-join the housing register, a PO may agree to reinstate a closed application. Normally this will only apply within 3 months of closure although this will be at the discretion of the relevant PO. The applicant will receive a new effective date as of the date that their new application is reinstated.

4.27 Data protection

Each PO has its own Data Protection Policy which can be requested from the relevant PO. All data provided under this scheme will be treated in accordance with the POs' Data Protection Policies.

Employees and members of the Council or an RP and their relatives

Applicants who are related to a Councillor or a Member of the Board of an RP, or are a member, or related to a member of staff of the Council will be asked to declare this on their application form.

4.28 Depending on the nature and extent of the relationship with the local authority, Councillor or RP, the manager of the assessing PO may refer the application to another local authority to ensure that it is fairly assessed. The agreed process is to refer the applicant to the local authority as follows and notify the applicant of this decision:

- Babergh to Suffolk Coastal/Waveney
- Braintree to Colchester
- Colchester to Ipswich
- Ipswich to Maldon
- Maldon to Braintree
- Mid Suffolk to Suffolk Coastal or Waveney
- Suffolk Coastal to Babergh/Mid Suffolk
- Waveney to Babergh/Mid Suffolk

4.29 The receiving local authority will retain responsibility for the application, establishing eligibility and awarding appropriate priority. The applicant will be notified in writing of the accepting local authority and the outcome of their housing register assessment.

Change in Circumstances

4.30 If there is a change in the main applicant's circumstances, for example, birth of a child, moving house or another change in circumstance it is the applicant's responsibility to update their online housing application via the Gateway system, providing the details of e.g. the new household member/new address etc. These changes will need to be verified using the verification procedure.

4.31 An applicant's Band may increase or decrease following a change in circumstances. If the priority band increases, the effective date will be amended to the date that the PO was informed of the applicant's change in circumstances.

4.32 If the lead applicant wishes to add new household member/s, to their application, the housing application will need to be updated, providing the new household member's details. New, eligible, non-dependent household members will be included in the assessment for bedroom entitlement. After 12 months, the application will be reviewed and if appropriate at that point, overcrowding priority will be applied.

4.33 Feedback

After each advertising cycle, feedback on successful lets is provided on the Gateway to Homechoice website at the following link:

<http://www.gatewaytohomechoice.org.uk/Data/ASPPages/1/75.aspx>

The feedback will include the following:

- property size and type;
- if the property was let as social or affordable rent;
- location of the property;
- number of bids for each property;
- priority band of the successful applicant; and
- effective date of the successful applicant.
- Properties which are let as a direct let

No personal information about bidders is shared publically.

Chapter 5 - How housing need is assessed

5.1 We use a Banding system to identify those in the greatest housing need and to reflect the aims and objectives of our policy. We will decide which Band the application will be placed in depending on the information provided in the application form. The following tables provide details on the Bands:

Band A – those with critical or urgent needs
Critical medical/welfare award, including emergency situations
Statutory accepted homeless applicants in severe need
Tenant Incentive Scheme (TIS) Council or RP tenants who are currently in three, four or five or larger bedroom accommodation, who wish to downsize and will release one or two bedrooms within the Gateway area of operation
Applicants with multiple needs - if someone has two or more needs in Band B, they will be moved into Band A.
Nominations - move on from specified agencies – at the discretion of the PO
Negotiated surrender of a tenancy within the Gateway area of operation
Retiring Scheme Managers in Council or RP properties where accommodation was a condition of their employment within the Gateway area of operation
Qualifying Agricultural Workers within the Gateway area of operation
Relationship breakdowns (Council properties where they are under occupying but have been assessed as having housing need) within the Gateway area of operation
Successions - Council or RP succession tenants who are under occupying their property in the Gateway
Releasing a property in need (Council or RP properties) or where it prevents the Council or Registered Provider making expensive alterations to the property within the Gateway area of operation.

Band B – applicants with serious needs
Statutory accepted homeless applicants
Applicants with a serious medical/welfare award
TIS council or RP tenants who are currently in one or two bedroom accommodation and who wish to downsize and will release one bedroom within the Gateway area of operation
Nominations - move on from specified agencies – at the discretion of the PO
Homelessness prevention - POs have discretion to award Band B to applicants threatened with homelessness, who are likely to lose their accommodation through no fault of their own, for which there is no legal redress, who are assessed by the particular scheme PO as likely to be in priority need and who are receiving housing advice from the particular scheme Council to prevent homelessness.
Applicants who are overcrowded in social or private rented housing within the Gateway area of operation (this does not apply to applicants who are residing in temporary accommodation and overcrowded).
Applicants who are required to leave their property as a result of an emergency prohibition order served in relation to the premises under the Housing Act 2004 within the Gateway area of operation
A prohibition order or demolition order has been served, or is about to be served in relation to the applicants dwelling by the Private Sector Team of the particular scheme Council. This indicates that the property contains one or more Category 1 Hazards that probably cannot be remedied.
An improvement notice has been, or is about to be served in relation to the applicant's dwelling by the Private Sector Housing Team of the particular scheme Council and: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The remedies that are needed to reduce the hazard will require the property to be vacated for a significant period of time; 2. The cost of the remedies is beyond the means of the applicant (where applicable); or 3. The remedies will make the property unsuitable for occupation by the applicant.
Applicants assessed as meeting Band A criteria, but with no local connection to the Gateway area

Multiple needs - applicants with four or more needs in Band C will be moved into Band B.
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Band C – those with medium need for housing
Moderate medical/welfare award
Applicants who are homeless or threatened with homelessness who are assessed by the PO as not being in priority need
Notice to quit – which has not been instigated by any breach of tenancy
Applicants who following a homelessness application have been deemed by the particular scheme PO to be in priority need, but intentionally homeless.
Overcrowded in social or private rented housing outside of the Gateway area of operation but with a local connection to the Gateway area
Overcrowded applicants who are living with friends or relatives
No fixed abode/sharing facilities/lacking facilities
Fixed term licensees – this applies to applicants living in supported accommodation
A hazard awareness notice has been served by the Private Sector Housing Team of the particular scheme Council, in relation to a Category 1 or 2 hazard at the applicants dwelling and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The remedies that are needed to reduce the hazard will require the property to be vacated for a significant period of time; or • The cost of the remedies are beyond the means of the applicant (where applicable); or • The remedies will make the property unsuitable for occupation by the applicant
A suspended improvement notice or prohibition order exists but a foreseeable change in the applicants circumstances will cause it to become active and result in a high priority situation.
Applicants assessed as meeting Band B criteria, but with no local connection to the Gateway area of operation

Band D – reduced preference
Applicants assessed as meeting Band C criteria, but with no local connection to the Gateway area of operation
Applicants with reduced preference
<p>i) where the applicant is entitled to reasonable preference but are found to have:</p> <p>Sufficient resources to buy a property on the open market Sufficient resources to buy a property through a low-cost home ownership scheme Sufficient resources to rent a property in the private sector</p> <p>This does not apply to transfer applicants who are existing local authority or RP tenants and who exceed the current financial thresholds.</p> <p>Members of the armed forces, who have received a lump sum payment as compensation for an injury or disability sustained during active service, will not be subject to reduced reference on grounds of significant resources.</p>
<p>ii) where the applicant would be entitled to reasonable preference but the behaviour of the applicant (or member of their household) affects their suitability to be a tenant, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • former tenant arrears • deliberately damaging a property • obtaining a previous tenancy fraudulently • notice being served on a tenant because of their own actions e.g. rent arrears or anti-social behaviour • intentionally homeless applicants with rent arrears • an applicant has been evicted from a home owned by a PO or RP

- an applicant has abandoned a property without giving the required notice to their landlord
- an applicant has assaulted or harassed an employee or agent of a PO or RP
- an applicant or members of their prospective household have committed acts causing or likely to cause a nuisance or annoyance to their neighbours or others in the locality of where they live or where they have previously lived
- failure to maintain a rented property in a proper and reasonable condition
- an applicant or member of their household has committed acts of anti-social behaviour
- Failing to repay money owed to a PO relating to rent deposit, rent in advance, rent arrears, mortgage arrears
- Applicants who are accepted as being owed a full homeless duty and are in temporary accommodation who are actively bidding but building up rent arrears sufficient to be bypassed on shortlists

Band E –applicants who do not have a housing need
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Applicants who live in a property that is adequate to meet their needs in terms of property type, size and facilities

Owner-occupiers

Applicants in prison

A suspended prohibition order or improvement notice has been or will be served by the Private Sector Housing Team of the particular scheme Council, in relation to the applicants dwelling, but the criteria leading to it becoming active are not met by the applicant.
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A hazard awareness notice or improvement notice has been or will be served by the Private Sector Housing Team of the particular scheme Council, in relation to the applicants dwelling, but the specified remedies are low cost and straightforward to achieve.

