

Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel

30 January 2020

Time 6.00 pm **Public Meeting?** YES **Type of meeting** Scrutiny

Venue Committee Room 3 - Civic Centre

Membership

Chair Cllr Mak Singh (Lab)

Vice-chair Cllr Paul Appleby (Con)

Labour

Cllr Mary Bateman
Cllr Philip Bateman MBE
Cllr Greg Brackenridge
Cllr Alan Butt
Cllr Jacqui Coogan
Cllr Bhupinder Gakhal
Cllr Keith Inston
Cllr Beverley Momenabadi
Cllr Martin Waite

Conservative

Cllr Christopher Haynes

Quorum for this meeting is three Councillors.

Information for the Public

If you have any queries about this meeting, please contact the Democratic Services team:

Contact Martin Stevens

Tel/Email 01902 550947 martin.stevens@wolverhampton.gov.uk

Address Democratic Services, Civic Centre, 1st floor, St Peter's Square,
Wolverhampton WV1 1RL

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Agenda

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

MEETING BUSINESS ITEMS

- 1 **Apologies**
[To receive any apologies for absence].
- 2 **Declarations of Interest**
- 3 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting** (Pages 3 - 8)
[To approve the minutes of the previous meeting as a correct record]
- 4 **Matters arising**
[To consider any matter arising from the minutes]

PRE-DECISION ITEM

- 5 **Allocations Policy Review** (Pages 9 - 66)
[To consider the Allocations Policy Review as a Pre-Decision item].

ITEM FOR DISCUSSION

- 6 **Work Programme** (Pages 67 - 68)
[To consider the Work Programme for the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel].

Attendance

Members of the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Paul Appleby (Vice-Chair, in the Chair)

Cllr Philip Bateman MBE

Cllr Greg Brackenridge

Cllr Alan Butt

Cllr Jacqui Coogan

Cllr Christopher Haynes

Cllr Keith Inston

Cllr Beverley Momenabadi

Cllr Martin Waite

In Attendance

Cllr Steve Evans

Cabinet Member for City Environment

Employees

John Denley, Director of Public Health

Helen McGourlay

Earl Piggott-Smith

John Roseblade

Ross Cook, Director of City Environment

Michele Ross

Finance Business Partner

Scrutiny Officer

Head of City Transport

NHS England - Local Area Team

Senior Planning Officer

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

1 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from the following members of the panel:

Cllr Bhupinder Gakhal

Cllr Mak Singh

2 **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest recorded.

3 **Minutes of the previous meeting**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2019 were approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

4 **Matters arising**

Minute 7 – Housing Strategy

Scrutiny Officer advised the panel that the City Housing Strategy 2019-24 was approved by Cabinet at a meeting on 16 October 2019.

Minute 8 – Housing Allocation Policy

Scrutiny Officer advised the panel that the report will be presented at the meeting on 5 February 2020 for pre-decision scrutiny.

5 **South Staffordshire Spatial Housing Strategy Consultation**

Michele Ross, Lead Planning Manager, gave a presentation on the main points of the South Staffordshire Spatial Housing Strategy Consultation and the implications for Wolverhampton. The panel were advised about the public consultation led by South Staffordshire Council about future housing options in the new Local Plan. The consultation proposes broad locations for housing and linked infrastructure priorities.

The preferred option would involve the release of green belt land to provide new homes. The Lead Manager gave a summary of the preferred Option G which was expected to provide new homes and supporting infrastructure for South Staffordshire and also new homes for neighbouring authorities in the Black Country, to help them meet their targets for new home building. Option G would include the building of 220 homes in Perton and 570 homes at Codsall/Bilbrook, beyond sites already identified in the existing South Staffordshire Local Plan.

The Lead Manager advised that a Green Belt assessment had been completed and seven spatial options were being considered to meet the housing need. At this stage of the process only broad locations for future development have been identified, depending on final details the housing plans may affect areas such as Fallings Park and Wednesfield North.

The Lead Manager advised the panel that there is a specific criteria against which sites selected for development would be assessed by South Staffordshire Council, for example, impact on the historic environment, landscape character sensitivity and impact on nature conservation. The Lead Manager advised that the proposed developments would have implications for transport and school places in particular. The consultation includes plans for new and improved infrastructure investment to support the housing development. There were concerns about existing traffic congestion and other issues in the north of Wolverhampton which could require extra provision of school places and improved public transport to meet increased levels of demand.

The Lead Manager advised the panel that the deadline for comments was 12 December 2019. Cabinet would be asked to approve the response from Wolverhampton to the proposals in the consultation document at a meeting on 4 December 2019.

The Lead Manager added that the draft plan including proposed development sites is due to be published by South Staffordshire Council in the summer 2020 and final

draft plan is due in early 2021. The plan is due for adoption by South Staffordshire Council in 2022. The panel were invited to comment on the proposal.

The panel reported concerns from the public at recent meetings about the plans for redeveloping green belt areas outlined in the consultation document. The panel highlighted the importance of making strong representations in the response to the consultation about the importance to using brownfield sites where possible to reduce the need to develop land on green belt in South Staffordshire which would impact on Wolverhampton residents along the affected boundary.

The panel commented on the value and importance of the green belt area to the residents. The panel queried the potential for developments in South Staffordshire green belt side which would not directly affect the area in Wolverhampton but would impact negatively by having a large development in the adjoining area. The Lead Manager referred to on-going discussions with South Staffordshire as part of developing the Black Country Plan where cross boundary issues are discussed.

The Black Country Plan is due to be published next autumn and the aim is to get a consistent approach to assessing the impact of proposed developments in one authority area which could affect a neighbouring authority. There is a recognition of need for neighbouring authorities to work together positively to meet national targets for new house building. The panel were reassured that South Staffordshire had not yet decided about the final sites to be developed and the implications of any development on the local infrastructure would need to be carefully considered. The panel asked the John Denley, Director of Public Health, if work had been done to undertake health impact assessment of the proposed housing and infrastructure developments. The Director of Public Health advised the panel that work is being done with the RWHT to use local intelligence to assess the impact on local GP services. The work is on the work programme and will be reviewed as plans develop.

The panel discussed the options for using brownfield sites to build new homes and the accuracy of current registers detailing possible sites. John Roseblade, Head of City Transport, commented on the work done to ensure list of potential brownfield sites is accurate but added that even if existing sites were used there would still be a shortfall across the Black Country as the new homes target set by Government is so high and this presents a real challenge to local authorities to meet. The Lead Manager added that there is capacity for the Black Country to build around 47,000 new homes on brownfield land but developing brownfield sites for housing is expensive, estimates range from half to £1 million per hectare to reclaim land. Furthermore, increasing housing building density would still leave a large gap in meeting the target.

The panel queried if the Duty to Cooperate referred to in the consultation document was legally enforceable in a situation where a neighbouring authority objected to a proposed development. The Lead Manager explained that the duty is taken from planning legislation and a Planning Inspector could reject a Local Plan if a local authority was not able to show that it has engaged constructively, actively and on ongoing basis with a neighbouring authority over matters which affect boundaries. If a Local Plan was rejected then the local authority would have to start the process again, which would add delay to plans to meet new housing development targets. The panel discussed the option of using empty homes to reduce the number of homes to be developed on green belt land.

The panel welcomed the presentation and the opportunity to contribute to the consultation.

Resolved:

The panel comments on the preferred Option G in South Staffordshire Spatial Housing Strategy to be included in report to Cabinet meeting on 4 December 2019 where Wolverhampton's response will be considered.

6 Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020-2021 to 2023-2024

The Finance Business Partner, presented the report and explained the changes to the content to whole budget approach. The Finance Business Partner highlighted the specific budget proposals relating to the remit of the Panel and invited Panel members to comment. The Panel's comments would be included in a report to Scrutiny Board and then onto Cabinet.

The Panel queried the rationale for the proposed review of the WV Active Business Model to reducing reliance on agency staff. The Director of Public Health explained that the plan was to offer employees more financial stability, by shifting to employees from sessional work to permanent employment. The change would help to grow the quality of the workforce and offer a career path. The change would also help to improve the quality of the service and respond to increased growth in membership of WV Active from 5,000 to 10,000 during the last few years. The Director of Public Health commented on the importance of getting customer feedback about their experiences and making changes to the offer with the aim of improving the overall quality.

The Director of Public Health commented on the vision for using other settings such as parks and open spaces to respond to increasing public interest in wanting different opportunities and settings to improve their health and fitness.

The Cabinet Member for City Environment, commented on the progress made to improve the fitness and leisure offer and the success of initiatives aimed at increasing the number of WV Active members. The Cabinet Member outlined the vision for the future of the current offer and actively looking for opportunities to host sporting events such as Judo Championships at local venues such as Aldersley Leisure. The ambition was to attract investment that could develop a velodrome in Wolverhampton for hosting national competitions and make it attractive location for countries attending the Commonwealth Games wanting a base for their preparation. The Cabinet Member outlined ideas for developing the offer at local parks.

The Director for City Environment added that work was being done to look for opportunities to promote Wolverhampton as potential location for activities linked to the Commonwealth Games in 2021 and to raise its profile. The Panel discussed the importance of the canal network as part of the improved leisure offer and the benefits of past investment in attracting more interest and suggested that this should also be part of the vision for the future leisure offer in Wolverhampton. The Director of Public Health commented on the analysis done to understand the reasons why people stop attending events and activities. This had been completed through feedback and surveys to better understand the reasons. There was a focus on improving the quality of the offer. The Panel discussed if the proposals would lead to a reduction in

the number of people offering sessions. The Panel were reassured that the aim was to maximise the number of instructors and continue to improve the leisure offer.

Resolved: The Panel agreed to note the report.

7 **Feedback on West Side Link Transport Related Questions**

Ross Cook, Director for City Environment, introduced the briefing note to update panel members on outcomes arising from the joint scrutiny meeting on 16 July 2019 with members of the Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel. The panel were asked to note the progress and specifically the work of the member reference group.

The Director for City Environment confirmed that the questions from members of Stronger City Panel had been responded to.

The members of the member reference group were given the opportunity to feedback their views on the response received to issues and questions raised about the proposed transport links. Cllr Bateman commented that all his questions and issues had been addressed and welcomed the opportunity to discuss it in detail. Cllr Phil Bateman welcomed the progress made in responding to the issues about the Westside Link scheme. Cllr Waite commented that his view there were no off limit questions in meeting to discuss the plans for the scheme and was happy with the positive response and the progress made.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the report.

8 **Potholes in Wolverhampton**

John Roseblade, Head of City Transport, gave a short PowerPoint presentation on the work done to maintain the highway network and the treatment of potholes and defects. The Head of City Transport advised the panel that the Council maintains highway network of 450 miles and referred to findings of an independent annual survey. The survey reported that to bring roads up to a 'reasonable' standard would take 10 years and cost £9.8 billion. Based on this estimate this would require a budget of £24 million - the current annual resurfacing budget is approximately £3 million. The Head of City Transport advised that despite the budget shortfall the overall condition of the road network is considered to be good compared to other local authorities in the region. The Council benefited from extra Government funding awarded a few years ago to do large scale road maintenance work, which has helped.

The Head of City Transport explained the current inspection regime and the criteria used to assess the degree of risk that a road defect represents, and the different repair methods used. The Head of City Transport explained the statutory responsibilities of the Council to maintain the highway. The Head of City Transport explained that a new method of repairing road defects is being trialled and early results are very promising when doing temporary or larger scale maintenance work. The method provides a rapid pothole repair service which has greatly improved response times and reduced disruption to traffic due to the speed it can be done at much lower cost.

The panel queried current research into new methods of highway maintenance and repair. The Head of City Highway advised that methods using recycled rubber and

plastic are being tested to see if they can cope – a particular challenge is how such material copes with periods of prolonged rain which damages the surface. The Council is constantly looking for improve methods for repairing highways and also seeking funding opportunities.

The panel queried the work done to respond to resident complaints about the lack of co-ordination between different organisations which lead to recently resurfaced highways being damaged to enable other maintenance work to be done. The Head of City Transport explained the work done to share details of planned maintenance with other utility organisations. The Council can put a legal restriction to prevent road maintenance work being done for up to five years; unless there an emergency gas or water repairs required. The aim is to protect the condition of the road.

Steve Evans, Cabinet Member for City Environment, commented on the issues caused when planned maintenance work overruns and the benefits of using the velocity patchwork method. The panel were shown a video clip of the method being used and the speed at which it can repair damaged highways. The system can complete 100s of road repairs within a short time which reduces traffic disruption.

The panel discussed the use of alternative materials to repair the highway. The Head of City Transport advised the panel that there is a focus on finding low energy alternative materials which will reduce the carbon footprint.

Further plans will be included in the service response to Council's response to the climate change emergency declaration.

The panel discussed the issue about how to communicate to the public when a repair to the highway is intended to be a temporary fix.

The panel queried the number of claims against the Council for compensation as a result of personal injury, loss and damage. The Head of City Transport responded that the Council had received 206 claims in total to date for compensation during 2018/19. The authority had accepted 20 claims for damage due to potholes and the total amount paid was £5,000. This performance compares well with other neighbouring authorities. The Council had settled 8 separate claims for personal injury totalling £38,000.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the report.

CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL	Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel 30 January 2020
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Report title	Allocations Policy Review	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Peter Bilson City Assets and Housing	
Key decision	Yes	
In forward plan	Yes	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable Director	Kate Martin	
Originating service	City Assets and Housing	
Accountable employee	Mila Simpson Tel Email	Service Lead Housing Strategy 01902 554841 mila.simpson@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	Better Homes Board Housing and Assets Leadership Team	8 January 2020 16 January 2020

Recommendations for decision:

The Panel is recommended to:

1. Endorse for approval by Cabinet the revised Allocations Policy for implementation from February 2021, following the development of the IT system necessary for roll out.
2. Endorse for approval by Cabinet the implementation of those aspects of the revised Allocations Policy that are not dependent on the development of the IT system from 1 April 2020 as detailed in paragraph 6.4 of the report.
3. Endorse delegated authority to the Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing, in consultation with the Director for City Assets and Housing to approve any minor changes to the final policy, where any structural constraints to the IT system are identified which are not able to support implementation of minor aspects of the recommended changes.
4. Endorse delegated authority to the Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing, in consultation with the Director for City Assets and Housing, to make minor editorial changes to the Allocations Policy when necessary.

Recommendation for noting:

The Panel is recommended to:

1. Note that the Allocations Policy continues to delegate authority to the Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing, in consultation with the Director for City Assets and Housing, to approve local lettings plans which are time limited variations to the Allocations Policy to achieve specific objectives pertaining to a local area or addressing a specific issue.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval from Cabinet to formally adopt a revised Allocations Policy; the scheme by which applicants on the City's housing register are prioritised for social housing. The Allocations Policy has been reviewed alongside the development of the new City Housing Strategy, adopted in October 2019, which emphasises the need to provide a range of good quality homes whilst making the best use of the social housing stock that we own.
- 1.2 This report sets out the requirement for an Allocations Policy, the process that has been involved in revising the policy and the recommendations for adoption that will assist in allocating homes in line with the Housing Strategy and making best use of stock.
- 1.3 This report also requests approval to implement identified changes that are required to be made before February 2021 to help fulfil the service's strategic aims and, are not reliant on the development of the new IT system.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Local Authorities are required by the Housing Act 1996 to have a scheme for determining priorities, and the procedure to be followed, in allocating housing accommodation both to first time applicants and transferring tenants including nominations to Registered Providers (Housing Associations); the Allocations Policy. The Council's Allocations Policy as a choice based letting (CBL) scheme was adopted in 2007 and has been subject to periodic updates to ensure it keeps abreast of changing legislation and external challenges and, was last amended in April 2018 to account for new duties introduced through the Homelessness Reduction Act.
- 2.2 City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC) own 22,280 properties within the city, that are managed across five managing agents; Wolverhampton Homes and the city's four tenant management organisations (TMOs), who are all required to allocate and let the properties they manage in accordance with the Allocation Policy. Of these Council owned homes, 1,537 became available to let during 2018-2019; a number which reduced year on year. This is compounded by an average loss of 250 properties per year through the Right to Buy. This serves to reduce the number of people that can be assisted into homes through the Council's scheme, but with 8,700 households on the housing register (as at November 2019) of which half are assessed as having no housing need there is also a need to manage people's expectations.
- 2.3 Since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2018 there has been an increase in the number of households being placed in temporary accommodation and notably the use of bed and breakfast to accommodate larger families, exerting greater demand on those homes that do become available to relieve pressure for those most in housing need.

3.0 Reviewing the Allocations Policy

- 3.1 The first wholesale review of the current Allocations Policy was initiated in January 2019. A steering group was established with representation from Housing Strategy, Legal Services, Wolverhampton Homes and the city's tenant management organisations (TMOs) who worked through a range of evidence and analysis which demonstrated the increased demand and reduced supply of social housing, as well as case law and guidance, which concluded that the current Allocations Policy as a CBL scheme remains fit for purpose but could be improved to better meet the current needs of the city's residents most in need of affordable housing. Based on the work of the steering group a number of proposed changes to the Allocations Policy were put forward for consultation.
- 3.2 Consultation on the proposals was undertaken across September and October 2019 for a six-week period and included detailed discussions with senior officers, presentation at Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny, Equality Advisory Group and Council Leadership Teams. A letter was sent to all Councillors setting out the proposals. An online survey was made available to members of the public (also available in hard copy) and a sample of 1,000 households from the housing register were written to, to encourage their participation. In addition, the proposals were shared with a wide range of stakeholders including Lettings Officers and Housing Options Officers, Registered Housing Provider partners, Social Care officers, Wolverhampton Federation of Tenants Association and members of the Children and Families Together board), who were encouraged to feedback their views. A summary of the key changes made to the proposals resulting from the consultation is set out at appendix 3.

4.0 Revised Allocations Policy Objectives

- 4.1 As part of the review five new policy objectives are proposed, which reflect the need for the Council to make best use of its homes, whilst meeting its statutory responsibilities:
- i. Ensure people in the greatest housing need have the greatest opportunity to access suitable housing that best meets their needs.
 - ii. Make use of a range of housing options and tenures to prevent and relieve homelessness.
 - iii. Make best use of the Council's and partner registered providers housing stock.
 - iv. Manage applicants' expectations by being realistic about stock availability, to support them in making informed choices about their housing options, and the extent to which they are able to express reasonable preference.
 - v. Ensure that the Council's legal duties and corporate responsibilities are met and that they contribute to delivering the Council's priorities.
- 4.2 To achieve these objectives, the Council will provide advice and information to enable applicants to make informed and realistic choices, making use of a range of housing options and tenures to alleviate their housing needs.

4.3 The final recommendations being put forward are driven by their alignment with these objectives.

5.0 Proposed Changes

5.1 A breakdown of all the recommended changes to the Allocations Policy are set out at appendix 1. Below is a summary of the key recommendations and how they link to the revised objectives.

5.2 **Assisting those in greatest need** - Currently applicants on the Council's housing register are assessed against criteria set out in the Allocations Policy which awards them a level of priority from one of five bands; Emergency Band, Band 1 through to Band 4 no housing need. To support the Council in meeting its Legal and Corporate responsibilities it is recommended that a new band is created, 'Emergency Plus', that will give the greatest priority for housing to applicants with a full homelessness duty who are also care leavers, members of the armed forces, require a substantially adapted property, or anyone who requires immediate rehousing due to a significant threat to life, to ensure those with the highest level of need are given the most priority. Of the 213 respondents to the online survey, 78% agreed with this proposal.

5.3 It is recommended that the level of arrears an applicant can be in before they are excluded from the housing register or their priority demoted be increased from £60 to £400. This is aligned to an average of four weeks rent which is a more realistic level taking into account the impact moving on to Universal Credit can have on arrears. This will enable households that could be in significant housing need to bid and accept offers of accommodation.

5.4 **Corporate Parenting** - To further support the Council in its role as Corporate Parent, there are further proposals to give priority to those residents committed to adopting and fostering to enable them to access appropriately sized homes if needed (59% of respondents to the online survey supported this proposal) as well as increasing the priority given to Care Leavers on the housing register to assist them in securing a settled home (64% of respondents to the online survey agreed).

5.5 **Overcrowding** - A more consistent and fair approach is being recommended for households that are overcrowded. This includes allowing the largest overcrowded families to improve their housing situation by moving to a property where they may still over-occupy but to a lesser extent than before, to help reduce the amount of time they are severely overcrowded (64% support from the online survey). It is recommended that the priority of overcrowded families living in one-bedroom properties is increased (84% support from the online survey) and that overcrowded households are awarded greater priority than households that do not have access to a private garden, which is not currently the case (55% support from the online survey).

5.6 **Best use of homes** - A number of recommendations intend to make best use of the affordable homes in the City, helping to reduce waiting times for some of the most

needed property types. For example, due to the limited number of level access properties that become available to let, it is recommended that ground floor flats are given priority to those with a mobility requirement, rather than the current approach of giving priority to those aged 55 or over.

- 5.7 The current Allocations Policy prioritises a quarter of homes advertised based on a household's local connection to the neighbourhood the home is located in, over the need to be housed in suitable accommodation. So that people in the greatest housing need have the greatest opportunity to access a suitable home, it was proposed that this local connection allowance is removed. As the Council operates a choice-based lettings allocation scheme, applicants retain the choice as to the location of properties on which they bid. Furthermore, the Allocations Policy gives priority to applicants that need to move to a location to be in close proximity to provide essential care to someone. This change will also reduce potential equality implications that could arise as the number and type of social housing is spread disproportionately across the city. With 43% of respondents to the online survey in agreement and 43.6% in disagreement, considered in conjunction with the stakeholder feedback and the potential equality issues this presents it is recommended it is removed.
- 5.8 **Managing expectations** – Band 4 is currently awarded to applicants that are assessed as having no housing need and so are awarded the least level of priority for housing. Applicants in Band 4 however are successful for on average 10% of all lettings in a year. It is recommended that the housing register no longer operates Band 4, with applicants needing to demonstrate the level of housing need required for the remaining priority Bands within the policy to access the housing register. With 98% of applicants in Band 4 (around 5,000 households) unlikely to receive an offer of accommodation this will better manage those residents' expectations with advice given on their available housing options such as quality private rental properties through Rent with Confidence or home ownership, including the packages of assistance that can make it more affordable. This will also help manage demand and ensure those with the greatest priority are better able to access homes. In addition, 64% of respondents to the online survey agreed with this recommendation.
- 5.9 It is proposed to reduce the number of refusals an applicant can make when successful in their bid for a property from three bids to two bids before their application is suspended for a period of six months (currently three months). As applicants can only bid on homes they are eligible for, this should encourage applicants to make informed and realistic decisions when placing bids on properties in terms of property type and location (greatest reason for refusal), speeding up the time the successful and committed applicants can be housed and reducing the administrative burden of pursuing applicants that have no real interest in the property. 73% of survey respondents supported this proposal.
- 5.10 It is also recommended that the Council retains the right to temporarily prevent applicants from bidding on properties in particular areas or of particular types where there is evidence of a threat to the safety of themselves and/or others. This will assist in

applicants accessing housing suitable for their needs and will be applied on a case by case basis, be regularly reviewed and open to review should the applicant request it.

6.0 Implementation

- 6.1 In order to implement the proposed change to the Allocations Policy, significant structural changes will be required to the housing management system, Northgate, that is used to maintain the housing register and advertise and allocate properties. The role of the steering group has been extended, with the additional membership of Wolverhampton Homes Systems Development to manage this process, which will include a system build, user testing, training and implementation.
- 6.2 In addition to changes to the IT system, a number of operational actions will also be required. All existing applicants will need to be reassessed, including the applicants in Band 4 to ensure their circumstances have not changed or that they meet any new qualifying criteria and should be reassessed into a remaining Band. This will be supported with a robust communications plan and support available for any vulnerable applicants so that all applicants in housing need are assessed and awarded the appropriate level of priority on the housing register. Applicants will have the usual recourse to a formal review should their Band change or they are assessed as having no housing need and it is anticipated that there will be a temporary uplift in officer time for associated reviews, front end training and enquiries.
- 6.3 Dependent on the approval of the Allocations Policy by Cabinet project management of the IT and operational changes necessary to implement the recommendations is planned to take 12 months. This report seeks delegated authority to the Cabinet member for City Assets and Housing, in consultation with the Director for City Assets and Housing to approve any changes to the final Allocations Policy necessary due to structural constraints of the IT system that are not able to support implementation of minor aspects of the recommended changes.
- 6.4 A number of changes have been identified that are not reliant on amendments to the Northgate IT system and are required to be made before February 2021 to help fulfil the service's strategic aims. It is recommended that the following changes are implemented from April 2020, therefore the existing Allocations Policy will be amended and published to include the following amendments:
- i. The updated policy objectives;
 - ii. A new banding for foster carers and adopters to give them additional priority where a larger property is required in order for them to foster or adopt.
 - iii. Directly allocating properties that have been purchased by the Council for the purposes of estate redevelopment or renewal approved as part of separate Cabinet approval.
 - iv. Priority for residents living in Houses of Multiple Occupation to be limited to families with children and people of pensionable age.

- v. Reducing the number of offers that can be refused from three to two before suspending an application for six months.
- vi. Priority for ground floor flats being limited to applicants with a requirement for level access housing.
- vii. The removal of offering priority to applicants in two properties moving into one property due to its under usage.
- viii. The removal of an automated phone line for placing bids; the least used method with several alternative methods in place.

6.5 The implementation of the revised Allocations Policy will be overseen by CWC's Better Homes Board, which is chaired by the Director City Assets and Housing and includes representation from the Chief Executive of Wolverhampton Homes and the TMOs.

7.0 Evaluation of alternative options

7.1 Option one would be to adopt the revised Allocations Policy as detailed in Appendix 2 with early implementation of those recommendations requiring no IT system development from April 2020 and full rollout of the policy by February 2021. This will ensure the Council is meeting its legislative requirements and is responding to the current operating environment as reflected by the revised policy objectives, including making best use of homes and ensuring those in the greatest housing need have the greatest opportunity for accessing suitable accommodation.

7.2 Option two would be to adopt the revised Allocations Policy as detailed in Appendix 2 and implement it all from February 2021 once all structural changes have been made to the IT system. Whilst this would ensure the Council is meeting its legislative requirements and is responding to the current operating environment as reflected by the revised policy objectives, it would delay the benefits of implementing aspects of the policy that can be rolled out immediately by making the current Allocations Policy more fit for purpose and responsive to the external environment than it is currently.