Applicants living in a caravan, mobile home or boat but who don't have a housing need

Applicants in tied accommodation, but no housing need.
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Band F – this is a non-bidding Band and only applicants who are waiting for extra care or some other form of supported housing or those who are being directly matched to a property will be placed in Band F.

Medical Assessments

5.2 Medical assessments will be carried out for applicants who believe that their medical condition or disability is affected by their current accommodation. The applicant will be required to complete a self-assessment medical form showing the impact that their current property has on their medical condition or disability. These forms will be assessed by the relevant PO and the applicant may be placed in a higher Band depending on what impact their current accommodation is having on their medical condition.

5.3 Applicants may also be awarded priority if the applicant is asking to be re-housed so they can receive care or specialist support.

5.4 Extra medical information may be sought from the applicant's GP, hospital consultant, health visitors and other relevant parties

The table below is used to act as a guide to priority:

Effect on Housing	Medical Problem			
	Critical - 1	Serious - 2	Moderate - 3	Low -4
Critical - 1	Band A	Band B	Band C	No award
Serious - 2	Band B	Band B	Band C	No award
Moderate - 3	Band C	Band C	Band C	No Award
Low - 4	No award	No award	No award	No award

5.5 Applicants accepted under Homelessness legislation will not be eligible for medical priority. If a homeless applicant has a medical need for an extra bedroom due to, for example, needing a live-in carer this will be assessed under medical grounds.

5.6 If a homeless applicant's temporary accommodation is unsuitable on medical grounds the PO will first look to see if alternative temporary accommodation can be found.

5.7 Applicants who have been awarded Band B prevention of homelessness cannot be assessed under medical or welfare grounds as these awards are based on their permanent accommodation and a Band B prevention award is given because their current accommodation is coming to an end.

Wheelchair, Mobility and Adapted Housing

5.8 An applicant should inform the relevant PO if they have mobility needs. Further information about the applicant's needs may be sought from the applicant's GP/consultant. Applicants who need a property suitable for wheelchairs users will be assessed by an occupational therapist before an offer can be considered.

5.9 The following are the mobility categories used in this scheme:

Code 1 – the applicant is a full-time wheelchair user and needs a home which is accessible for wheelchair use both indoors and outdoors

Code 2 – the applicant needs a home with a level access shower

Code 3 – Ground floor accommodation is required as the applicant can't use stairs

Welfare

5.10 At the applicant's request, the PO will request relevant evidence to support their application. The PO will then review the full situation, taking into account the level of vulnerability of the household members. Each case will be assessed on individual circumstances.

The table below is used as a guide to priority:

Need for settled suitable accommodation	Level of Vulnerability			
	Critical - 1	Serious - 2	Moderate - 3	Low - 4
Critical - 1	Band A	Band B	Band C	No award
Serious - 2	Band B	Band B	Band C	No award
Moderate -3	Band C	Band C	Band C	No award
Low - 4	No award	No award	No award	No award

5.11 If a homeless applicant or household is particularly vulnerable and may be at significant risk in temporary accommodation the PO can place them in the category of 'accepted homeless applicants in severe need' which will increase their Band to Band A.

5.12 Applicants cannot be awarded priority under both the medical and welfare schemes. If an applicant applies for both, once their applications have been assessed, they will be placed in the higher Band which reflects either their medical or welfare needs.

Succession rights when a council or RP tenant dies

5.13 When a secure Council tenant or an Assured RP tenant dies a person living with them at the time of their death may have a right to succeed the tenancy. This will depend on the individual tenancy agreement that the tenant had with their landlord. The remaining tenant, where there is a joint tenant or other persons living in the home will need to liaise with the relevant landlord to see if they have a succession right.

5.14 If the remaining tenant succeeds the tenancy but is then under-occupying the property and wishes to move, if the landlord agrees, these applicants will be placed in Band A Succession. If there is no succession, then a Notice to Quit will be served and the applicant will be placed in Band C.

Applicants who have deliberately made their housing situation worse

5.15 The PO will consider whether an applicant has deliberately made their housing situation worse to increase their housing need, and consequently improve their chances of re-housing through the register.

5.16 If it is decided that the applicant has made their housing situation worse, for example, by moving into smaller private rented accommodation, they will remain in the Band that reflected their housing need in their previous accommodation. In 12 months' time, this decision may be reviewed by the relevant PO on request. If the restriction is removed, the applicant will be placed in the band that reflects current circumstances. Their effective date will be the date they moved to the new Band.

Owner-occupiers

5.17 Owner-occupiers or applicants who own other residential property are eligible to join the housing register but will be placed below other groups in our lowest priority band (Band E).

5.18 Owner-occupiers in Band E will be able to express an interest for a property if they wish to do so, however, because a Council or RP tenancy can only be held as a main home, homes are not usually offered to applicants who still own their home or are paying a residential mortgage. An exception may be considered where an older owner-occupier wants to express an interest in low demand sheltered accommodation.

5.19 Generally, owner-occupiers will not be able to move to another Band unless they meet the criteria for critical or serious medical or welfare priority (Band A or B).

5.20 In assessing whether there is a critical or serious medical or welfare need the following information will be taken into account:

- The effect of their current housing on their medical or welfare needs
- Whether they can afford to meet their housing needs from their own resources and whether the type of accommodation required is available in the private sector

5.21 If it is decided that the applicant is unable to buy or privately rent suitable accommodation and they have a serious or critical medical or welfare need they may be placed in Band A or B as appropriate

and will be permitted to bid for and if successful, may be offered the type and size of accommodation which meets their needs.

Chapter 6 - Allowed Property sizes

6.1 The following table shows what size of property applicants will be eligible for within this scheme:

Household Size	Bedroom entitlement
1 adult	Bed sit or 1 bedroom
2 adults living together as a couple	1 bedroom
2 adults living together, but not as a couple	2 bedrooms
1 adult (or 2 adults living together as a couple) expecting their first child	2 bedrooms
1 adult (or 2 adults living together as a couple) with 1 child	2 bedrooms
1 adult (or 2 adults living together as a couple) with 2 children of the same sex	2 bedrooms
1 adult (or 2 adults living together as a couple) with 2 children of the opposite sex, where both children are under 10 years old	2 bedrooms
1 adult (or 2 adults living together as a couple) with either: 2 children of the opposite sex where one child is aged 10 years or more 2 children and the applicant or their partner is pregnant 3 children 4 children (all of one sex or 2 boys and 2 girls)	3 bedrooms
1 adult (or 2 adults living together as a couple) with either: 4 children (3 children of the same sex and 1 child of the opposite sex who is over 10 years old) OR Up to 6 children	4 bedrooms
1 adult (or 2 adults living together as a couple) with 6 or more children	5 or more bedrooms

6.2 Children of the same sex are expected to share a bedroom unless there is a medical or welfare reason why the children cannot share a bedroom. Medical and welfare needs will be assessed using the scheme's standard processes. Adult children will not be given additional bedroom entitlement but will be considered as children of the household and will be assessed in accordance with the table above.

Exceptions to the Property Size Rules

6.3 Transfer Incentive Scheme applicants who are downsizing are permitted to bid for properties with one more bedroom than their allowed size

6.4 In exceptional circumstances, and with the agreement of the landlord, an applicant will be allowed to move into a property that is smaller than their needs, if doing so improves their situation. For example, if an applicant has 4 children and is entitled to a four bedroom property, but is living in a 2 bedroom flat, their application for a 3 bedroom property may be considered and if successful these applicants will be suspended from bidding for a year as detailed in [3.8](#)

Parents with 'staying access' to dependent children or shared residency orders

6.5 Applicants with a shared residence order or staying access for children are not automatically entitled to bedrooms for their children. The general principle is that a child needs one home of an adequate size, and that the POs will not accept responsibility for providing a second home for children.

Applicants with a medical or social need for a larger property

6.6 Applicants can apply for an extra bedroom due to their medical or social needs. Their circumstances will be considered and evidence supporting the need for an extra room will be required.

Extra rooms for carers

6.7 If an applicant needs an extra room for a carer the PO will investigate and seek advice on the need for an extra room. The PO will make the final decision but it is usually expected that Social Services should be able to give supporting evidence that a 'live in' carer is needed.

6.8 Applicants in receipt of housing benefit will need to be aware that from April 2013 they may not qualify for housing benefit for an extra bedroom. In such circumstances the applicant will be responsible for paying any shortfall and may be subject to affordability checks prior to signing a tenancy.

6.9 Bedroom Sizes

- Bedrooms of less than 6.7 square metres are not considered for use by more than one child.
- Rooms of less than 8 square metres are not seen as suitable for use by more than one 'non-dependent' adult (aged 16 or over)
- Rooms between 6.7 – 8 square meters are not considered suitable for more than two children and a second bedroom occupied by four or more children is considered unreasonable

Chapter 7 - Choice Based Lettings

Finding a Home

7.1 Properties which are available for applicants will be advertised in the following ways:

On the Gateway to Homechoice website - www.gatewaytohomechoice.org.uk

In a property newsletter if requested and at the discretion of the PO to:

- RPs;
- voluntary and other agencies;
- applicants in Bands A and B; and
- applicants who require sheltered accommodation and who require assistance with bidding

7.2 Advertisements will include information about the property, which can include the following:

- a description of the home;
- a photograph of the property;
- rental type (e.g. social or affordable rent);
- rental charge and period (e.g. weekly, monthly, 4 weekly);
- service charges;
- length of tenancy (e.g. fixed term tenancy and number of years);
- special facilities; and
- adaptations made to the property

7.3 The advertisement will also highlight if there are any special criteria for letting the property, for example if a property is only available to homeless applicants, those applicants with a local connection or applicants of a certain age range.

7.4 The property advert will show who is able to bid for the property.

7.5 Available properties are advertised on a weekly cycle; applicants can bid for up to two properties per cycle.

7.6 To be considered for a property, bids must be placed by the advertising cycle deadline.

Sheltered accommodation

7.7 When allocating sheltered housing the same general principles as for other property types are followed. In addition, an assessment of the applicant's suitability and need for support must be completed before a sheltered tenancy is offered. If the applicant is considered unsuitable for sheltered accommodation, they will be advised and given advice on homes more suitable to their needs.

Allocation of extra-care sheltered housing or very sheltered housing

7.8 The eligibility rules means that applicants who want extra-care sheltered or very sheltered are assessed on both their housing and support needs. For more information on these schemes please contact the relevant PO.

7.9 Applicants waiting for extra care or very sheltered housing will usually be placed in Band F (non-bidding Band)

Bungalows

General Needs Bungalows

7.10 Some bungalows will be let to applicants of any age. These are known as general needs bungalows and will be advertised as such.

Restricted bungalows

7.11 Many of the bungalows advertised within the scheme are designed for older people, or people who have limited mobility. These are known as restricted bungalows.

Preference for restricted bungalows will be given to:

- Those aged 60 or over
- Those under 60 with a medically assessed need for a bungalow
- Those who will release a property that is needed by the Council as decided by the Transfer Incentive Scheme (TIS) aged between 40 and 60

Direct Lets

7.12 Occasionally, a property may be let to an applicant directly, without it being advertised on the Gateway website. This may happen in the following circumstances:

- extra care and very sheltered properties;
- if a property is needed to house someone in a social housing property temporarily;
- where someone has to be moved immediately;
- where a specially adapted property has been built for a specific person;
- where the landlord needs to do major repairs to their property or redevelop the area and the property needs to be vacant for this work to be carried out (also called decant);
- where a homeless applicant has either failed to bid or failed to bid on a property on which they could be successful, or has refused a property and the PO needs to move them on from temporary accommodation;
- if there is no suitable temporary accommodation and the PO would be breaching their duty under homelessness law;
- where it has been deemed that the person is at risk or is a risk to others and it is not appropriate for them to bid through the scheme;
- for applicants who are currently in RP or council housing within the Gateway area of operation and who are fleeing domestic violence or in other exceptional circumstances (known as management moves)
- Properties which have been adapted to a very high standard, for example, a fully accessible property, may not be included in the scheme and will be directly allocated.
- Retiring scheme managers, relationship breakdown and under-occupying successors who are not bidding

7.13 The outcome of each letting cycle is published on the website and all direct lets are reported here.

7.14 Applicants may be placed in Band F which is a non-bidding category when a property is being let to them directly.

The Essex-wide agreement for victims of domestic abuse

7.15 This is a countywide agreement which a number of POs and RPs in Essex have signed up to. The agreement aims to increase the accommodation options to for social housing tenants who need to move because of domestic abuse where they are at a significant risk of harm. Lettings made under this agreement will usually be let as direct lets.

7.16 Bidding Restrictions

Some applicants are subject to the restricted bidding arrangements as detailed below:

Location Restrictions

Applicant type	Restriction
Applicants who are owed a statutory homeless duty by the local authority and who are not at risk of violence, threats or harassment	These applicants are only permitted to bid within the awarding local authority area
Applicants who are owed a statutory homeless duty and who are in severe need (Band A)	
Applicants who are assessed as meeting the statutory homeless criteria but who are not within 28 days of becoming homeless and are not at risk of violence, threats or harassment and have received a homeless prevention award (Band B prevention)	
Applicants who have been given medical or welfare priority because they need to move to a specific area in order to give or receive support	Applicants are only permitted to move to the specific local authority area where they wish to live – this is because the welfare or medical priority is based on the applicant moving to that specific area
Applicants who are ready to move on from supported housing schemes in Bands A & B	Applicants will usually only be permitted to bid within the local authority area as ongoing support may be a condition of their tenancy. In certain cases these applicants may be allowed to bid for properties in other local authority areas across the Gateway area of operation, however, this will only be permitted following agreement between the awarding PO and receiving PO

7.17 Time Restrictions on bidding

Some applicants will be subject to time limited bidding restrictions. Applicants will be free to choose which properties they bid for throughout the period given below. After that period has elapsed, the sanction indicated will apply. The suitability of a property will be considered using the criteria set out in 'The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012'. The POs reserve the right to set the time limits based on local circumstances, which can include the availability of accommodation required by the applicant in the PO area:

Applicant Type	Restriction	Sanction available
Applicants who are accepted as being homeless and in severe need (Band A)	Applicants are expected to use their bids to secure the first available suitable property.	PO will bid on appropriate property on applicant's behalf and/or move the applicant's bids to the most appropriate properties.
Applicants awarded severe or high medical or welfare priority (Bands A and B)	Applicants will be subject to a time limited bidding restriction of 2 bidding cycles, which include suitably sized properties in a relevant area	Reduce by one Band
Applicants awarded multiple needs in Band A		Reduce to Band B

Band B Homeless Applicants	Applicants are expected to use their bids to secure the first available suitable property.	PO will bid on appropriate property on applicant's behalf and/or move the applicant's bids to the most appropriate properties.
Band B Prevention Applicants	Applicants are expected to use their bids to secure the first available suitable property.	PO will bid on appropriate property on applicant's behalf and/or move the applicant's bids to the most appropriate properties.
Applicants who are ready to move on from supported housing schemes	Applicants will be subject to a time limited bidding restriction of 3 months	Make direct offer of next suitable vacancy
Retiring sheltered housing scheme managers in tied accommodation	Applicants will be subject to a time limited bidding restriction of 6 months	Make direct offer on next suitable vacancy
Relationship breakdown (applicants in social housing properties where they are under occupying and assessed as having a housing need)		
Successions (applicants in social housing properties where they are under occupying but have been assessed as having a housing need)		

7.18 If an applicant is sanctioned, the PO will notify the applicant of their decision and the reasons for this action. The PO will also advise the applicant of their new priority band, effective date and the right to a [review of the decision](#).

Appropriate bidding for applicants awarded homeless and homeless prevention priority

7.19 The awarding PO reserves the right to review the priority band award and/or bid on the applicant's behalf for suitable properties during the time period if the applicant has:

- failed to bid for any properties;
- failed to bid for properties which they would have likely to have been successful in securing;
- placed bids on unsuitable properties; or
- placed a bid on a suitable property and then refused the offer.

7.20 If an applicant with homeless prevention priority refuses or fails to respond to an offer of a suitable property, the awarding PO reserves the right to review the application and remove the homeless prevention award

7.21 If awarding PO removes the homeless prevention award, the application will be reassessed and given the Band that reflects their current situation. If the applicant's new Band is lower, there will be no change to their effective date, but if their circumstances mean the band remains the same, they may be given a newer effective date.

7.22 Under these circumstances, the PO will notify the applicant of their decision and the reasons for this action. The PO will also advise the applicant of their new priority band, effective date and the right to a [review of the decision](#). (For further information on the reviews of housing application decisions, please see [Chapter 9](#)) – move this section to bidding restrictions

Local Lettings

7.23 In certain circumstances, the POs may decide to give preference for offers of homes to a particular group of applicants in response to certain local circumstances. This is called a local lettings plan. The decision to apply a local lettings plan will be jointly made by the landlord of the property and the PO and will usually be made under the following circumstances:

- To help create balanced communities and achieve wider community objectives (i.e. to produce a broader social mix).
- To help improve difficult to let areas and/or to tackle anti-social behaviour
- To make best use of the housing stock and give priority for releasing a property in need.
- Where planning conditions were agreed at time of build (s106 agreements) that stipulate that priority must be given to local applicants

7.24 If a property is subject to a local lettings plan, it will be clearly labelled as such in the property advert. The local lettings plan will also usually be put on the Gateway to Homechoice website too.

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Chapter 8 – Shortlisting and offers

8.1 At the end of each choice based lettings (CBL) cycle a shortlisting of applicants who have bid for the property will be taken from the CBL computer system. The shortlist will identify the order of applicants based on who is in the highest housing Band (A is highest, E is the lowest) and who has the earliest effective date unless the property has been adapted or is subject to a local lettings agreement, such as a s106 agreement.