7.3 Option three would be to make no change to the existing policy. This would result in the allocation of the approximately 1,200 properties that become available to let in a year not being let in accordance with what has been determined as best use of stock and meeting greatest housing needs in the City based on the most recent assessment of the local environment and need for affordable housing.

8.0 Reasons for decision

Option one will ensure the Allocations Policy remains as fit for purpose as it can be dependent on the development of the IT system. This is important as allocations policies make decisions that change people's lives and housing opportunities and so need to reflect the latest legislation, regulation, case law and the local market.

9.0 Financial implications

9.1 There will be some one-off costs for development to the Northgate system managed by Wolverhampton Homes to enable the changes to be implemented. Estimated costs are in

the region of £10,000 and will be charged to the existing Housing Revenue Account budget. Costs relating to changes in waiting list eligibility can be met from existing budgets.

- 9.2 The changes to the allocations policy will result in the better use of housing stock by ensuring council homes that become available are allocated to those most in need. This will result in efficiencies to the lettings process and also may help to reduce the demand of those in need for support from general fund services.

[JM/08012020/L]

10.0 Legal implications

- 10.1 The Council as a Local Housing Authority is required to allocate housing accommodation in accordance with Part VI of the Housing Act 1996. Section 167 of the Act requires the Authority to have an allocation scheme and to allocate housing accommodation in accordance with the Scheme.

[RP/08012020/A]

11.0 Equalities implications

- 11.1 An equalities analysis has been undertaken, which demonstrates the positive intentions of the changes to the Allocations Policy. There will be ongoing liaison with CWC's Equalities Team throughout the development and implementation phase of the Allocations Policy to ensure applicants are clearly communicated with and are supported in the reassessment of their housing application where needed, so that those vulnerable people with housing needs receive the appropriate priority on the housing register.

12.0 Environmental implications

- 12.1 There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

13.0 Human resources implications

- 13.1 Implementation of the revised Allocations Policy will come from existing CWC, Wolverhampton Homes and TMO officers. Some development support will be required from Northgate as set out in the Financial Implications section of the report.

14.0 Corporate landlord implications

- 14.1 This report is related to properties within the Housing Revenue Account and so has no Corporate Landlord implications.

15.0 Health and Wellbeing Implications

Revisions to the Allocations Policy aim to give those in greatest housing need the greatest opportunity for accessing suitable housing. This can help alleviate issues such as homelessness, overcrowding and the need for an accessible home. Satisfying households housing needs should have a positive impact on their health and wellbeing.

16.0 Schedule of background papers

- 16.1 5 September 2019, Housing Allocations Policy Briefing Note, Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel
- 16.2 17 September 2019, Housing Allocations Policy Briefing Note, Equalities Advisory Group

17.0 Appendices

- 17.1 Appendix 1 – *Summary of recommended revisions to the Allocations Policy*
- 17.2 Appendix 2 – *Allocations Policy February 2021*
- 17.3 Appendix 3 – *Summary of consultation responses on the Allocations Policy*

Appendix 1 - Allocations Policy Review

Recommendations

	Recommendation	Current Situation	Rationale
1.	Update Policy Objectives	<p>The focus of the current policy's objectives is on reducing void times and helping people choose where they would like to live. Whilst this remains important, going forward there is a need for applicants to make choices based on a growing demand for a smaller number of homes that become available every year in the city.</p> <p>The new objectives focus on helping those in greatest housing need, whilst setting realistic expectations for people, by exploring a range of housing options and in doing so making the best use of housing across the city and ensuring the needs of vulnerable people are met.</p>	Updating the Allocations Policy's objectives helps to ensure all the recommendations put forward as part of this review are consistent in what they are trying to achieve based on what we know the current housing needs are in the City for social housing.
2.	A new banding priority for foster carers and those approved to adopt who require a larger property.	There is no current priority for foster carers and those approved to adopt in the policy.	This supports the achievement of key corporate priorities; assisting children and young people to get the best possible start in life by being able to secure housing that meets their needs more quickly, and also helps to encourage families in the City who are minded to become foster carers or adopter, providing more settled homes to children and young people in care.
3.	Increase the priority given to Wolverhampton Care Leavers and exempt them from any residency requirements up to the age of 25.	Care Leavers are currently given priority at a lesser level than what is recommended in the policy and they are not exempt from the residency rule, which requires them to have lived in the city for at least 2 years.	Supports the Council's commitment to support Care Leavers in having stability in their home lives allowing them to return to the City for example if they move away to attend university.

	Recommendation	Current Situation	Rationale
4.	Introducing a new band of need called the 'Emergency +' Band.	Currently, the highest Band of need is the Emergency Band. This new band would see a level of need above the current highest priority for applicants with a full homelessness duty who are also care leavers, members of the armed forces, require a substantially adapted property or anyone who requires immediate rehousing due to a significant threat to life.	This new banding is being introduced to ensure those with absolute highest level of need are given the most priority, supporting the Council in meeting its Legal and Corporate responsibilities.
5.	Ensure the limited number of Council housing that becomes available to let is allocated to those most in housing need.	As the policy operates an 'open' housing register, more than half of those registered for housing, having had their circumstances assessed are found to be adequately housed and have no housing need as determined by the policy. Despite this, nearly 10% of housing that became available to let in 2018 were allocated to these Band 4 applicants. Whilst Band 4 applicants were successful in bids for just over 100 properties last year, this only represents 2% of applicants in Band 4. As the vast majority of applicants in Band 4 are unlikely to be housed through the housing register and are better served by looking at other housing options.	Maintaining a housing register only for those applicants in housing need will ensure best use is made of the limited homes that become available. This change will also help to manage expectations as applicants assessed as having no housing need are highly unlikely to be successful in their bid for a house and so will be better served by the Council through better advice and support in accessing other good quality housing options in the City.
6.	Remove the priority attached to a quarter of all properties that become available to let to someone with a local connection to an area over those with the greatest housing need.	Currently a quarter of all lettings are prioritised to applicants that have a local connection to the area in which the property is located. Applicants can choose one area in which they claim a local connection, providing they can provide evidence to show that they meet the local connection criteria. Properties are randomly selected to be prioritised in this way by an automated process and will be of any property type in any area.	This policy is not consistent with the new objectives of the Allocations Policy in terms of assisting those households in greatest need and by doing so making the best use of Council homes as in the first instance it prioritises local connection above housing need. This policy is also problematic as the number and types of Council homes are not spread evenly across the City, which could have equality implications for

	Recommendation	Current Situation	Rationale
			<p>those protected groups in need of specific property types that are in short supply.</p> <p>For those with a need to live in a certain area of the City, this is accommodated as the Allocations Policy is a choice based letting system, and those with the greatest housing need will have the greatest priority including those households that need to move to be able to provide essential care for someone.</p>
7.	<p>The policy recognises that people living in good quality houses of multiple occupation (HMO), are adequately housed and have no housing need on this basis alone.</p>	<p>The current policy gives priority on the housing register to people living in HMOs who are adequately housed with no other housing needs.</p>	<p>HMOs that are well maintained and well managed form part of the wider housing offer in the City. For single people and couples, it can provide an affordable form of accommodation, especially for people in receipt of financial support with their housing costs who are only eligible for the shared room rate, typically single people under the age of 35. The Council with partners is working to ensure all HMOs are of a satisfactory standard and are using its licensing powers to do so, improving standards across the private rented sector as it provides an important housing offer in the City.</p> <p>The policy will maintain priority for families and people of pensionable age living in HMOs.</p>
8.	<p>Allowing applicants to bid and accept an offer of housing if in arrears up to £400.</p>	<p>Currently applicants who owe debts of more than £60 to a Council or Registered Provider, will be placed in Band 4, giving the lowest priority for housing (with a small number of exceptions).</p>	<p>This amount has been increased from £60 to £400 to bring it up to date and in line with the average monthly rent of a Council property, particularly in response to the impact that Universal Credit is having on households</p>

	Recommendation	Current Situation	Rationale
9.	Allowing a maximum of two refusals of offers of housing in a 12 month period before suspending a housing application for six months.	<p>Whilst the Council operate a choice based lettings system for allocating housing, meaning that the majority of applicants are able to bid on properties and in areas that they choose, there is still a high proportion of applicants that then refuse an offer of housing, for reasons such as location or property type.</p> <p>Applicants (excluding those owed a homeless duty), currently can refuse three offers of suitable accommodation in a 12-month period before their application is suspended for a period of three months.</p>	Despite Wolverhampton Homes and the tenant management organisations providing as much information on the property in the advert, applicants are bidding on properties that they are not willing to accept offers of housing on. This is a waste of resources and can increase the length of time a property remains empty, meaning higher void costs. Reducing the number of refusals that can be made and increasing the amount of time an applicant cannot bid, should encourage applicants to fully consider if they are willing to live in the property they are bidding on, their housing options and have realistic expectations about where and what homes are likely to become available to let. It should also make the best use of housing by reducing the time a property remains empty.
10.	Improve access to ground floor flats for those applicants with mobility restrictions.	Ground floor flats are currently prioritised for applicants who are over 55 years old and applicants requiring single level accommodation.	There is limited single level accommodation across the City that is accessible to people with mobility restrictions. In line with making the best use of homes available and meeting peoples housing needs, this change aims to improve accessibility to homes and potentially reduce the waiting times of those people of all ages, including older people, with limited choice on where they can live because of mobility restrictions.
11.	Allow children of the same sex to share a bedroom post the age of 15.	When children of the same sex reach the age of 15 they require separate bedrooms, in terms of their housing application.	Increasing the size of property that a family needs, when two same sex siblings would be happy to continue to share, can restrict the household's eligibility to larger homes that are in short supply and can significantly increase the amount of time they may be waiting on the housing register.

	Recommendation	Current Situation	Rationale
12.	Improve the powers of Multi-Agency Panels to award a wider range of housing priority when assessing the needs of individual cases.	Currently multi-agency panels which could for example include Social Care, the Police, Probation and the NHS can only provide an Emergency banding to an applicant's housing application, when there circumstances have been considered as part of a case conference style discussion in terms of the support required to address the individual needs of the applicant/household.	Some applicants who receive support from various organisations may benefit from an increased level of priority as part of a package of support, but do not require an urgent need to move, equivalent to an Emergency Band award.
13.	Applicants owed a housing duty that are refusing to cooperate with Housing Options will be placed in Band 3.	Housing options can only award banding for homelessness duties, there is no repercussion for refusing to engage with support services.	Encourages applicants to cooperate with housing options and resolve their housing need.
14.	Improve the Council's ability to protect applicants or other residents by restricting the property type or location where an applicant can bid if they would otherwise pose a risk to themselves or others.	Currently applicants can only be excluded from the housing register as a whole but there are circumstances where it is in the best interest of the applicant or other residents if the applicant is limited to where they can bid for housing based upon location or property type.	For example, this approach could provide further protection to victims of Domestic Violence by excluding the perpetrator from bidding on properties close to the victim. It could also prevent some vulnerable people from bidding on the higher floors of high-rise flats where for example it may be difficult for them to escape in the case of a fire. Decisions to make these exclusions would be taken on a case by case basis, with the provision of supporting evidence from partners.
15.	Increasing the priority of overcrowded families living in one-bedroom properties.	Currently over occupied families in one bedroom properties have no additional priority when compared to families over occupied in a two bedroom property.	This improves the priority for parents that are sharing with children, above priority for those parents and children that have separate bedrooms.
16.	Households that are overcrowded will receive higher priority than families that are not overcrowded but	Currently applicants that are tenants of the Council or a registered provider (housing association) who has children under 12 years of age but does not have access to a private garden is awarded Band 2 priority,	Whilst recognising the benefits of a private garden for families with children under the age of 12, this has been balanced with addressing the housing needs of those families living in overcrowded conditions.