8.2 The top three applicants from the shortlist will usually be invited to view the property.

8.3 After viewing the property the applicant at the top of the shortlist will usually be given up to 24 hours to accept or refuse the accommodation. If the offer is refused the next person on the shortlist will be offered the property.

8.4 At the point of shortlisting, the PO or RP carrying out the shortlisting will verify the applicant's level of housing need and other details to ensure that the applicant still remains eligible for housing that their circumstances remain the same as when they applied and that their level of priority is correct. References from the applicant's current landlord will also be sought. Applicants may also be required to pay rent in advance.

8.5 In order to effectively manage housing applications, shortlists and prompt allocation of properties, any open shortlists dated one month from the end of the advertising cycle, where applicants in bands A-C bands have been exhausted, may be rejected and re advertised in the next suitable cycle.

Formal Offer

8.6 Once the applicant has confirmed their acceptance of the tenancy the landlord of the property will usually write to confirm the formal offer of the tenancy and an applicant's application will be matched against the property. Once they have signed the tenancy agreement, the applicant's housing register application will then be changed to Housed.

Rejecting an Offer

8.7 An applicant may reject an offer of accommodation and they will be permitted to bid on other properties. If an applicant repeatedly bids for and then rejects properties that they are offered, the PO may decide to suspend the applicant from bidding on properties for a specified time period. For further information please see [here](#)

Offering properties to tenants who owe rent

8.8 Tenants on the register will not normally be offered a new tenancy if they are in arrears with their rent. An offer is possible if:

- The rent owed is no more than four times the weekly rent (less any housing benefit payable). Any rent owing must be paid before the tenant signs to accept the new tenancy. *Note: this may not always apply to RP tenants as the rent account may need to be clear before making the offer. This is checked with the RP at the time.*
- A PO has accepted a duty to house the applicant under homelessness legislation. However, the applicant will still be expected to agree to pay outstanding rent. *Note: if court action is being taken to gain possession or other legal action, no offers of housing will be made without the agreement of the PO.*

8.9 The applicant is a Council or RP tenant who has a high priority because they:

- have been temporarily moved from their property by the Council or RP to allow repairs or redevelopment work to take place; or
- are moving under the Transfer Incentive Scheme. In this case the rent they owe cannot be more than any payment due from the scheme. An exception may be made if a move would benefit both housing needs in the area and the POs housing management work. The PO and the landlord must agree this; or
- have a high medical, welfare or hardship assessment. For clarification purposes, this is for those who have been awarded Band A on medical or welfare grounds. No offers of housing will be made without the agreement of the PO; or
- tenants who are at significant risk due to violence or harassment. No offers of housing will be made without the agreement of the PO.

8.10 In some circumstances, a new tenancy will be approved if there is rent owing. This could include applicants who have accrued rent arrears as a direct result of housing benefit deductions due to under-occupation of their property. These cases will need to be agreed by the PO and the landlord. Generally these cases will include a strong social or housing management need for the household to move.

Offers to Homeless Applicants

8.11 In accordance with the Housing Act 1996, part 7 (as amended) and the policy for discharging statutory homeless duties, all statutory homeless applicants are entitled to one reasonable offer of accommodation. These applicants will usually be placed in Band B and will be able to bid for properties through the CBL scheme. The PO may also bid for properties on behalf of the applicant. If a statutory homeless applicant refuses or fails to respond to a reasonable offer of accommodation, the awarding PO can end its statutory duty to provide accommodation.

8.12 If a homeless applicant has refused the accommodation because of its suitability, the awarding PO will explain the applicants' right to request a review of the suitability of the accommodation offered. The PO will also explain the applicant may lose their right to temporary accommodation. For further information on statutory homelessness review and appeals, please refer to [Appendix 1](#)

8.13 An applicant, whose statutory homeless duty has been ended as a result of their refusal or failure to respond to an offer of suitable accommodation, can remain on the housing register although the awarding PO will remove the statutory homeless priority Banding award. Their application will be reassessed and given the priority that reflects their current situation. Their effective date will not change. The PO will advise the applicant of their new priority band and the right to [request a review](#) of this decision

Bypassing an applicant on a shortlist

8.14 The LAs and RPs agree that:

1. a decision by an LA or RP to bypass an applicant who would be next in line for an offer of accommodation will only be taken according to the criteria agreed set out below;
2. where an RP wishes to retain exception rules that do not form part of the allocations policy, for example, rules relating to the size of accommodation to be offered or rules relating to offers of accommodation from applicants with former rent arrears or behaviour that has not yet been addressed or resolved – these rules should be transparent and will be recorded on each RPs website so it is clear when a named RP will bypass an applicant and what an applicant would need to do in order to be considered by that RP; and
3. each case will be assessed individually

8.15 It is not possible to describe every situation where an applicant on a shortlist might be bypassed. However, the following are the most common situations:

- Applicant doesn't require a ground floor property/requires only a ground floor property
- Applicant has been offered a different property

- Applicant has changed their mind
- Applicant is unsuitable due to arrears/debts
- Applicant needs extra care
- Applicant wants a bath/applicant wants a shower
- Area is unsuitable for applicant
- Change of circumstances
- Condition of the property isn't satisfactory
- Did not turn up for arranged viewing/unable to contact/ Incomplete verification by applicant
- Does not need an adapted property/property isn't adapted or adaptable
- Doesn't meet criteria/ Doesn't meet local lettings criteria/Doesn't meet age criteria
- Doesn't meet s106 criteria
- Efficient management of stock
- Garden is too big/no garden
- Not suitable for pet
- Owner occupier
- Property is too large for applicant/property is too small for applicant
- Rent is too high and property would be unaffordable for the applicant

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Chapter 9 – Right to Reviews

9.1 Applicants have the right to ask for a review of decisions made about their application for housing or offer of accommodation. This includes:

- decisions about refusing to allow an applicant to join the register;
- removing an application from the register;
- size or type of property
- assessment of Bands; and
- offers of housing

How to request a review of a Housing Register Decision

9.2 An applicant who disagrees with a decision a PO has made that affects their housing application may request a review of that decision within 21 days of receiving the written decision from the PO. A request for a review should usually be made in writing although POs may also consider verbal requests for a review to be undertaken.

9.3 The applicant should clearly outline the reasons that they have formally requested a review and a different officer at the PO will review the original decision. In some cases the PO may need to request further information from the applicant in order to make a decision. The PO will respond to the review request in writing within 8 weeks.

9.4 If an applicant still disagrees with a decision they can request that another PO hears their appeal. The appeal process will be as follows:

- Babergh to Suffolk Coastal/Waveney
- Braintree to Colchester
- Colchester to Ipswich
- Ipswich to Maldon
- Maldon to Braintree
- Mid Suffolk to Suffolk Coastal or Waveney
- Suffolk Coastal to Babergh/Mid Suffolk
- Waveney to Babergh/Mid Suffolk

9.5 The PO carrying out the appeal will reply to the applicant within 8 weeks of receiving it from the awarding PO.

Complaints procedure

9.6 If an applicant is dissatisfied with any aspect of the management of their application, other than when a review can be made, they should contact the PO and ask for a complaints form.

The Local Government Ombudsman

9.7 If an applicant is not satisfied with the action of a PO and they have already been through all of the stages of the POs' complaints procedure, they can send a written complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman. If an applicant has complained to a PO but has not had a reply from the relevant PO for 12 weeks, they can also complain to the Local Government Ombudsman.

Further detail about the Local Government Ombudsman can be found here:

<http://www.lgo.org.uk/>

And information about how to make a complaint is here:

<http://www.lgo.org.uk/making-a-complaint/>

Alternatively, you can write to:

The Local Government Ombudsman

PO Box 4771

Coventry

CV4 0EH

Telephone: 0300 061 0614

The Housing Ombudsman Service

9.8 If an applicant wishes to make a complaint about a Registered Provider they should contact the Housing Ombudsman Service:

Housing Ombudsman Service

81 Aldwych

London

WC2B 4HN

Telephone: 0300 111 3000 (lines are open Monday to Friday from 9:15 to 17:15)

Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

To make a complaint, use the link below:

[Getting help from the Housing Ombudsman.](#)

Final Nov 2015

Appendix 1 – Discharging Statutory Homelessness Duty

Policy Overview

1.1 This document relates to the policy and procedural arrangements for discharging statutory homelessness duties. The document will be referred to as “the policy”.

The policy applies to the following Local Authorities:

- Babergh District Council
- Braintree District Council
- Colchester Borough Council
- Ipswich Borough Council
- Maldon District Council
- Mid Suffolk District Council
- Suffolk Coastal District Council
- Waveney District Council

1.2 The Local Authorities, who have signed up to the policy, all participate in the Gateway to Homechoice housing register and choice based lettings system. This policy works alongside the Gateway to Homechoice Allocation Policy.