	Recommendation	Current Situation	Rationale
	have no access to a private garden.	greater than the Band 3 priority received by overcrowded households short of one bedroom.	
17.	Allow the largest families that are overcrowded to improve their housing situation by moving to a property where they may still over-occupy but to a lesser extent than before. This would be on a case by case basis with the approval of a senior Council housing officer.	Currently families who require 6 or 7 bedroom properties are unable to bid on 4 5-bedroom properties despite the lack of 6 or 7 bed properties in the City as they would still be classed as overcrowded.	This will help to alleviate the situation for households that are extremely overcrowded, reducing the amount of time they will have to wait for a property to become available, if at all due to the shortage of larger homes in the City.
18.	Ensure the Allocations policy meets current needs by removing those criteria that are not used i.e “the two tenancies for one rule”	The “two tenancies for one rule” gives additional preference when two Council or Registered Provider (housing association) tenants are each giving up a property type that is in demand (determined by analysis of the number of bids and availability of type of property) to move into one property.	This additional priority has been in the policy for a number of years, however has very rarely been used and so has been considered as not meeting current housing needs.
19.	Allow households in the Emergency band, to bid and accept offers of housing despite factors that would otherwise reduce their priority to the lowest Band in the policy.	Applicants that have been assessed as in the greatest housing need (Emergency Band) are currently placed in Band 4 (lowest priority for housing) due to factors such as having £60 rent arrears unless there is a statutory duty to house them.	As applicants awarded the Emergency band have been assessed as having an urgent need to move, this priority should be honoured with additional support or agreements put in place to overcome the reasons for being placed in Band 4, for example a payment plan for those applicants in arrears. This does not apply to applicants in the Emergency Plus or Emergency Bands.
20.	Applicants assessed as having lesser preference would have their application suspended until the affected criteria has been resolved or	There are currently circumstances where an applicant’s housing need is assessed but they are awarded ‘lesser preference’ and placed into the Band 4, the least priority for housing. Examples include having debt over £400, having failed a pre-leaving	As Band 4 is being removed and to encourage applicants to not enter a new tenancy continuing the same unacceptable behaviour, applicants with lesser preference will now have their application suspended until the affected criteria has been resolved or a

	Recommendation	Current Situation	Rationale
	a repayment plan has been adhered to for at least 3 months.	inspection and where they have been involved in unacceptable behaviour such as anti-social behaviour.	repayment plan has been adhered to for at least 3 months.
21.	Extend the preference of 10% of properties to lower bands (Band 2 and 3) to include Band 1.	Preference is currently given to applicants in Band 2 and Band 3 for 10% of all lettings made to ensure that applicants with this level of housing need have an opportunity to receive an offer of accommodation.	With the introduction of the Emergency Band + and removal of Band 4, this 10% is to be extended to include applicants in Band 1 to make more consistent and fairer the opportunity to access housing for those in greater housing need. This will see 5% of properties allocated to Band 1 and another 5% allocated to Band 2 and 3.
22.	Removal of the requirement for updated medical evidence to be provided every 6 months.	The policy requires applicants to provide medical evidence every 6 months, however medical professionals now charge patients for medical evidence.	The requirement for updated evidence every 6 months has been removed from the policy.
23.	Amend the 'residency rule', which requires applicants to have lived in the City for 2 or more years before their housing needs can be fully assessed, to exclude refugees and travellers.	Applicants who have not lived in the City for at least two years are awarded the lowest priority of housing need, Band 4 with a small number of exceptions for example there is an emergency or band 1 need to move on medical or social grounds or the applicant or a member of the household has a firm offer of employment in the City.	This change takes into account recent case law, which assessed the inclusion of refugees and Gypsy and Travellers in residency requirements as equal to indirect discrimination, as it would be more difficult for refugees and Gypsy and Travellers to meet this requirement than others.
24.	Direct allocation of properties brought back in to the Council's stock, typically for purposes of regeneration and renewal, to the existing occupant of the property.	Should the Council need to buy a property into its stock, typically a former Right to Buy property for a large-scale renewal programme, the occupant would need to be rehoused under the existing Allocations Policy.	The current policy will reserve the right to directly allocate properties which have been purchased in cases of for example estate regeneration, where this has been subject to separate Cabinet approval as part of that project.
25.	Reserve the right of the Council to allocate available properties outside of the	There is currently no mechanism within the policy that allows a flexible response from the Council in terms of the use of available housing in the case of a large-scale emergency.	This adds to the City's resilience plans should a large number of households in the City require urgent rehousing due to an emergency situation.

	Recommendation	Current Situation	Rationale
	Allocations in the case of a large-scale City emergency		
26.	Remove the option of automated telephone bidding.	Currently bids for available properties can be made via the website, by text, via automated phone line, in person at a Housing Office or by phone	The automated telephone bidding service is a rarely used service accounting for 0.5% bids.
27.	Recommendation to undertake further research into the development of an Accessible Housing Register for the City.	Applicants who require an adapted property are encouraged to bid on any property they are eligible for with an Occupational Therapist assessment done if the applicant is successful in their bid, which can result in the property not being suitable for the type of adaptation required. Not enough information is known about the stock in terms of adaptability for a number of needs.	The experience for applicants requiring an adapted property could be improved if we have better information across the stock in terms of how it can be adapted. This would allow us to make best use of Council homes and better meet housing need of those applicants that require an adapted property.

Housing Allocations Policy

February 2021



VAUXHALL
HOUSE



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Part 1

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This document contains details of the scheme that the City of Wolverhampton Council uses in deciding between competing applicants for housing as required by s166A Housing Act 1996.
- 1.2 This Policy records, collects and takes account of individuals' needs and requirements in order to allocate housing to those that need it most.
- 1.3 This Policy does not discriminate against any person on the grounds of race, gender, sexuality, age, class, appearance, religion, responsibility for dependants, unrelated criminal activities, being HIV positive or with AIDS, or any other matter which causes a person to be treated with injustice.
- 1.4 This policy applies to:-
- Existing tenants who want to transfer from one tenancy to another
 - New applicants
 - Nominations to Registered Providers
- 1.5 At the time of writing this policy, the Council had a housing stock around 22,000 properties.
- 1.6 The Council recognises that it alone will never meet the demand for affordable rented accommodation in the city. The Council also works to encourage applicants to explore all options for housing open to them but it aims to make the best use of the limited vacancies which become available.
- 1.7 The objectives of the policy are to:-
- 1) Ensure people in the greatest housing need have the greatest opportunity to access suitable housing that best meets their needs.
 - 2) Make use of a range of housing options and tenures to prevent and relieve homelessness.
 - 3) Make best use of the Council's and partner registered providers housing stock.
 - 4) Manage applicants' expectations by being realistic about availability of stock, to support them in making informed choices about their housing options, and the extent to which they are able to make choices
 - 5) Ensure that the Council's legal duties and corporate responsibilities are met and that the policy contributes to delivering the Council's priorities.

2.0 Equality and Diversity

- 2.1 In producing and operating this policy, we aim to ensure that Council housing is accessible to all sections of the community and provides for a diverse range of housing needs. It should be read in conjunction with the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy, the overall aims of which are to:

- a) eliminate unlawful discrimination;
- b) promote equality of opportunity; and
- c) promote good relations between people of diverse backgrounds

in its employment policies and practices, in its services, and in its engagement with partners and with the communities of the city.

3.0 Data Protection and Freedom of Information

3.1 The Council recognises that applicants for housing provide personal and sometimes sensitive information. The Council undertakes to treat this with care and respect, and in particular it will:

- a) hold, retain and dispose of all information in accordance with current legislation
- b) keep personal information secure and restrict access to it
- c) enable the applicant to have access to their own information unless it is exempt under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, and to correct any inaccuracies.

3.2 The Council's managing agents collate personal data primarily for the purpose of assessing applicants, in line with the Allocations Policy, for their eligibility for housing and the priority they will be awarded. Managing agents including Wolverhampton Homes and the Tenant Management Organisations will share this personal data with the Council for the purposes of reviewing housing decisions, monitoring housing allocations, safeguarding adults and children, preventing and detecting fraud or other criminal offenses.

3.3 Further guidance on how the council uses your personal data can be found on our privacy statement which is located on our website.

3.4 Each Managing agent will have their own Privacy Statement defining how they use the information provided. Please refer to the managing agents' website (or office) to access this. Here you will also find their data protection contact, which are determined by the individual managing agent, should you have any specific queries or concerns.

4.0 Statement on Fraud

4.1 The Council will require applicants to produce specified identification documents (including photographs) and may check the accuracy of information submitted in support of the application. This is to deter and detect fraud and ensure that housing is allocated to those who are entitled to it.

4.2 Where investigations identify that a housing fraud has been committed we will take appropriate and proportionate action which may include the following:

- a) application for possession of any property obtained, retained or used fraudulently;

- b) recovery of any monies obtained as a result of the fraud e.g. rent paid by sub-tenants to who the property is unlawfully sub-let;
 - c) recovery of any financial loss to the Council including, but not limited to, emergency accommodation costs sustained by the act of denying the Council the ability to use the property to house homeless families;
 - d) exclusion or, deferral from, or demotion on the waiting list for accommodation;
 - e) report to the Police for criminal investigations and action, or where applicable, conduct relevant investigations as potential prosecuting authority; and
 - f) offer advice and assistance to other victims of the fraud, for example a person who has unknowingly paid rent to a tenant who has unlawfully sub-let their council tenancy to them.
- 4.3 To deter those who may be considering committing a housing fraud we will publicise details of any actions we take to counter fraud, details of cases where action has been taken and encourage members of the public to report fraud through all appropriate media and communication channels.

5.0 Legal Framework and Scope

- 5.1 City of Wolverhampton Council's housing stock is managed by five managing agents which are:
- a) Wolverhampton Homes, an Arms-Length Management Company
 - b) Dovecotes Tenants Management Organisation;
 - c) Bushbury Hill Estate Management Board;
 - d) New Park Village Tenants Management Co-operative; and
 - e) Springfield Horseshoe Housing Management Co-operative.
- 5.2 All allocations will be made in accordance with this Policy and must be followed by all managing agents, although some local variations may be allowed. A local variation will only be allowed with the express consent of the Council in writing. Such local variations in policy will be set out in writing and will be made available on request and form appendices to this Allocation Policy. All Council properties are to be advertised via the Council's Homes in the City choice-based lettings scheme.
- 5.3 The way that a Local Authority allocates empty properties is largely governed by various Acts of Parliament and also the outcome of cases that have been before the Courts. Wolverhampton's Tenancy Strategy has also been considered, which commits to the use of introductory tenancies followed by secure tenancies for Council housing across the City. The City Council and its managing agents also take account of Government guidance concerning allocations which are published from time to time.

- 5.4 Allocations are dealt with in the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Localism Act 2011.
- a) Section 167 (1) of the Housing Act 1996 as amended requires every local housing authority to have a scheme for determining priorities, the procedure to be followed and for allocating housing accommodation.
 - b) Section 167 (2) states that the scheme has to include a statement on the authority's policy on offering people who are to be allocated housing accommodation a choice of housing accommodation and the opportunity to express preferences about the housing accommodation that is offered to them.
- 5.5 This policy must be implemented in such a way as to ensure reasonable preference is given to:
- a) people who are homeless (within the meaning of Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996) that is they have no accommodation available for their occupation;
 - b) people who have made applications for homeless assistance and have received a decision that a prescribed duty is owed to them;
 - c) people who are occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or are otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions;
 - d) people who need to move on medical or social grounds including grounds relating to a disability; and
 - e) people 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 others).
- 5.6 An authority does not have to keep a register of those applying for housing, but Wolverhampton has chosen to do so in order to be able to respond to statutory and other requirements relating to factors such as the demand for properties in the City.
- 5.7 This means that everyone applying must have applied for inclusion on the register except those who are ineligible to join or who have been formally excluded. (Section 8)

6.0 Eligibility

- 6.1 Due to an increase in demand for the limited social housing stock within Wolverhampton, the Council's housing register is only open to those applicants that are eligible for housing. Residents that aren't eligible for housing may still approach the Council for housing advice and assistance.
- 6.2 When considering an application, the Council will assess if an applicant is eligible for an allocation and qualifies as being considered in housing need.

- 6.3 Any applicant assessed as either not eligible or does not qualify as being considered in housing need will not be granted access to the housing register.
- 6.4 All applicants will be required to provide evidence to verify both their eligibility and qualification status if requested at the point of application and again at point of allocation.
- 6.5 If at any time a person's eligibility or qualification circumstances change they can be reassessed at any point.

7.0 Applicants who are not eligible

The following classes of applicants will not normally be eligible for an allocation:

7.1 Subject to immigration

The Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002, restricts certain people subject to immigration control, or with limited rights of residence or failing the habitual residence test access to the Housing Register, as well as some European nationals depending on their residency and/or employment status and on any specific exclusions, any applicant who is subject to these controls will not be eligible for an allocation. The regulations are updated by Parliament from time to time, and the Council will consider any housing application under the law as it stands when the application or allocation is made.

7.2 Incapable of holding a tenancy in law

An applicant who is incapable in law of holding a legal tenancy will not be eligible to access the housing register.

The following groups of people will however be able to access the register despite otherwise being incapable of holding a tenancy in law:

- A person in the care of the Council, or a care leaver;
- A person defined as a child in need as a result of a s17 Children Act 1989 statutory assessment;
- Is owed a full statutory homeless duty following a s20 Children Act 1989 statutory assessment, or;
- Has an adult or adults who will act as a trustee(s) and hold a legal tenancy until the legal incapacity to hold a tenancy ends.

7.3 Applicants with no recognised housing need

Applicants assessed as having no housing need, in that they do not meet any of the qualifying criteria, in any of the bands identified in Section 11 of the policy.

7.4 Applicants with no connection to Wolverhampton

Applicants without a connection to Wolverhampton will not be eligible. Local connection is established through evidencing one of the following, that:

- 1) The applicant has lived in the City for the last 2 years. This does **not** apply to the following groups of people:
 - Refugees who were previously dispersed in Wolverhampton;
 - Members of the Gypsy and Traveller community who do not have a permanent residency;
 - Applicants who are former Council care leavers from Wolverhampton who are returning to the City, up to the age of 25.
 - An applicant who is being supported as they need to move due to domestic violence, subject to multi agency panel approval or an agreed protocol between CWC and neighbouring authorities;
 - Eligible homeless applicants that are not subject to a referral to another Local Authority AND they meet the Housing Act local connection criteria.
- 2) The applicant has evidenced they are giving continuing care to a resident within the City which is evidenced by professional support e.g. hospital, social services etc. This can also be confirmed by the Council's medical advisor.
- 3) The applicant is in employment or has received an evidenced offer of employment within the City.
- 4) The applicant is a former City of Wolverhampton Council care leaver up to the age of 25 who was cared for by the Council between the ages of 16 and 18.
- 5) Any applicant with the following connection to the Armed Forces:
 - Those who are currently serving in the regular forces or who were serving in the regular forces at any time in the five years preceding their application for an allocation of social housing.
 - Bereaved spouses or civil partners of those serving in the regular forces where (i) the bereaved spouse or civil partner has recently ceased, or will cease to be entitled, to reside in Ministry of Defence accommodation following the death of their service spouse or civil partner, and (ii) the death was wholly or partly attributable to their service.
 - Existing or former members of the reserved forces who are suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is attributable (wholly or partly) to their service.

7.5 Applicants with income/assets above the set limit

Applicants with income, levels of assets, or savings that would normally enable them to access market housing within the City will not be eligible.

Income levels will be based upon an annual averagely priced home in the City, the annual level will be set at one-third of the average lower quartile housing price at the end of the previous calendar year.

A full calculation of the set income level can be accessed using the below link:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/datasets/low-erquartilehousepricefornationalandsubnationalgeographiesquarterlyrollingyear-hpssadataset15>

The threshold for household assets or savings will be consistent with the Government's upper limit for savings set out in the common rules of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Benefit and Pensions Rates.

7.6 Exceptional Circumstances

The City of Wolverhampton Council recognises that there may be exceptional circumstances where it is necessary to reconsider the eligibility of an applicant who would not normally qualify. The Council therefore retains the right to reconsider an individual's eligibility in extreme circumstance (e.g. a significant threat to life), subject to the agreement of a delegated Housing Officer within the Council.

8.0 Exclusions

Applicants who are eligible to access the housing register may be excluded for one of the following reasons:

8.1 Unacceptable behaviour

Applicants may be excluded from the Housing Register when the Authority is satisfied that the applicant or a member of their household has been guilty of behaviour serious enough to make him or her unsuitable to be a tenant of the Authority.

For the purpose of this Allocation Policy, unacceptable behaviour includes the behaviour of the applicant, a member of their household and/or their lodgers or visitors. This could include but is not limited to the making of a possession order or the use of anti-social behaviour powers given to the Council by law. Or, where the Council believes any person covered by this section has caused harassment, alarm, distress, nuisance or inconvenience to any other person otherwise engaging in lawful behaviour in the City.

The exclusion only applies to the member(s) of the household who were participative in the unacceptable behaviour with other family members being able to make a separate application for housing.

Unacceptable behaviour also includes but is not limited to substantial rent arrears cases (not caused by factors outside the applicant's control), persistent non-payers, tenancy fraud or other tenancy breaches.

The exclusion will be for a set period of time which will be detailed in the information sent to the applicant informing them of the terms of their exclusion and may include conditions after the exclusion period which an applicant must be able to demonstrate have been fulfilled prior to the exclusion ending.

Persons subject to the criteria set out above cannot be granted a sole tenancy or participate in a joint tenancy.

Following the exclusion ending an applicant must submit a new housing application to re-join the housing register.

8.2 Refusal of Offers

Applicants who have refused 2 suitable offers of housing will be suspended from the housing register for a 6-month period, after which time their original application will be reinstated.

8.3 Welfare and safety exclusions

An applicant may be excluded from being allocated a specific property type or from being housed in a specific area of the City, if it is determined that to house them in such a property or area would be of significant risk to themselves or others. All welfare and safety exclusions must be agreed by an agreed delegated Housing Officer.

8.4 Notification of decisions and right to appeal

In the circumstance of an applicant being deemed ineligible, excluded or not considered to be in housing need they are entitled to request a review.

The Housing Act 1996 Part 6 gives applicants the right to request a review of a decision not to award preference on the grounds of:

- Unacceptable behaviour;
- The facts of their case which have, or may be, taken into account when considering whether or not to allocate a property; or
- That they are not eligible to join the Housing Register.

Applicants will be advised of all decisions in writing along with the reasons for the decision being taken. Applicants will also be advised of their right of review a decision taken if applicable.

Should an applicant wish to exercise their right for a review to be undertaken, they should usually request this review within 21 days of service of the decision. Later requests for a review may be considered if the applicant can demonstrate a genuine and reasonable reason for the delay in requesting the review.

Any request for a review can be made in writing or verbally.

8.5 Procedure on review

The following procedure will be followed in relation to reviews: -

- All letters concerning a decision made under this policy should provide information about the right to request a review.
- A review can be undertaken in writing or, when relating to a homelessness case, verbally in person and must usually be heard within 56 days of the request for a review.

- The review will be carried out by someone not involved in the original decision and who is of appropriate seniority.
- The review will take into account the present circumstances of the applicant not just those applicable at the time of the original decision.
- The applicant will be given five clear days' notice of the date on which the appeals will be considered either orally or in writing.

9.0 16 and 17-year olds

9.1 16 and 17-year olds will not normally qualify for an allocation until reaching the age of 18.

9.2 However, if appropriate, the application for re-housing before the age of 18 can be referred to Wolverhampton Young Persons Accommodation Forum (WYPAF).

9.3 The criteria for this to happen are:

- must be single with no dependents and
- in need of support to live independently

Additionally, the applicant will be either:

- homeless or threatened with homelessness
- living in an unsuitable environment with a demonstrable, urgent, need to move
- resident in a hostel or foyer or other supported accommodation and ready to move on a care leaver owed a duty under the Leaving Care Act 2000

9.4 Having assessed the case, WYPAF will then make a recommendation as to appropriate accommodation and / or support. This may, or may not, involve a Council tenancy.

9.5 16 and 17-year olds with dependents will be routed through either the Council's Housing Options Service or the Young Parents Single Referral Panel.

9.6 Any 16 and 17 being granted a council tenancy will be required to have a trustee.

10.0 Application process

10.1 Applications will normally only be accepted via the Homes in the City website or by phone. It is the responsibility of the applicant to answer all questions on the housing application truthfully. Failure to answer questions truthfully could be considered fraud. The application must also set out in full all persons who will be residing with them at any future property allocated under this policy. Incomplete applications will not be made live until the Council is satisfied that it has all of the information it requires to complete its assessment.

- 10.2 The Council may request supporting information from applicants in order to assess an applicant's eligibility or housing need before their application is made live. It is the responsibility of the applicant to provide the Council with any supporting information or documents as requested. Applications will not be made live until any information requested has been provided and assessed.
- 10.3 In order to assist applicants to explore housing options, receive financial guidance on sustaining a tenancy and understand the rights and responsibilities of being a tenant applicant may be asked to complete a pre-tenancy exercise before their application is made live. Applications may not be made live until applicants have completed the exercises.
- 10.4 An initial assessment will be undertaken based on the information provided on the application and any further information requested when this has been submitted. All applicants will be required to provide evidence to verify both their eligibility and qualification status at the point of application and again at point of allocation. Prior to any offer of accommodation evidence must be provided of all circumstances and residency details on the application at that time.
- 10.5 Joint applications will be accepted providing that each partner is eligible in their own right to access the housing register. Joint applications will be accepted from married or cohabiting couples including same sex couples or applicants not in a relationship who are looking to be considered for a 2 or 3 bedroom flat or maisonette.
- 10.6 Extended household members or others, which covers anyone except parents with children living with them on a full-time basis (see section 28) for those who have access to children), will not normally be included on the application in their own right unless there is parental responsibility or there are medical or social grounds which require that the household needs to live together. Applicants must be able to demonstrate such a need exists and must provide supporting information requested by the Council to assist with this purpose. These checks will also be carried out at the time of allocation to ensure that an applicant's circumstances have not changed.
- 10.7 Support can be provided to complete the application form if requested; see section 23.
- 10.8 As a result of this assessment or an applicant's inaction, applications may be:
 - a) made live on to the housing register;
 - b) excluded from the housing register;
 - c) remain pending until supporting information has been provided;
 - d) have their applications closed.
- 10.9 If further information has been requested from an applicant and has not been provided with 6 months the application will not be made live and the applicant

will need to make a new application if they wish to be rehoused through Homes in the City. All applicants should note that in such cases the registration date of any future application will not be backdated to the earlier application date.

10.10 If an applicant is rehoused through this policy the application used to house them will be permanently closed at the point they sign the new tenancy. If the tenant, then wishes to be rehoused from the new address via Homes in the City they will need to submit a new application.

10.11 Duplicate applications will not be accepted if an applicant currently has a live application or an application that has been closed within the last 6 months (not through exclusion or being rehoused through this policy). The new application will be treated as a request to update their old application with a change of circumstances and the older application updated.

Part 2

11.0 Prioritisation of applicants

11.1 Applicants' circumstances are assessed and placed in one of five bands for allocation purposes, with the Emergency + Band having the highest housing priority and band 3 having the lowest priority. Applicants with lesser preference will be moved to the band below and given the lowest priority within that band.

11.2 Where an applicant has two or more needs within a band they will be considered ahead of applicants with fewer needs in that band.

11.3 These bands are displayed in Table 1.

11.4 Any criterion relating to a rightsizing category refers to the different levels of overcrowding and under occupation, a full breakdown of the rightsizing categories can be seen in Table 2.

Table 1 – Housing Need Banding

Emergency +
<p>Applicants who are homeless and are owed the main duty including when they have become homeless or the Relief Duty has come to an end AND they have been assessed as being in priority need and unintentionally homeless; plus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A substantially adapted or purpose-built property is required. This category includes those applicants covered by regulations which apply to members and former members of the Armed Forces and having particular regard for those injured or disabled in action; • Armed Forces personnel with families upon the provision of a Certificate of Cessation of Entitlement to Occupy Service Living Accommodation • For children leaving care who were under the care of CWC up to the age of 25
<p>There has been a Multi-Agency Panel review and immediate rehousing is required. Immediate rehousing need is when there is a significant threat to life.</p>

Emergency
Applicants who are homeless and are owed the main duty including when they have become homeless or the Relief Duty has come to an end and they have been assessed as being in priority need and unintentionally homeless;
There has been a Multi-Agency Panel review and urgent rehousing is required; Urgent rehousing need is all urgent situations but there is no threat to life.
A substantially adapted or purpose-built property is required. This category includes those applicants covered by regulations which apply to members and former members of the Armed Forces and having particular regard for those injured or disabled in action;
A substantially adapted (£3000 or more in value, through floor lift substantially adapted bathroom etc) or purpose-built property is being freed;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An appointed Occupational Therapist has decided the applicant's property is unsuitable for the applicant or a dependent member of the households needs. Or; where adaptations would cost in excess of £5,000 • cannot be carried out due to the construction of the property • deemed to be prevented from leaving hospital without suitable accommodation.
A family is freeing a placement in a specialist housing scheme, or subject to a single referral forum decision, and has been assessed as ready to move on;
Category A rightsizing (see table 2, rightsizing categories)
Band 1
There is an urgent need to move on medical or social grounds (see section 14, Medical Grounds);
There is a young person leaving care;
Foster Carers and those approved to adopt who require a larger property;
Applicants who are homeless and are owed the Relief Duty and would be owed or likely to be owed the Main duty when the relief duty came to an end, because they are or are likely to be in priority need and unintentionally homeless;
The applicant is freeing a placement in a specialist housing scheme, or subject to a single referral forum decision, and has been assessed as ready to move on;
A tenant of City of Wolverhampton Council or a Partner Registered Provider wishes to leave a house and move to a flat, maisonette or bungalow;
The applicant's home is subject to a Compulsory Purchase Order/Closing Order;
The applicant has an urgent need to move to a particular area in the City and where not to do so would cause hardship to themselves or to others.
Armed Forces personnel with families upon the provision of a Certificate of Cessation of Entitlement to Occupy Service Living Accommodation
Where a Council service tenants occupying tied accommodation whose contract states that accommodation must be occupied, and their employment is terminated, the service tenant retires or tied accommodation is no longer available. This will not apply to Employees leaving as a result of dismissal.
Category B rightsizing (see table 2, rightsizing categories)
Band 2
The applicant is freeing a placement in a supported housing scheme e.g. hostel / foyer etc. as they have been assessed as ready to move on;

Applicants who are threatened with homelessness and are owed the Prevention Duty and would be likely to be owed the Main duty if both the Prevention Duty and any Relief Duty that followed on were to end unsuccessfully and they would be, or would likely to be, found to be in priority need and unintentionally homeless;
A family, or pensioner is sharing or lacking a kitchen, bathroom or toilet. Does not apply to owner occupiers.
There is a significant need to move on medical or social grounds (see section 14, Medical Grounds)
Category C rightsizing (see table 2, rightsizing categories)
Band 3
There is a need to move on medical or welfare grounds, but which is less than that required for Bands 1 and 2 (see section 14, Medical Grounds);
Applicants owed a Prevention duty, or Relief duty for as long as that duty is owed but would not be or are unlikely to be owed the Main Duty when any relief duty came to an end and intentionally homeless.
Any applicant owed the Prevention, Relief or Main duty and are or are likely to be in priority need and unintentionally homeless but are refusing to cooperate on task(s) specified within their personal housing plan. A review of this can be requested.
An individual living in Supported/Specialist housing but is not yet ready to move on.
The applicant is a tenant of CWC or RP who has children under 12 years of age but does not have access to a private garden. This does not apply for a like to like property.

Table 2 - Rightsizing Matrix

Category	Criteria
Category A – Emergency Band	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short of 3 or more bedrooms. • Short of 2 or more bedrooms whilst living in a 1-bedroom property • Wolverhampton City Council or Registered Provider tenant releasing two or more bedrooms;
Category B – Band 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short of 2 bedrooms. • Children of opposite sex sharing a bedroom over the age of 10 (where there are three or more children, those of the same sex will be expected to share a bedroom) • Short of 1 bedroom whilst living in a 1-bedroom property
Category C – Band 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short of 1 bedroom. • Wolverhampton City Council or Registered Provider tenant releasing one bedroom.