The policy complies with:

- The Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002
- Equality Act 2010
- The Localism Act 2011
- Suitability of Accommodation Order (November 2012)

Policy aims and objectives

1.3 The policy will ensure a comprehensive and consistent needs and risk assessment is carried out for each statutory homeless household. This approach will ensure applicants' needs are appropriately met and risks to personal safety and that of staff and the community are minimised. Each case will be assessed on an individual basis.

1.4 This policy and the needs assessment procedure will ensure there is no discrimination on the grounds of gender, age, religion, race, disability, nationality or sexuality.

Assessment Procedure

1.5 Enquiries will be made by the local authority officers into the following areas of need and risk:

- Bedroom eligibility under Local Housing Allowance
- Physical Mobility / Health needs
- Mental / Emotional Health needs
- Practical Support / Advice needs
- Cultural/ Faith needs
- Risks to staff and community
- Risk to self (e.g. substance misuse/self-harming)
- Recent housing history
- Ability to manage finances/maintain home
- Ability to manage personal health and hygiene

- Concerns raised by the applicant
- Status of Homelessness Application
- Area of preference. The use of the Private Rented Sector will potentially provide greater opportunity for households to remain in their preferred area.
- Confirmation of the affordability of each option. Each case will be assessed on its own merit.
- Financial circumstances. Households above the current Gateway to Homechoice financial thresholds (for income and savings) will automatically be considered for private rent accommodation. Households with sufficient capital to meet 12 months' rent in advance in the private rented sector will receive reduced preference under the Gateway to Homechoice Allocations Policy and, if a homeless duty is accepted, then an offer (wherever possible) will be made to discharge into the private sector.

1.6 The outcome of these enquiries will be recorded on each local authority's Housing Advice/Enquiry form. Some local authorities will complete a housing needs assessment as part of initial housing options advice and as part of the homeless application process. The outcome of these enquiries will determine the eligible accommodation option(s) for each household. Available options for customers are detailed in [Section 2](#).

The policy and procedure for selecting households for properties is detailed in [Section 3](#).

2. Available options for customers

2.1 Assessed as suitable for discharge into private sector

a) Singles/Couples

- Singles – Under the age of 35 for shared housing only, unless they are in an exempt category of persons.
- Singles – 35 and over can be considered for bedsits, studio or one beds
- Couples – one beds

These applicants must be 18 years or over, have low support needs, have an accepted homelessness application and assessed income and savings which are above the current Gateway to Homechoice financial thresholds (see section 3.1) or the property identified is assessed as being affordable to the household and they are assessed as being able to manage their finances with limited support.

b) Families - Households aged 18 years or over and have children or include an expectant mother with low support needs, an accepted homelessness application and assessed income and savings which are above the current Gateway to Homechoice financial thresholds or the property identified is assessed as being affordable to the household and they are assessed as being able to manage their finances with limited support.

2.2 Suitable ONLY for Council or RP Properties - those singles, couples and families who do not meet the criteria as above should make a Gateway application to bid on Council or RP properties

3. Selecting Households for Properties

3.1 Policy - a selection procedure is in place in order to prioritise households for properties when they become available. The decision to prioritise households for properties will be at the local authority's discretion. Each case will be assessed on individual circumstances and in line with the terms of this policy and procedure. In certain cases a landlord may determine the criteria for who will be accepted into the property.

3.2 When a suitable property becomes available priority will be given as follows:

First – Exceptional medical cases or other circumstances where it was agreed B&B/temporary accommodation would be unacceptable if the household was not prioritised for a property. Households with sufficient capital to meet 12 months’ rent payments. Then if none (or none suitable)

Second - Households in Bed & Breakfast/temporary accommodation (longest stay first). Then if none (or none suitable)

Third - Households where negotiations have taken place (e.g. with a landlord) to avoid B&B if we prioritised them for a property. Then if none (or none suitable)

Fourth - Next suitable homeless household (where a homeless duty has been accepted) with the oldest date homeless.

4. Offers of accommodation

4.1 Statutory homeless households are entitled to one reasonable offer of accommodation. The local authority will consider its homeless duty discharged if a suitable offer (known as a “final” offer) is refused, in either the private rented or social sector.

Offers of accommodation in the Private Rented Sector

4.2 If an applicant is deemed to be suitable for a private sector offer and a suitable property is available, they will be made an offer immediately. The private sector offer must be an offer of an Assured Short-hold Tenancy, with a minimum fixed term of one year. Under these circumstances, this will be considered to be the applicant’s one offer of suitable accommodation and will therefore discharge the statutory homeless duty. If the applicant refuses the offer of accommodation, the local authority can end its statutory homeless duty.

4.3 Once the offer has been formally made, the applicant’s homeless and housing register applications will be closed. Should the applicant wish to reapply to the housing register, they will need to complete a new application and their priority will be assessed based on their current accommodation.

4.4 If an applicant is deemed suitable for a private sector offer and there are no suitable properties available, the applicant will be given Band B and will be able to bid for social housing, subject to location and time bidding restrictions. (For further information on time and location bidding restrictions, please refer to the Gateway to Homechoice Allocation Policy).

4.5 If a suitable private rented property becomes available before an offer of social housing can be made, then this property will be offered to the applicant as their final offer.

Offers of accommodation in the social sector

4.6 Applicants assessed as being suitable for a social housing offer of accommodation will be subject to location and time restricted bidding under the scheme. For further information, please refer to the Gateway to Homechoice Allocation Policy.

Refusal or failure to respond to an offer of suitable accommodation

4.7 If a statutory homeless applicant refuses or fails to respond to a suitable offer, the Local authority will explain the applicant’s right to a review against the suitability of the offer of accommodation.

4.8 The Local authority will also explain to the applicant that they may lose their right to temporary accommodation. For further information, please refer to section 9 below and to the relevant Local authority Reviews Procedure.

4.9 An applicant, whose statutory homeless duty has ended as a result of their refusal or failure to respond, can remain on the housing register; however the Local authority will remove the statutory homeless priority award. Their application will be reassessed and given the band that reflects their current situation. For further information, please refer to the Gateway to Homechoice Allocation Policy.

New approaches from applicants previously housed into the private sector

4.10 If an applicant becomes unintentionally homeless from their private rented tenancy within 2 years, the statutory homeless duty automatically revives once. In cases where the duty revives and the applicant applies to a different local authority, the applicant can be referred back to the original local authority, unless there is a risk of domestic violence.

4.11 The revived duty may again be discharged through an offer of private or social rented accommodation, in accordance with this policy.

5. Reviews on the suitability of accommodation offered

5.1 As part of the offer process and in accordance with each Local authority's policies and procedures, applicants will be advised of their right to request a review on the suitability of the accommodation offered. Applicants will also be advised of advice services, for example Citizens Advice Bureau or Shelter.

Review process

5.2 Applicants can request a review within 21 days of the Local authority telling them that they consider an offer to be suitable and that it has discharged its duty under the homeless legislation. The local authority will consider review requests received after 21 days, but they are not obliged to agree to carry out the review.

5.3 Review requests can be made in writing or verbally to the relevant local authority. Once a review request has been received, the local authority will write to the applicant to:

- acknowledge the request
- provide details of the review procedure

5.4 The local authority will need to complete the review within 56 days of receiving the applicant's original review request (unless a longer period is agreed). The review will be carried out by a local authority Senior Officer. This Officer must not have been involved in the original decision.

Review outcomes

5.5 The review outcome can be:

- Unsuccessful – in this situation the local authority's original decision will stand.
- Successful – in this situation the local authority will amend their original decision.

5.6 Once the review has been completed, the local authority will write to the applicant informing them of the review decision. The letter will be sent to the applicant or will be available for collection from the local authority offices.

5.7 The outcome letter will explain the review decision, how the local authority reached this decision and the right to appeal the review decision to the County Court if the applicant believes the decision is legally incorrect. An appeal must be made within 21 days of being notified of the review decision.

Accommodation options during and after a review decision

5.8 During the review process, the local authority is not legally obliged to provide the applicant with temporary accommodation. Applicants will be advised to accept the final offer of accommodation whilst the review is being considered. This is because:

- the applicant will have somewhere to stay during the review process
- there is no guarantee of a further offer of accommodation following the outcome of the review.

5.9 During the review process, the property originally offered, may at the landlord's discretion, be held open whilst the review is considered. Unfortunately this may not be possible in cases of private rented accommodation. If the review is unsuccessful and the property is still available, the applicant may be offered the property again. If the applicant refuses the offer, they will be referred to a Local authority Senior Officer, who will confirm if the statutory homeless duty has been ended.