11.5 Lesser preference

Applicants who meet one or more of the following criteria will be given lesser preference. This means their application will be suspended until the affected criteria has been resolved or a repayment plan has been adhered to for at least 3 months:

- anyone who owes debts of more £400 to a Council or Registered Provider. This does not apply to:
 - a) current Council or Registered Provider tenants who are requesting a transfer to a smaller, more affordable property due to the financial hardships making their rent unaffordable and there is no possession order;
 - b) eligible homeless applicants that are not subject to a referral to another Local Authority AND they meet the Housing Act local connection criteria.
 - c) when an applicant is being supported as they need to move due to domestic violence. The allocation of alternative accommodation will be dependent on if (a),(b) and (c) do not apply:
 - i. the tenant making regular payments (for a minimum of three months) to show commitment to the repayment plan;
 - ii. the tenant will be subject to a full income and expenditure exercise by/on behalf of their managing agent where a repayment plan will be agreed with the tenant; and
 - iii. the debt owed at the current property being transferred to the new tenancy and any agreement to discharge the remaining debt will become a condition of the new tenancy;
- tenants of the Council who have been in their property for less than one year;
- tenants of the Council whose property has failed a pre-leaving inspection;
- applicants who have been involved in unacceptable behaviour such as persistent non-payers, applicant or member of his or her household involved in anti-social behaviour but not serious enough to be excluded from the housing register.

Lesser preference does not apply to applicants in the Emergency Plus or Emergency bands.

12.0 Change of circumstances

- 12.1 Where there is a change in an applicant's circumstances, their relative degree of preference, and therefore their banding priority, will be reviewed. This may result in the applicant moving up or down within the bands. It is the responsibility of the applicant to inform the Council of the changes.
- 12.2 For applicants that do not currently live in Wolverhampton, if they have a change in circumstances that cannot be met in the area in which they live e.g. to give or receive essential support, their application will be placed in the

appropriate band. This will not apply to needs that can be met where they currently live e.g. overcrowding. It will only be applied where Wolverhampton is the only place where such needs can be met.

- 12.3 It is the responsibility of the applicant to update their application should there be a change of circumstance.

13.0 Band date

- 13.1 This will be the date the applicant registered for re-housing except where there has been a change in a housing need e.g. a medical award when the date of the change will be used. The allocation will normally be made to the application with the earliest date.

14.0 Medical grounds

- 14.1 The Housing Act 1996 states that reasonable preference on the housing register should be given to applicants who have a need to move on medical or welfare/social grounds.
- 14.2 This category includes an applicant, or member of that applicant's household, whose health is being affected by their current property, and where a move to another more suitable property would alleviate their condition or make it easier to manage.
- 14.3 Where it appears that there is a need to make enquiries into an applicant's medical condition the Council will make use of an independent medical advisor or refer the case to the medical panel.
- 14.4 The applicant should provide their own medical evidence if appropriate which will be sent to the independent advisor or considered by the medical panel to assist with the assessment.
- 14.5 The applicant will be required to complete a medical referral form that may be submitted to the independent advisor. If it is decided that reasonable preference should be awarded then they will make a recommendation that the applicant is placed in the appropriate band and, where appropriate, a recommendation as to the property type.
- 14.6 The medical panel can review the decision made by the independent medical advisor.
- 14.7 Where two or more members of a household would qualify for medical priority and the levels of priority are different, the highest will apply.

Note: Where a particular circumstance, or set of circumstances, has been taken into account when awarding medical priority, that same circumstance, or set of circumstances, will not be taken into account in any request for social priority or vice versa.

15.0 Social/welfare grounds

15.1 Social/Welfare grounds are factors affecting a person's situation where a move would help in resolving that particular circumstance. Social need awards will be reviewed after 3 months or on refusal of a suitable offer of accommodation.

15.2 Circumstances applicable to a Band 1 award

- A move is necessary to enable a disabled/mentally ill/elderly person and carer to be close in order to prevent immediate admission to hospital or a home where essential support is given. Will only apply where the applicant is looking to move to the same estate as carer;
- violent injury/death, suicide, rape or attempted rape in or near the home which directly affects the applicant or a member of the applicants' household;
- where a neighbourhood dispute/racial harassment/hate crime incident results in court action and the applicant needs to move away from an area;
- life threatening violence or the likelihood of it;
- children being returned from care but dependent on a change of accommodation;
- freeing a hospital bed or residential home placement where present accommodation is deemed unsuitable following professional advice;
- change of accommodation required for exceptional social/medical factors where moving would enable the delivery/monitoring of essential support services. Awarded when Housing Support has confirmation that the applicant is engaging with supporting agencies;

15.3 Circumstances applicable to a Band 2 award

- burglary: where the applicant is considered vulnerable and is the target of repeat offending;
- neighbourhood disputes/racial harassment incidents/hate crime resulting in intimidation or serious threats or damage to property which are recurrent;
- to move away from criminal activity and/or drug problems where the applicant would be vulnerable to being drawn back to previous criminality;
- Couples/Families/Single people in financial hardship actively looking to downsize from larger accommodation to smaller accommodation and circumstances currently assessed as band 2;
- Applicant is a current or former member of the armed forces, injured serviceman or woman, bereaved spouse or civil partner or existing or former member of the reserved forces who is suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is attributable (wholly or partly) to their service (families).

15.4 Circumstances applicable to a Band 3 award

- accident or bereavement in or near the home which is seriously affecting the applicant or a member of their family;
- neighbourhood disputes/racial harassment resulting in graffiti, gestures, letters;
- where, following the breakdown of a marriage, civil partnership or established common law relationship the former partners are still living in the same property;
- Couples/Families/Single people in financial hardship actively looking to downsize from larger accommodation to smaller accommodation and circumstances currently assessed as band 3;
- Applicant is a current or former member of the armed forces, injured serviceman or woman, bereaved spouse or civil partner or existing or former member of the reserved forces who is suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is attributable (wholly or partly) to their service (singles).

Note: Where a particular circumstance, or set of circumstances, has been taken into account when awarding social priority, that same circumstance, or set of circumstances, will not be taken into account in any request for medical priority or vice versa.

16.0 Lettings variations

16.1 Lower Bands

To ensure that applicants in Bands 1, 2 and Band 3 have an opportunity to receive an offer of accommodation; preference will be given to applicants from these bands as follows:

- 5% of all lettings to Band 1
- 5% of all lettings to Band 2 and 3.

Properties will be selected randomly by an automated process and will be of any property type in any area.

In the event of there being no suitable applicants from Bands 2 & 3 then the offer will be made to another case in accordance with section 19.1.

16.2 Making best use of Stock

To make best use of the housing stock and to support CWC and Registered Provider (RP) tenants to move from a house, 50% of all suitable bungalows, flats and maisonettes will be given to those tenants. If the property has adaptations applicants will be considered ahead of house release.

To address under occupancy and overcrowding houses that are released by a CWC tenant moving to a Council or RP bungalow, flat or maisonette or a lodger left in possession of a house the property will be advertised with

preference to an applicant who is short of bedrooms in their present council or RP home.

16.3 Flats let to Children's Services

The Council has agreed a supply of flats and studios are made available to Children's Services to assist in the move-on and housing of young people in care and care leavers. Should the current occupant of one of the flats ask to remain in the property instead of moving on at the end of the six months licence they will be allowed to do so.

Part 3

17.0 Bidding

- 17.1 Properties that are available or about to become available for letting are normally advertised on a weekly basis from 6pm on Tuesdays until 10a.m. on the following Monday. This is known as the bidding period. Adverts can be seen on our website www.homesinthecity.org.uk; Civic Centre and other Housing Offices in Wolverhampton.
- 17.2 Applicants are invited to express an interest (known as bidding) on up to 3 properties which they are eligible for during the bidding period. This enables the Council and its Managing Agents to advise applicants of all available properties as well as being able to meet the Council's legal duties to those people who have an urgent statutory need to be housed.
- 17.3 Bids can be made via the website or in person at a Housing Office or by phone.
- 17.4 Applicants will need to have an active email address to register on Homes in the City in order for bids to be placed.

18.0 Managing the housing register

- 18.1 Applicants with a housing need will be expected to bid on a regular basis, however applicants should only bid on properties they would be willing to accept. Applicants who are not actively looking for accommodation and have not expressed an interest or bid for a property for 6 months will be deferred. This means that the applicant is unable to bid for any further homes until contact has been made with the Council.
- 18.2 The applicant's application is deferred at the time a letter is sent explaining the expectations of the applicant and giving contact details should the applicant require any assistance or advice and remains deferred, until contact is made, and the application is reviewed.
- 18.3 Applications may also be deferred, closed or cancelled in the following circumstances, to ensure that applicant details are kept as up-to-date as possible: -

- We are informed that they are no longer living at the registered address.
- We have reason to believe that an applicant's needs are not recorded correctly.
- We have reason to believe that an applicant has made a fraudulent application or provided incorrect information to increase priority.
- The applicant accepts a home; this could be prior to or following an accompanied viewing.
- Undeclared debts/tenancy issues are found i.e. if applicant has not indicated on application that debts are outstanding or has not kept to agreed payment arrangement.

18.4 Applications may only be re-activated following contact from the applicant and satisfactory investigations have taken place.

18.5 Applicants will be required to re-register annually on the anniversary of joining Homes in the City and to advise the Council of any changes in their circumstances or contact details. Failure to reply to the re-registration letter will result in an applicant being removed from the Housing Register.

18.6 Under normal circumstances if an applicant fails to re-register or requests their deferment to be lifted after a 6-month period, they will be required to make a new application however, a review of this can be requested.

19.0 Selection of offers

19.1 In the majority of cases properties will be advertised open to all those eligible for the property type and size, except those properties selected to be let with a lettings variation as highlighted in section 16.

19.2 When the bidding period comes to an end a shortlist is produced of all eligible applicants. Contact will be made with the applicant who is in the highest priority band, with the greatest number of housing needs that placed them in that band, who has had that level of housing need the longest and is eligible for that property. The applicant will be contacted to request that they supply evidence of their housing circumstances, their identity and the identity of those moving with them.

19.3 If the applicant fails to provide this evidence within a reasonable amount of time the applicant will be by-passed, and contact will be made with the next applicant on the shortlist.

19.4 Prior to an offer being made the applicant will be subject to an affordability assessment by the managing agent. Where there are affordability concerns the applicant will be referred to a money management service for advice and support on how they will financially sustain a tenancy.

19.5 In exceptional circumstances, following a case conference, the Council and its managing agents reserve the right to withhold (subject to further clarification) or cancel an offer. Circumstances where this could occur include but are not limited to:

- where there are concerns that the allocation of the property is a risk to the applicant and members of their household or others on management grounds, such as severe antisocial behaviour or where a perpetrator of domestic violence, hate crime or other offences would be rehoused close to previous victims or health and safety grounds;
- where there is evidence from a medical or social work professional that the property bid for would not meet the applicant's particular needs;
- where in order to live independently the applicant will require a package of support that has not been confirmed at the point of the bid being placed; or
- where the Council believes that information provided at the application or allocation stage is false or misleading.

19.6 Where such a situation arises, the applicant will be advised of the offer being withheld/cancelled and informed why this decision has been made and the process should they wish to appeal.

19.7 Many factors affect which applicant is top of the shortlist for each home (detailed in Section 16 - Lettings Variations). In the event of a property being advertised with multiple preferences shortlists will be produced combining all of the preferences. If no applicant matches all of the preferences the property will be allocated as highlighted in 19.1

20.0 Difficult to Let Properties

20.1 A property will be considered difficult to let if;

- There are no bids received when the property is advertised
- The property is not let despite bids being made after the shortlist is exhausted due to refusals, withheld offers or withdrawn offers

20.2 The property will be advertised as an immediate available property and let on a first-come first-served bases. The applicant needs to be eligible for the property type and evidences provided as outlined in Section 19 Selection of Offers.

21.0 Statement of Choice

21.1 Applicants owed a homeless duty will have their applications regularly reviewed to ensure they are bidding on suitable properties or to identify any barriers i.e. where they require an adapted property or large property. Being

owed a homeless duty relates to those accepted by The City of Wolverhampton Council as statutorily homeless and owed a duty to house under sections 193(2) or 189B of Housing Act 1996; or have been granted homeless status under section 166A(3) (a) (people who are homeless within the meaning of Part VII of the Housing Act 1996).

- 21.2 Where this is the case the Council retains the right to make direct bids on behalf of homeless applicants to help resolve their homelessness into suitable accommodation.
- 21.3 The Council will try to meet preferences around location, which will be assisted by the ability to make offers within the private rented sector and registered provider stock, however due to the availability of stock that meets a household's needs at any given time, the Council will retain the right to make an offer of accommodation where this becomes available in any area of Wolverhampton that the Council or one of its managing agents has assessed as suitable and safe for the applicant to live in.
- 21.4 The Council recognises that council accommodation is just one option to resolving a customer's housing need therefore the council may also organise for a direct offer of private rented or housing association accommodation to be made to resolve an applicant's housing need. This is undertaken in line with the City Council's Homeless Strategy.
- 21.5 The Council will have due regard to where an applicant cannot live in certain areas due to fear of violence, harassment, domestic abuse or similar circumstance.
- 21.6 Applicants (except those owed a homelessness duty, please see below) who have refused 2 suitable offers of housing will be suspended from the housing register for a 6-month period, after which time their original application will be reinstated. will be advised of this in writing and can request a review of this decision. An applicant's housing application can be reviewed following a refusal of a property.
- 21.7 Applicants owed a homeless duty will be made one offer of suitable accommodation. If refused this will end the statutory homelessness duty, meaning the removal of a statutory reasonable preference need award. This applies to those households accepted as statutorily homeless and owed a duty to house. Applicants will then be assessed against their remaining housing need and placed in the appropriate Band. Where the applicant has no other reason to be awarded a priority they will be placed in Band 3. Applicants will have a right to request a review of this decision.