County Court Appeals

5.10 An applicant can appeal to the County Court on any point of law for one of the following reasons:

- if they feel the review decision is legally incorrect; or
- if the Local authority has not met the time limit to complete the review process

5.11 All appeals must be made to the County Court within 21 days of the review decision. Applicants considering an appeal to the County Court are advised to obtain independent legal advice e.g. citizens advice bureau or Shelter.

Complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman

5.12 If an applicant is not satisfied with a review decision, they can complain to the Local Government Ombudsman.

5.13 The Ombudsman will not consider certain matters, for example, if 12 months has passed since the cause for complaint occurred or when matters are, or could be, subject to court proceedings.

5.14 The Ombudsman will consider a complaint if an applicant believes they have been treated unfairly as a result of maladministration. Examples include:

- Delayed taking action without good reason
- Taken into account irrelevant considerations or ignored relevant considerations
- Not followed rules (legal or local procedures)
- Given the wrong decision
- Not reached a decision in the correct way

Contact details for the Local Government Ombudsman are:

The Local Government Ombudsman
PO Box 4771
Coventry
CV4 0EH

Telephone: 0300 061 0614
Text : Text 'call back' to 07624 811595
Website: www.lgo.uk

Partner Organisation List

Babergh District Council
131 High Street
Needham Market
Suffolk
IP6 8DL

Telephone: 01473 825757
Website: www.babergh.gov.uk
Email: homechoice@babermidsuffolk.gov.uk

Braintree District Council
Causeway House
Bocking End
Braintree
Essex
CM7 9HB

Tel: 01376 552525
Website: www.braintree.gov.uk
Email: homechoice@colchester.gov.uk

Colchester Borough Council
Rowan House
33 Sheepen Road
Colchester
Essex
CO3 3WG

Tel: 01206 282222
Website: www.colchester.gov.uk
Email: homechoice@colchester.gov.uk

Ipswich Borough Council
Grafton House
15-17 Russell Road
Ipswich
Suffolk
IP1 2DE

Tel: 01473 423000
Website: www.ipswich.gov.uk
Email: homechoice@ipswich.gov.uk

Greenfields Community Housing
Greenfields House
Charter Way
Braintree
Essex
CM77 8FG

Tel: 01376 535400
Website: www.greenfieldsCH.org.uk
Email: csc@greenfieldsCH.org.uk

Colchester Borough Homes
Rowan House
33 Sheepen Road
Colchester
Essex
CO3 3WG

Tel: 01206 282514
Website: www.colchesterboroughhomes.co.uk
Email: homechoice@colchester.gov.uk

Maldon District Council
Princes Road
Maldon
Essex
CM9 5DL

Tel: 01621 854477

Website: www.maldon.gov.uk

Email: homechoice@maldon.gov.uk

Moat Homes Ltd
Mariner House
Galleon Boulevard
Crossways
Dartford
DA2 6QE

Tel: 0845 359 6161

website: www.moat.co.uk

Email: customer@moat.co.uk

Mid Suffolk District Council
131 High Street
Needham Market
Suffolk
IP6 8DL

Tel: 01473 825757

Website: www.midsuffolk.gov.uk

Email: homechoice@babergmidsuffolk.gov.uk

Suffolk Coastal District Council
Melton Hill
Woodbridge
Suffolk
IP12 1 AU

Tel: 01394 444822

Website: www.suffolkcoastal.gov.uk

Email: homechoice.scdc@eastsuffolk.gov.uk

Flagship
Keswick Hall
Norwich
Norfolk
NR4 6TJ

Tel: 0808 168 4555

Website: www.flagship-housing.co.uk

Waveney District Council
Riverside
4 Canning Road
Lowestoft
NR33 0EQ

Tel: 01502 523524

Website: www.waveney.gov.uk

Email: homechoice.wdc@eastsuffolk.gov.uk

Glossary of Terms

Affordable Rent	Local authority or registered provider accommodation let at a higher rent level compared to social rent, normally up to 80% of market rent levels
ALMO	Arms Length Management Organisation is a not-for-profit company that manages the housing stock and provision of housing services on behalf of a local authority. Ownership of the housing stock remains with the local authority
Applicants	People who apply to join the housing register who are seeking access to local authority or registered providers' properties for rent or low cost ownership
Housing Register	The housing register is a list of applicants who want to be considered for social housing. Eligible applicants are able to join the housing register and will be prioritised based on their need for social housing
Large Scale Voluntary Transfer (LSVT)	Large Scale Voluntary Transfer refers to local authorities that have transferred their housing stock to a RP. The RP owns the housing stock and is responsible for overall management and provision of housing services.
Negotiated tenancy surrender	<p>Applicants in this category will be placed in Band A if tenancy surrender has been negotiated and meets these conditions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They were a council or RP tenant when taken into custody and the offence did not mean that they had broken their tenancy or the tenant has to go into a mental health or other special facility for an extended period; and • They have or are likely to be sent to prison or an institution for more than 13 weeks (including the time spent on remand) and; • They have conducted their tenancy in a reasonable way and have not broken their tenancy agreement; and • Their rent is up to date; and • They have not been served with a 'notice seeking possession;' and • They offer to end their tenancy <p>Before agreeing to a tenancy surrender, the landlord will agree this with the PO. Tenancy surrenders will not go ahead until the PO gives their written confirmation.</p> <p>Tenancy surrenders are only applicable within the Gateway area of operation.</p>
Nominations	To help POs retain spaces within specialist or supported accommodation, POs have agreed to house a certain number of clients each year from this type of accommodation. These applicants will be placed in either Band A or Band B of the scheme at the discretion of the PO
Partner Organisation (PO)	The term PO refers to the eight local authorities which participate in the scheme

Registered Provider	RP are private, non-profit making organisations which provide low cost social housing. Sometimes they are referred to as Housing Associations
Relationship breakdown of a secure/assured tenant in the sub-region	<p>This applies to existing secure and assured tenants only.</p> <p>If a joint tenant ends the tenancy when moving out, if the remaining applicant qualifies to be offered the same property, they will be offered this property.</p> <p>If they are not offered the property, the remaining tenant will be placed in Band A if they either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualify to be offered a smaller property; or • Qualifies for the property size but does not need the adaptations within the current property <p>If a joint tenant ends the tenancy when moving out, the property is not automatically offered to the tenant remaining. However, if an applicant qualifies to be offered the same property they will be made an offer of that property.</p> <p>If an applicant qualifies to be offered a smaller property they will be placed in Band A and will be able to bid for properties under the scheme. These applicants will be subject to a time limited bidding restriction of 6 months. During these six months, the POs reserve the right to express an interest on the applicant's behalf for suitable properties.</p> <p>If a property is then subsequently refused, the applicant may lose their right to remain in their current property</p>
Social housing	Social housing is a term used to describe accommodation owned and managed by local authorities and registered providers. This includes accommodation let on social and affordable rent levels
Social rent	Local authority or RO accommodation let a lower rent level compared to affordable rent
Stock holding local authority	Stock holding refers to local authority who have a housing stock and are responsible for the overall management and provision of housing services.
Tenant Incentive Scheme	Existing social housing tenants within the Gateway area of operation who wish to downsize into smaller sized social housing

Colchester Borough Council

Equality Impact Assessment Form - An Analysis of the Effects on Equality

Section 1: Initial Equality Impact Assessment

Name of policy to be assessed:

- Gateway to Homechoice Allocations Policy

<https://www.gatewaytohomechoice.org.uk/NovaWeb/Infrastructure/ViewLibraryDocument.aspx?ObjectID=274>

1. What is the main purpose of the policy?

- To allocate social housing according to need and ensure that housing need assessment is fair and does not discriminate on unreasonable grounds

2. What main areas or activities does it cover?

- The policy aims to assess the needs of everyone who makes an application for housing based on their individual circumstances. Each applicant will be placed into a Band between A and E, with those who are in most urgent housing need will be placed in Band A. Priority is also given to applicants who will release accommodation in high demand, for example, applicants who want to downsize.
- The policy aims to promote equality and equal opportunities for access and participation by everyone and to assess applications for housing against the same criteria

3. Are there changes to an existing policy being considered in this assessment? If so what are they?

- Right to Move – this new legislation came into effect on 20 April and gives reasonable preference to existing social tenants who wish to move for work-related reasons.
- Essex-wide Domestic Violence Reciprocal Agreement – this is a new agreement for victims of domestic violence to enable them to move from one Registered Provider to another to help them to flee DV and safeguard them
- Clarification of a number of points within the existing policy for example, updating the wording in the Local Lettings part of the policy

4. Who are the main audience, users or customers who will be affected by the policy?

- Applicants for social housing who perceive themselves to be in need of social housing, some of whom are very vulnerable

5. What outcomes do you want to achieve from the policy?

- To meet the legal requirements for letting social housing
- To assess all customers fairly based on their need for housing and to enable those in greatest housing need to access social housing
- To make best use of existing housing stock
- To provide a consistent lettings process across the sub region, so properties are let in a fair and transparent way
- To provide increased choice and information to customers in the allocation of social housing
- To support vulnerable customers accessing available homes
- To ensure that customers are not discriminated against, whether directly or indirectly
- To improve mobility across the sub region by allowing customers to apply to be housed in any of the eight local authority areas
- To promote social inclusion and help achieve sustainable communities

6. Are other service areas or partner agencies involved in delivery? If so, please give details below:

Local Authority partners include:

- Babergh District Council
- Braintree District Council
- Colchester Borough Council
- Ipswich Borough Council
- Maldon District Council
- Mid Suffolk District Council
- Suffolk Coastal District Council
- Waveney District Council

Registered Landlords include:

1. Broadland Housing Association
2. CDS Coop
3. CHP
4. Colne
5. Cotman HA
6. English Rural Housing
7. Estuary
8. Family Mosaic

9. Flagship
10. Genesis
11. Greenfields
12. Guinness
13. Habinteg
14. Hanover
15. Hastoe
16. Home Group
17. Housing 21
18. London and Quadrant Housing
19. Moat
20. Orbit Group Ltd
21. Orwell Housing Association
22. Places for People
23. Riverside ECHG
24. Saffron Housing Trust
25. Salvation Army
26. Sanctuary Housing
27. South Anglia
28. Suffolk Housing Society
29. Swan Housing
30. Wherry
31. Winsleys

7. Are you aware of any relevant information, data, surveys or consultations¹ which help us to assess the likely or actual impact of the policy upon customers or staff?

- General monitoring is carried out by the scheme's project board every quarter to ensure that the scheme is running effectively and that properties are being let to those in need
- An annual report on the scheme is also published and available on the customer website - <http://www.gatewaytohomechoice.org.uk/NovaWeb/Infrastructure/ViewLibraryDocument.aspx?ObjectID=305>

¹Click on [surveys or consultations](#) for more information. The Council's surveys and consultations include 'equality monitoring information' to help us identify any particular concerns or views expressed by any particular group or 'protected characteristic'. It can also help us to assess how representative of our customers the respondent group is. Local Data on the Protected Characteristics is available [on this page](#) of the Hub.

8. The 'general duty' states that we must have "due regard" to the need to:

- (a) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between people who share a 'protected characteristic'² and those who do not³
- (c) foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not⁴

Not all policies help us to meet the 'general duty', but most do.

Where applicable, explain how this policy helps us to meet the 'general duty':

The allocations policy adheres to the 2010 Equalities Act and allows for a consistent, fair and transparent approach to making social lettings which takes account of each person's need for social housing.

The scheme and policy are overseen by a Project Board, which regularly monitors available equalities data from the scheme.

The policy helps us to 'eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation' in the following way(s):

Applicants to the scheme are assessed and prioritised according to their need for housing. Where applicants have been subject to harassment in their current/previous homes, they can be given a high priority on the housing register.

The policy helps us to 'advance equality of opportunity...' in the following way(s):

Equality of opportunity may be advanced for people in the following ways

- People with disabilities are assessed and may be given a higher band due to their medical needs
- Those in BME groups may be given high priority awards in cases of harassment
- Older people have access to specialist accommodation to meet their needs

The policy helps us to 'foster good relations...' in the following way(s):

² The Equality Act's 'protected characteristics' include age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief and sex and sexual orientation. It also covers marriage and civil partnerships, but not for all aspects of the duty.

³ This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to: (a) remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic; (b) take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it, and (c) encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

⁴ This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to (a) tackle prejudice, and (b) promote understanding.

There is clear information on the Gateway to Homechoice website which outlines how clients' housing applications will be prioritised as well as showing which properties are let to which type of applicant each week.

9. This section helps us to identify any disproportionate impacts. Please indicate in the table below whether the policy is likely to particularly benefit or disadvantage any of the 'protected characteristics'.

Remember to include reference to any relevant consultation, data or information.

'Protected characteristic' group		Positive Impact	Explain how it could particularly benefit the group	Negative Impact	Explain how it could particularly disadvantage the group
Age	Older people (60+)	X	<p>Priority for sheltered accommodation gives greater opportunity and choice of housing.</p> <p>Older applicants who wish to downsize are also given high priority on the housing register to enable them to move as quickly as possible</p>	X	<p>Primary access to the application and bidding process is via a website which those over 60+ may not have regular access to or may not feel comfortable using this type of technology</p>
	Younger people (17-25) and children (0-16)	X	<p>Under 16s are treated as dependent children and are therefore in a priority need group</p> <p>16 and 17 year olds are also considered to be in priority need</p> <p>Those who are under 21 years old who were in local authority care between the ages of 16 and 18 and those aged 21 and over who are vulnerable as a result of leaving local authority care are in a priority need group</p> <p>17 – 25 year olds can also access supported housing</p>	X	<p>Under 16s may be expected to share a bedroom with a sibling of the same sex even if there is a large age gap between them</p> <p>17 year olds can't hold a tenancy</p>

Appendix B

'Protected characteristic' group		Positive Impact	Explain how it could particularly benefit the group	Negative Impact	Explain how it could particularly disadvantage the group
Disability	Physical	X	<p>Physical needs can be taken into account during the application process and applicants can be given a higher banding than usual due to their physical needs.</p> <p>Adapted properties are also available to those who need it</p> <p>Some new properties built within the Gateway adhere to the Lifetime Homes standards</p>	X	<p>Some properties will be inaccessible to those with physical disabilities – e.g. top floor flat with no lift</p> <p>Live-in help will not automatically be considered to be part of a household.</p>
	Sensory	X	<p>Sensory needs can be taken into account during the application process and applicants can be given a higher banding than usual due to their sensory needs.</p> <p>Adapted properties are also available to those who need it</p> <p>Some new properties built within the Gateway adhere to the Lifetime Homes standards</p>	X	<p>Some properties will not be appropriate for those with sensory needs.</p> <p>Live-in help will not automatically be considered to be part of a household.</p>
	Learning	X	<p>Learning disabilities can be taken into account during the application process and applicants can be given a higher banding than usual due to their learning disability</p>	X	<p>Online scheme could disadvantage this group which may find it more difficult to access the service.</p> <p>Live-in help will not automatically be considered to be part of a household.</p>

'Protected characteristic' group		Positive Impact	Explain how it could particularly benefit the group	Negative Impact	Explain how it could particularly disadvantage the group
	Mental health issues	X	Mental health needs can be taken into account during the application process and applicants can be given a higher banding than usual due to their mental health needs	X	Live-in help will not automatically be considered to be part of a household.
	Other – <i>specify</i>		n/a		
Ethnicity ⁵	White				
	Black	X	The policy may particularly help to protect Black and Minority Ethnic Groups from harassment through high priority awards on welfare grounds.		
	Chinese	X	The policy may particularly help to protect Black and Minority Ethnic Groups from harassment through high priority awards on welfare grounds.		
	Mixed Ethnic Origin	X	The policy may particularly help to protect Black and Minority Ethnic Groups from harassment through high priority awards on welfare grounds.		
	Gypsies/ Travellers	X	The policy may particularly help to protect this group where they have been the victim of harassment.		
	Other – <i>please state</i>				
Language	English not first language	X	Local authorities provide translation services where necessary, for example, using Language Line or Capita Translate to enable those who do not speak English as their first language to access and understand the system	X	Online scheme could disadvantage this group. Potential issues of accessibility and possible difficulty around understanding how the scheme operates.

⁵ National Census 2011 categories are: Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani, Other Asian (Asian or Asian British), African, Caribbean, Other Black (Black or Black British), White and Black African, White and Asian, White and Black Caribbean (Mixed), British, Irish, Other White (White), Chinese, Other (Other Ethnic Group).

'Protected characteristic' group		Positive Impact	Explain how it could particularly benefit the group	Negative Impact	Explain how it could particularly disadvantage the group
Pregnancy and Maternity	Women who are pregnant or have given birth in last 26 weeks	X	Women who are pregnant and those who dependent children are in a priority need group This group may also benefit from an additional bedroom housing need being awarded as a result of pregnancy or childbirth.		
Religion or Belief	People with a religious belief (or none)	X	Applicants could be awarded a higher banding under the welfare award if they need to move due to suffering from religious harassment		
Sex	Men	X	90% of those currently serving in the armed forces are men and this group is given additional preference for housing within this scheme	X	Men with a child who does not permanently reside with them are not awarded priority under the policy.
	Women	X	Priority is awarded to families with children, and women are disproportionately the main carer of dependent children.	X	Women who are victims of domestic abuse and who do not have children may not be considered to be in priority need and may not be given a high priority under the schemed
Gender Reassignment ⁶	Transgender/ Transsexual	X	The policy helps to protect this group from harassment through high priority awards on welfare grounds		
Sexual Orientation	Bisexual, Heterosexual, Gay or Lesbian	X	The policy helps to protect this group from harassment through high priority awards on welfare grounds		

⁶ The protected characteristic of gender reassignment is defined by the Equality Act 2010 as “a person proposing to undergo, is undergoing or has undergone a process (or part of a process) for the purpose of reassigning the person's sex by changing physiological or other attributes of sex.” This is a personal process that may involve medical interventions such as counselling, psychotherapy, hormone therapy or surgery, but does not have to. NB: It is generally held that transgender people disguise their features or clothing to resemble their preferred sex, whereas transsexual people wish to change their body to completely resemble their preferred sex.