22.0 Feedback

- 22.1 Applicants will be able to see the outcome of each letting including the number of people to have expressed an interest, and the band priority and the

date of application of the successful applicant. This information is available on the Homes in the City website and at Housing Offices.

23.0 Support in the application and allocations process

23.1 It is recognised that some applicants may require help with completing the Homes in the City application form and bidding for properties.

23.2 Support is available to residents applying for Homes in the City, such as:

- Support to complete application form.
- Support to understand the applicants banding and the type of property they are eligible for.
- support, and reasonable adjustments will be made for applicants for housing who have hidden disability
- referral to the appropriate local agency or support worker to enable supporting documentation to be provided.
- access to accredited translation and interpretation services.
- access to a suitable environment.

23.3 Information on available properties is accessible in a number of ways to ensure that applicants with disabilities, such as sight, hearing, physical or mental health impairments etc, can make as informed choice as all applicant. Support workers are also trained in the process of bidding to ensure that they can offer positive assistance to applicants requiring assistance.

23.4 Some particularly vulnerable applicants may require additional help to ensure that they have the same opportunity to access accommodation. The Supported Application List is a further enhancement which seeks to provide a number of personalised services for applicants who need help and assistant such as:

- contact with applicants to advise of available properties;
- referral to the appropriate local agency or support worker to enable proactive support with applying, or applying on the applicant's behalf;
- access to accredited translation and interpretation services
- access to a suitable environment for applicants
- support, and reasonable adjustments will be made for applicants for housing who have hidden disability
- regular contact from staff to ensure support needs are being met.

23.5 Referrals for accessing the Supported Application List may come from a number of sources, although most would come via the following (not exclusive):

- from the application form – where a badly completed form may indicate literacy or language problems or where the applicant may indicate a particular disability such as a hearing, sight, physical or mental health impairment etc;
- request from a support worker – where a support worker specifically requests additional assistance for one of their clients; or

- from a non-bidder's report – where it is identified the applicant is not making bids for suitable accommodation.

23.6 The extent of additional assistance will be tailored to meet the needs of the individual applicant.

24.0 Direct Allocations

24.1 The Council reserves the right to directly allocate properties which have been purchased in cases of for example estate regeneration, where this has been subject to separate Cabinet approval.

Part 4

25.0 Introductory tenancies

25.1 The City of Wolverhampton Council operates introductory tenancies.

25.2 All new tenants of the Council will be introductory tenants for the first twelve months of their tenancy. This will not apply to current transferring Council tenants or to new tenants whose preceding tenancy was that they were secure tenants of another authority or an assured tenant of a Registered Providers.

25.3 A tenancy will remain introductory however if proceedings for possession have been started but not yet resolved.

25.4 The rights of introductory tenants differ from those of secure tenants.

25.5 Introductory tenants cannot:

- a) take in lodgers;
- b) exercise the right to buy (although the period spent as an introductory tenant will count towards the qualifying period);
- c) sub-let;
- d) carry out a mutual exchange; or
- e) vote on matters concerning changes in policy or practice concerning housing management.

25.6 However, there may be times when the Council would wish to allow something that is not given as a right e.g. allow a mutual exchange.

25.7 Where action is taken to end a introductory tenancy the Council does not have to prove the facts in court only that it has followed the correct procedure, particularly with regard to considering any appeal against the decision to go to court.

25.8 Introductory tenancies can be extended up to 18 months.

26.0 Registered provider nominations

- 26.1 Registered Providers (RPs) previously known as Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and Housing Associations, are non-profit making organisations providing homes for people in housing need.
- 26.2 Wolverhampton City Council has nomination agreements with RPs that have properties in the city that a negotiated percentage of their lettings will be to people nominated to them from the Council's Housing Register. A copy of the nomination agreement is available upon request.
- 26.3 All properties put forward from the RPs for a nomination will be advertised in the same way as council properties so that applicants are offered the widest choice of accommodation available. The advert will distinguish that it is an RP property and display the name the relevant RP.
- 26.4 The nomination will be made within the Allocation Policy and the household make/family size up as set out by the RP.
- 26.5 Nominations will only be made where an applicant would be eligible to receive an offer of accommodation as set out in section 3.
- 26.6 Once an applicant is nominated they will not be considered for other offers until such time as the RP has advised the Council of the outcome of the nomination.

27.0 Relationship breakdown

- 27.1 Relationships for the purpose of this policy are defined as marriages, civil partnerships and established common law partnerships i.e. 12 months plus.
- 27.2 In general, it would be the intention that the partner that has responsibility for any child/ren of the relationship should remain in the home. In this event the allocation of that property will be excluded from the general allocation policy. The other partner will be able to bid on other properties subject to the banding under Section 11.
- 27.3 If the breakdown is a result of domestic abuse it may be more appropriate to rehouse the parent and child/ren away from the matrimonial home.
- 27.4 If 26.2 above applies and the former partner is left in occupation as a tenant, then action under grounds 2A Schedule One of the Housing Act 1996 as amended may be taken to end the tenancy. In these circumstances no offer of alternative accommodation will be made.
- 27.5 In all cases the applicants will be expected to sign, in the presence of a housing officer, a declaration stating the reasons for the relationship breakdown and, where there are children involved, the arrangements for their future care.
- 27.6 If one partner has left the home and there are no contact details available for them, then the remaining partner will be required to declare that fact in the declaration in 26.5 above.

28.0 Referrals for minors

- 28.1 Where Wolverhampton's Children's Services feel that rehousing is required in helping them carry out their functions to a child in need; a full report should be prepared by them in line with statutory requirements.
- 28.2 The report should detail why, without rehousing, the child is unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development.
- 28.3 The report will then be considered by the Council and, if appropriate, the case will be placed in the relevant band.

29.0 Access to children

- 29.1 Where an applicant has a joint residence order in respect of children with a former partner, the eligibilities set out Section 38 may be varied to take account of that order.
- 29.2 Other demands on the housing stock will be considered along with any potential under-occupancy of the property. Children will only be included as part of the household if the child is both dependent upon and resident with the applicant. A child shall be deemed to be resident with the applicant if it is their principal place of residence. Proof may be required to ensure that evidence provided in this respect is correct to the Council's satisfaction.

30.0 Sundry factors affecting allocations

30.1 Worsening situation

Where an applicant deliberately worsens their living conditions in order to gain benefit under this Allocations Policy no increase in their priority will be given until they have been in the new circumstances for one year.

30.2 Declaration of interest

Applicants that work for Wolverhampton Homes, Dovecotes Tenants Management organisation, Bushbury Hill EMB, New Park Village TMC and Springfield Horseshoe HMC must make this fact known in any application for rehousing. Any offer of accommodation to a member of staff of their organisations must be referred to the Director of Housing at CWC for approval.

30.3 Major repair, fire, flood or Key Worker

- a) Occasionally allocations will be made under Schedule 1 s79 Housing Act 1985 for example to Council tenants whose own property is undergoing major works or has been the subject of a disaster such as fire, flood etc., or to an employee of the Council who is required to occupy a particular property for the better performance of their duties (Service Tenants) or is someone that has been declared by Wolverhampton City Council's Corporate Human Resources Team to

be a new member of staff requiring temporary accommodation before completing a full move to the area.

- b) As these are not secure tenancies, this type of letting is not covered by this Allocations Policy.
- c) Tenants being out of their home where the works have resulted in the decant period of more than 6 months and the household meets the eligibility criteria for the property, can be offered the choice to stay or return to their original property.

31.0 Local Lettings Plans

31.1 Legal Framework

Section 166A(6)(B) of the Housing Act 1996 enables the Allocation Policy to contain provision to allocate particular housing accommodation to persons of a particular description, whether or not they fall within the reasonable preference categories through a local lettings plan (LLP).

31.2 Purpose of a Local Lettings Plan

A LLP is a key tool for Local Authorities and partners to address circumstances where there is a strong evidence base that letting properties through the main Allocations Policy will compromise community sustainability. A LLP cannot ever place any tenant into financial hardship or change or affect the following criteria as set out in the full Allocations Policy:

- Eligibility
- Exclusions
- Prioritisation of applicants

31.3 Local Lettings Plan Length and Review

LLPs will be approved for a maximum of 3 years.

The LLP must be reviewed annually by the proposing managing agent in order to reassess the continuing impact and relevance. A copy of the annual review outcomes of the LLP must be provided to CWC for consideration.

31.4 Local Lettings Plan Content

The use of LLP must be balanced against the Council's legal duty to allocate accommodation to people in housing need and must not dominate the Council's lettings policy.

The managing agent would need to demonstrate to the Council the need for such a policy giving:

- a clear definition of the objective(s) to be achieved, backed up by a clear evidence base;
- the numbers/types of properties affected;
- an Equalities Impact Assessment;

- clear methodology on how the scheme will be monitored, reviewed and reported on;
- evidence of consultation with the local community and any other affected persons or organisations such as Tenants Groups, RPs, Voluntary Sector Groups or other existing forums such as Area Panels;
- how it is proposed to market the policy so that existing and potential stakeholders are aware of it; and
- a clear exit strategy should the LLP not achieve its objectives.

31.5 Local Lettings Plan Approval Process

All requests to implement a LLP must receive Council approval by way of an Individual Executive Decision Notice after being presented at both the managing agent's and CWC's relevant leadership meetings.

Copies of any LLP are available on request and form appendices to this Policy.

32.0 Joint tenancies

32.1 Granting of Joint Tenancy

Joint tenancies will normally be granted to married couples (including Civil Partnerships) or couples living together as common law partners and where it can be shown that they have done so for 12 months or more.

Joint tenancies can be granted to applicants not in a relationship for 2- or 3-bedroom flats or maisonettes.

In each case the joint tenancy will only be granted if the other person would be eligible in their own right to receive an allocation.

If a tenant has succeeded to a tenancy a joint tenant cannot be added.

Where someone joins a tenancy, they will be asked to sign to accept the terms of the current tenancy agreement and will receive a specimen copy of that agreement.

32.2 Ending a joint tenancy

When one party gives notice on a joint tenancy this has the effect of bringing the whole tenancy to an end.

The Council will, having regard to all the circumstances of the case and if so requested, decide whether to grant a sole tenancy to the former joint tenant who remains in the property.

Factors to be considered would include responsibility for children, caring for a relative, the size of the property having regard to the household size of the applicant requesting the property, the demand for that particular property at the time etc.

The Family Court can decide that a joint tenancy is to be transferred to a sole tenancy in the name of one of partners. in which case the transfer is not subject to this Allocations Policy.

33.0 Discretionary lettings

33.1 The below lettings can be made at the sole discretion of the Council. They fall outside of the main policy above, however are an integral part of the Council's Allocation Policy.

33.2 Large-scale City Emergency

In the event of a large-scale City emergency CWC reserves the right to allocate any available properties outside of the Allocations Policy.

34.0 Death of a tenant where there is no legal right of succession

34.1 Where there is no legal successor, but someone is left in the property, consideration will be given to allow that person to be given the tenancy if:

- a) that person has lived with the previous tenant for more than 10 years
- or
- b) will be taking on the responsibility for the previous tenant's dependants,

AND

- c) the household is eligible for the property type, (for households eligible for a house under occupation by 1 bedroom is permitted)

AND

- d) the applicant would be entitled to re-housing under Homelessness Legislation and the applicant has lived in the City for at least 2 years.

34.2 Where the conditions of 34.1 are not met the person/s left in the property will be treated as possession use and occupation account.

34.3 Lodgers in possession will be placed in the band according to the property type they are residing in i.e. if releasing a house band 1 and the application will be registered to the date of the start of last tenancy.

34.4 33.2 and 33.3 above will only apply if the lodger in possession is eligible to receive an allocation under the terms of this Allocation Policy.

34.5 The Family Court can decide that the tenancy be given to the person/s left in the property in which case the transfer is not subject to this Allocations Policy.

35.0 Assignments

35.1 A tenancy can only be assigned in three ways

- a) to someone who would qualify as a successor;
- b) by way of mutual exchange under s91 Housing Act 1985; or
- c) following an order of the court under a number of provisions concerning family law.

36.0 Assignment to a potential successor

- 36.1 In 35.1 a) above the proposed assignee would have to satisfy the criteria in s87 Housing Act 1985.
- 36.2 Assignments to potential successors must be by deed but this necessity may be avoided if the assignment is evidenced in writing.
- 36.3 The provisions under 35.1 a) above do not apply when the tenancy has been assigned.
- 36.4 Assignments by way of exchange are allowed under s92 Housing Act 1985.