'Protected characteristic' group		Positive Impact	Explain how it could particularly benefit the group	Negative Impact	Explain how it could particularly disadvantage the group
Marriage and Civil Partnership	People who are married or in a civil partnership	X	The lettings made through this scheme take account of individual needs and help to ensure that none of the protected characteristics are discriminated against either directly or indirectly.		

10. If you have identified any negative impacts (above) how can they be minimised or removed?

(This is a key section: Please deal with each negative impact noted above in turn.)

Older people - negative Impact	Method to minimise or remove
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some older people do not have the knowledge or access to benefit from the online system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Authorities provide a telephone call service to customers who are experiencing difficulties in completing the online application form. Officers telephone the customer and work through the questions and complete the application form on behalf of the customer. Officers may also bid on behalf of customers.
Under 16s – negative impact	Method to minimise or remove
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Under 16s may be expected to share a bedroom with a sibling of the same sex even if there is a large age gap between them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children are often expected to share bedrooms. If children are over the age of 10 and the opposite sex to their sibling, they are then entitled to their own bedroom
17-25s - negative Impact	Method to minimise or remove
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 17 year olds can't hold a tenancy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If a 17 year old has a guarantor who is over 18, they can be given a tenancy

People with disabilities (physical and sensory) - negative impact	Method to minimise or remove
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some properties will not meet be accessible to or appropriate for those who have physical/sensory disabilities • Live-in help will not automatically be considered to be part of a household. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local authorities will liaise with applicants to ensure that they are able to bid for properties which have already been adapted or can be adapted to meet an applicant's needs • Although live-in help will not automatically be considered part of the household, extra rooms for carers will be subject to assessment in conjunction with social services' supporting evidence.
People with learning disabilities - negative impact	Method to minimise or remove
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online scheme could disadvantage this group which may find it more difficult to access the service. • Live-in help will not automatically be considered to be part of a household. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local authorities will support those who are experiencing difficulties in completing the online application form or can complete the form on behalf of the customer • Officers may also bid on properties on behalf of applicants • Although live-in help will not automatically be considered part of the household, extra rooms for carers will be subject to assessment in conjunction with social services' supporting evidence.
People with mental health needs - negative impact	Method to minimise or remove
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live-in help will not automatically be considered to be part of a household. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although live-in help will not automatically be considered part of the household, extra rooms for carers will be subject to assessment in conjunction with social services' supporting evidence.
People who do not have English as a first language - negative Impact	Method to minimise or remove
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online scheme could disadvantage this group. Potential issues of accessibility and possible difficulty around understanding how the scheme operates. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local authorities will provide translated/easy read documents on request • Local authorities will also provide links to local community groups which can help those who need it to complete application forms/explain the scheme to them

Men - Negative Impact	Method to minimise or remove
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Men with access to children, where the child does not permanently reside with them are not awarded priority under the policy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Men with access to children are offered advice and information on all housing options.
Women - Negative Impact	Method to minimise or remove
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women who are victims of domestic abuse but who do not have children may not be considered in priority need and may not be given a high priority under the scheme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women will be supported to consider/access other types of accommodation away from their violent partner

e) Additional general points

- Each case is assessed on an individual basis to avoid discrimination against protected characteristics
- Local Authorities identify vulnerable customers and send out newsletters giving details of properties in each cycle. The Local Authorities can also then place bids for properties on behalf of customers.

11. Could the policy discriminate⁷ against any 'protected characteristic', either directly or indirectly⁸?

(Please read the footnotes below before completing this section.)

- No. Applicants are only assessed according to their need for housing and against the same criteria. The policy does not discriminate against any protected characteristics either directly or indirectly.

⁷ The Council has a general duty to 'eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation'. Direct discrimination occurs when a person is treated less favourably than another in a comparable situation because of their 'protected characteristic' whether on grounds of age, disability, pregnancy and maternity, ethnicity; religion or belief; sex (gender), sexual orientation, or marriage and civil partnership. Indirect discrimination occurs when an apparently neutral provision or practice would nevertheless disadvantage people on the grounds of their 'protected characteristic'.

⁸ If you answer 'yes' to question 11 (above) you will need to complete this section *and* go on to complete Section 2 in order to conduct a full Equality Impact Assessment.

Summary and findings of Initial Equality Impact Assessment

12. Please put a tick in the relevant box to confirm your findings, and what the next step is:

Findings	Action required
No negative impacts have been identified <input type="checkbox"/>	Sign off screening and finish.
Negative impacts have been identified but have been minimised or removed <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sign off screening and finish.
Negative impacts could not be minimised or removed <input type="checkbox"/>	Sign off screening and complete a full impact assessment – Section 2.
There is insufficient evidence to make a judgement. <input type="checkbox"/>	Sign off screening and complete a full impact assessment – Section 2.

13. Name and job title of person completing this form:

- Claire Beckett – Gateway to Homechoice Coordinator

14. Date of completion:

- 14.10.15

15. Date for update or review of this screening:

- The EqIA will be reviewed when the Allocations Policy is next reviewed. The Allocations policy will be reviewed every three years, unless there significant changes made to housing/allocations legislation.

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Proposed Changes to the Allocations Policy

Item no	Topic	Section	Outcome
1.	Refusals	3.8 (f)	<p>Applicants who repeatedly select and/or view properties which they have no intention of taking</p> <p>In exceptional circumstances applicants can be suspended from participating if they repeatedly select and or view properties which they have no intention of accepting.</p>
2.	12 month restriction for customers applying to re-join the register	3.8 (a)	Clarification that applicants who are housed via Gateway to Homechoice or who mutually exchange are suspended from bidding for 12 months
3.	Right to Move	4.8	Existing social housing tenants who need to move due to work are exempt from local connection requirements set out in section 4.4
4.	Effective date	4.10	Clarification of how the effective date is determined when the birth of a baby entitles the family to a larger property
5.	Nominations to move on from supported housing	Chapter 5 Bands A and B	The existing policy awards applicants who are ready to move on from specified supported housing schemes a Band A. It is proposed that the partner organisation has the discretion to award a Band A or B
6.	Reduced preference	Chapter 5 - Band D	Clarification that reduced preference does not apply to existing Council or RP tenants whose financial resources exceed financial thresholds
7.	Reduced preference	Chapter 5 - Band D	Updated wording to show that the behaviour of a tenant or a member of the household could affect their suitability to be a tenant
8.	Reduced preference	Chapter 5 - Band D	Applicants who have been accepted as homeless and who are in temporary accommodation may have their preference reduced and placed in Band D if they are in rent arrears
9.	Welfare Matrix	5.10	New welfare matrix makes clear that no additional priority is awarded where the need to move and degree of vulnerability are considered to be low
10.	Deliberately making housing circumstances worse	5.16	Applicants who have deliberately made their situation worse are assessed on the basis of their previous accommodation. The section has been changed to include people who move to smaller private rented accommodation and introduced a review after 12 months
11.	Owner occupiers	5.17 – 5.21	These sections have been reworded to clarify the position of owner occupiers on the housing register.

12.	Affordability	6.8	This change to the policy allows landlords to consider the affordability of a property prior to offering a tenancy. Those reliant on housing benefit are no longer necessarily entitled to full benefit if they are under-occupying a property.
13.	Bungalows – no restrictions/age restrictions	7.10 and 7.11	Updated terminology with regard to bungalows. Bungalows are described as either age restricted or general needs
14.	Direct lets	7.12	The circumstances in which a direct let can be made have been amended to include management moves in exceptional circumstances and the Essex-wide agreement for victims of domestic violence Properties which are direct let are not advertised but feedback is given on the Gateway to Homechoice website
15.	Time bidding restrictions	7.17	Some applicants are subject to time limited bidding restrictions. This section sets out what types of applicant this applies to and what sanctions are available if they fail to bid for appropriate properties
16.	Offers of accommodation	8.4	At the point of offering a tenancy the applicant's current circumstances will be checked to ensure they have the same level of housing need and references and rent in advance may be required
17.	Shortlisting	8.15	If a property cannot be let promptly and applicants in Bands A – C have been exhausted the property may be readvertised
18.	How the policy operates	8.14 – 8.15	As a result of an ombudsman judgement relating to an allocations policy in another area of the country this section makes clear that registered providers may have policies which differ from the Gateway to Homechoice policy
19.	Reviews & Appeals	Chapter 9	The wording has been updated so that there is a clear distinction between a review and an appeal.