37.0 Mutual exchanges

- 37.1 A secure tenant may assign the tenancy to another secure tenant. Both tenants need the written permission of their landlord. This permission will not be unreasonably withheld except on one or more specific grounds.
- 37.2 The Council will reply to a request to assign by way of mutual exchange within 42 days of receiving the request and will inform the tenant of the outcome and, if permission is not given, the reason for refusal.
- 37.3 The Council may refuse consent on the following grounds which are set out in Schedule 3 of the Housing Act 1985. These apply to any party to the exchange.
 - a) the tenant is, or will be on a specified date, obliged to give up possession following a court order; or
 - b) proceedings have begun for possession of the property under one or more of grounds in Part 1 Schedule 2 Housing Act 1985 which are:
 - i. rent has not been paid or a tenancy condition has been broken.
 - ii. nuisance or annoyance has been caused or the property has been used for immoral or illegal purposes.
 - iii. due to the neglect of the tenant the condition of the property and /or the furniture has been allowed to deteriorate.
 - iv. the tenant obtained the tenancy by knowingly and recklessly making a false statement.
 - v. the tenant or previous tenant who was a member of their family obtained the tenancy by way of mutual exchange and a premium was paid.

- vi. the outgoing tenant's property is substantially larger than the incoming tenant needs, this is regarded as two or more bedrooms unoccupied;
- vii. the outgoing tenant's property is not reasonably suitable to the needs of the incoming tenant i.e. the exchange would result in overcrowding;
- viii. the property is used mainly for purposes other than housing and was let to the tenant by Wolverhampton City Council in connection with their employment;
- ix. the property was either purpose built for, or has been adapted to make it suitable for, occupation by a physically disabled person and, if the exchange were allowed, there would be no such person living there;
or
- x. the property is one of a group of properties which are let to people with special needs and a social service or special facility is provided nearby i.e. sheltered schemes.

37.4 As stated in 37.1 above while permission will not be unreasonably withheld by the Council it may impose conditions on the consent for example, clearing rent arrears, making good damage or rectifying any other breach of the tenancy agreement not covered in 37.3b above.

37.5 Permission will not be unreasonably withheld for a Council or RP tenant who has accrued rent arrears if their proposed move is due to the financial hardships of Welfare Reform making their rent unaffordable. Tenants must:

- a. be exchanging their property for smaller, more affordable accommodation.
- b. have reduced the debt over a 3-month period and have a signed repayment plan. Council tenants must meet certain criteria:
 - i. the debt owed at the current property will be transferred to the new tenancy and any agreement to discharge the remaining debt will become a condition of the new tenancy;
 - ii. will be subject to a full income and expenditure exercise by/on behalf of their managing agent where a repayment plan will be agreed with the tenant

37.6 Whilst a request to exchange with a tenant of a property designated for a certain age group cannot lawfully be refused, the incoming tenant will be made aware of the designation and the expectations of other tenants. (See Section 37)

37.7 Once the necessary permissions have been given the exchange will take place on the following Monday.

37.8 If a tenant feels that permission has been refused unreasonably or that a condition has been imposed unreasonably they can ask for a review of the decision. (See Reviews)

Part 5

38.0 Designated Properties

38.1 Particular blocks of flats are designated for older households as set out within the ‘Designated Properties Local Lettings Plan’, which is an addendum to the Allocations Policy. The local lettings plan contains the detail on the properties that are age designated, eligibility and the process for selection of offers on these properties.

38.2 Periodic reviews of designations may be undertaken. This can result in changes being made to the local lettings plan to ensure that age designations are fit for purpose and meet their original aim as well as allowing the Council to react to changes in supply and demand.

38.3 For further detail please refer to the ‘Designated Properties Local Lettings Plan’.

39.0 Property Eligibilities

39.1 The following table provides a breakdown of what household types are eligible for the different property types:

Property Type	Household Criteria
Studio Flat, General Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single person • Couple
1 Bedroom Bungalow, General Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single person over 60 • Couple over 60 • Single person or couple assessed as requiring a bungalow due to disabilities
1 Bedroom Flat, General Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single person • Couple
2 Bedroom Bungalow, General Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 adults over 60 that require a bedroom each • Couple over 60 • Couple over 60 moving with one adult • Single person over 60 • Single person over 60 moving with 1 adult • Single person, couple or family assessed as requiring a bungalow due to disabilities
2 Bedroom Flat, General Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 adults that require a bedroom each • Couple • Couple moving with one adult • Family that requires a minimum of 2 bedrooms • Single person

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single person moving with 1 adult
2 Bedroom House, General Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family that requires a minimum of 2 bedrooms
2 Bedroom Maisonette, General Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 adults that require a bedroom each • Couple • Couple moving with one adult • Family that requires a minimum of 2 bedrooms • Single person • Single person moving with 1 adult
2 Bedroom Parlour House, General Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family that requires a minimum of 2 bedrooms
3 Bedroom Bungalow, General Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Couple over 60 moving with 2 adults • Single person over 60 moving with 2 adults • Single person, couple or family assessed as requiring a 3-bedroom bungalow due to disabilities
3 Bedroom Flat, General Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Couple moving with 2 adults • Family that requires a minimum of 2 bedrooms • Family that requires a minimum of 3 bedrooms • Family with an adult requiring a minimum of 3 bedrooms • Single person moving with 2 adults
3 Bedroom House, General Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family that requires a minimum of 3 bedrooms • Family with an adult requiring a minimum of 3 bedrooms
3 Bedroom Maisonette General Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Couple moving with 2 adults • Family that requires a minimum of 2 bedrooms • Family that requires a minimum of 3 bedrooms • Family with an adult requiring a minimum of 3 bedrooms • Single person moving with 2 adults
3 Bedroom Parlour House, General Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family that requires a minimum of 3 bedrooms • Family that requires a minimum of 4 bedrooms • Family with an adult/adults requiring a minimum of 3 bedrooms • Family with an adult/adult requiring a minimum of 4 bedrooms
4 Bedroom House, General Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family that requires a minimum of 4 bedrooms • Family with an adult/adult requiring a minimum of 4 bedrooms
4 Bedroom Parlour House, General Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family that requires a minimum of 4 bedrooms • Family with an adult/adult requiring a minimum of 4 bedrooms • Family that requires 5 or more bedrooms • Family with an adult/adult requiring a minimum of 5+ bedrooms
5 Bedroom House, General Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family that requires 5 or more bedrooms • Family with an adult/adult requiring a minimum of 5+ bedrooms
6 Bedroom House, General Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family that requires 5 or more bedrooms

- | | |
|--|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Family with an adult/adult requiring a minimum of 5+ bedrooms |
|--|---|

39.2 Families are defined as a single person or couple with a child under the age of 21 who lives with them on a full-time basis. Families also include applicants who are over 3 months pregnant.

39.3 Please note the following property types will give priority to specific groups of applicants:

- Age designated blocks – In line with the Age Designated LLP
- Bungalows – Applicants over 60 or those with an immediate need for a fully adapted or purpose built property or have a progressive degenerative disease and their needs are such they will require a fully adapted/purpose built property imminently.
- Ground floor flats – Those with a mobility requirement for level access housing.

39.4 In certain cases the Council and its Managing Agents will allow the largest families that are significantly overcrowded to improve their housing situation by moving to property where they may still over-occupy but to a lesser extent than before. This would be on a case by case basis with the approval of a senior Council housing officer.

Part 6

Glossary

1) Intentionally homeless

Being 'intentionally homeless' means that your homelessness, or threatened homelessness, was caused by something that you deliberately did or failed to do.

2) Main duty

The main housing duty is a duty to provide temporary accommodation until such time as the duty is ended.

3) Multi-agency panel

Multi-agency panel consists of a group of professional people from different organisations e.g. the Council, the Police, Social Care etc. to make a joint decision.

4) Prevention duty

Where a local authority is satisfied that an applicant is threatened with homelessness and eligible, it must take reasonable steps to help the applicant secure that accommodation does not cease to be available for her/his

occupation.

5) Priority need

An individual who would be more vulnerable than other applicants if they were made homeless e.g. families with children.

6) Relief Duty

Where the council is satisfied that an applicant is homeless and eligible, it must take reasonable steps to help the applicant secure that accommodation becomes available for at least six months.

7) Single referral forum

The process of directing or redirecting an individual to the appropriate specialist or agency.

8) Unintentionally homeless

Being unintentionally homeless means that your homelessness, or threatened homelessness, was not caused by something that you deliberately did or failed to do.

Housing Allocations Policy

Summary of consultation findings

Introduction

This report outlines the feedback and response from the internal and external consultation on the draft Housing Allocations Policy, which ran across September and October 2019 (including public consultation 3 September 2019 – 25 October 2019).

The first draft of the policy was developed based on the discussions of the Allocations Policy Steering Group, which met seven times between February and June 2019 and included membership from Housing Strategy, Wolverhampton Homes and the City's four Tenant Management Organisations.

The draft policy has been further refined based on internal, stakeholder and public consultation including:

Presenting the draft policy at Council Leadership meeting and a range of forums, providing the opportunity for face to face discussion and feedback including:

Housing, Adults, Children's, Public Health and Education Leadership Teams, Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel, Equalities Advisory Group, Wolverhampton Federation of Tenants Association, Children and Families Together Board, Bushbury Hill EMB Board, Dovecotes TMO Board, Better Homes Board, Wolverhampton Homes Lettings, Housing Options and Management team meetings, Rough Sleeper Operational Group, the Youth Council and Care Leavers Forum.

Emails and letters sent to internal and external stakeholders including all Councillors, Local MPs, Registered Providers, Voluntary Sector Organisations, The Armed Forces Covenant, Domestic Violence Forum and a sample of 1,000 applicants currently on the Housing Register offering the opportunity for them to feedback directly to the Housing Strategy team including face to face if preferred.

An online survey was made available to stakeholders and members of the public, and was promoted through various means, with hard copies available on request. 213 responses were received from the online consultation of which 88% identified themselves as residents.

The key messages resulting from the consultation are summarised in the below tables, having been incorporated into a revised Housing Allocations Policy.

Table 1: Public Consultation Feedback

Theme	Feedback	Response
Buy Back Programme	Consultation highlighted that there is a need on occasions to directly allocate properties purchased by the Council to the current occupants where the property has been purchased for the purposes of estate redevelopment and renewal.	Section 24 of the policy has been added which states: “The Council reserves the right to directly allocate properties which have been purchased in cases of for example estate regeneration, where this has been subject to separate Cabinet approval.”
Lesser Preference	There are currently circumstances where an applicant’s housing need is assessed but they are awarded ‘lesser preference’ and placed into the Band 4, the least priority for housing. Examples include having debt over £400, having failed a pre-leaving inspection and where they have been involved in unacceptable behaviour such as anti-social behaviour. Under the proposed policy, applicants with lesser preference would be demoted one priority band, meaning an applicant with significant lesser preference who showed no intentions of adhering to a repayment plan could still be allocated a property in certain situations.	The policy has been updated and applicants with lesser preference will now have their application suspended until the affected criteria has been resolved or a repayment plan has been adhered to for at least 3 months. This does not apply to applicants in the Emergency Plus or Emergency Bands.
Emergency + Band	While consultees were supportive of the creation of the Emergency Plus Band, which is a new band that would see a level of need above the current highest priority for applicants with a full homelessness duty who are also care leavers, members of the armed forces, require a substantially adapted property, severely overcrowded or anyone who requires immediate rehousing due to a significant threat to life, some responses felt that Rightsizing (overcrowding) should not be a qualifying criterion as this was adequately covered in other bands.	Category A Rightsizing has been removed from the Band and is covered elsewhere in the priority Bands.

Band 1	With the introduction of the Emergency Band + and removal of Band 4, concerns were raised that applicants in Band 1 would be significantly disadvantaged by the 10% preference of all lets that is given to Bands 2 and 3.	The 10% quota to lower priority bands has been redesigned, which now sees 5% of properties allocated to Band 1 and another 5% allocated to Band 2 and 3.
Medical Reviews	Concerns were raised that the policy requires applicants to provide medical evidence every 6 months. Medical professionals now charge patients for medical evidence; this element of the policy could therefore potentially place applicants into financial hardship.	The requirement for updated evidence every 6 months has been removed from the policy.

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Scrutiny Work Programme

Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel Work Programme

The Panel will have responsibility for Scrutiny functions as they relate to: -

Operational Services, Public Realm, Commercial Services, Regulatory Services (policy), City Housing, Planning (policy), Strategic Transport, Keeping the city clean, Keeping the city moving, Improving the city housing offer and Strategic Asset Management.

Date of Meeting	Item Description	Lead Report Author	Notes
30 January 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocation Policy – Pre-Decision on actual policy 	Mila Simpson / Henry Gregory	
19 March 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Processes for obtaining s.106 money including chasing once agreed • Impact of Average Speed Cameras • Update on plans for the Hickman Avenue Site and potential changes to Willenhall Road • Homelessness 	Stephen Alexander John Roseblade Ross Cook Anthony Walker / Jenny Lewington	As requested by Cllr Waite at Scrutiny Board

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wolverhampton Homes Business Plan Annual Update Quarter 4		
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Potential Future Items: -

1. First meeting of new Municipal Year - One item covering Strategy for exploiting the most out of the Canal Network, Movement for Growth Consultation, £23 million funding secured in the West Midlands Region for cycling investment
2. Councillor Portal Development (as requested by Portfolio Holder during Q & A Session) (Possible invitation to a meeting of Our Council Scrutiny Panel).
3. Walsall Housing Growth Corridor – Second Meeting in new Municipal Year
4. WV Living Briefing Note – Second Meeting in new Municipal Year