

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET

17 MARCH 2011

SUBJECT:	APPROVAL OF THE SUB-REGIONAL CHOICE BASED LETTINGS JOINT ALLOCATIONS SCHEME
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL
REPORT OF:	KEVIN ADDERLEY, INTERIM DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	CLLR CHRIS BLAKELEY
KEY DECISION	YES

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 At it's meeting on 9 December 2010, Cabinet approved the recommendation of the Living in Wirral Task Force and instructed the interim Director of Corporate Services to develop a sub-regional Choice Based Lettings Scheme in Merseyside. This report outlines the proposed Sub Regional Choice Based Lettings Allocations Scheme (attached as Appendix 1), to be known as Property Pool Plus, for approval by Cabinet following a widespread consultation on the draft with stakeholders.
- 1.2 The 1996 Housing Act (as amended by the 2002 Homelessness Act) requires local housing authorities to make all it's housing allocations and nominations in accordance with an Allocations Scheme. The Allocations Scheme includes the criteria that the Authorities use to assess eligibility and to prioritise housing applicants for the social housing the Council has available through nominations to its partner landlords. The Housing Act 1996 and the Homelessness Act 2002 state that local authority allocation schemes must afford reasonable preference to certain categories of persons over those with no reasonable preference.
- 1.3 The proposed scheme for adoption by Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton and Wirral Councils seeks to ensure that housing is allocated to those in greatest need and also to contribute to the development of balanced communities and sustainable regeneration, including encouraging current and future social housing tenants into employment. It has been designed to offer a simple, accessible service for customers as well as creating efficiencies for partner organisations. Efficiencies in particular for Wirral will be realised through the purchase of a new shared IT system to take advantage of technologies introduced since choice based lettings was originally developed in Wirral in 2004.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Cabinet approves the proposed sub-regional allocations scheme for implementation by the sub-regional authority partners

3.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The proposed scheme is a result of widespread consultation with stakeholders and will make the best use of housing stock in Wirral ensuring that housing is available to those in housing need whilst providing an incentive to work.

4.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 Since the previous report to Members (virtual Cabinet report 27 May 2010) detailing the draft allocation scheme for consultation, which was approved by each of the partner Councils, officers have continued to work with Merseyside partners on the proposals to develop a sub-regional Choice Based Lettings (CBL) scheme and carried out a widespread consultation. This was following the award of £100,000 in 2008 by Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) from the Regional Choice Fund for the development of such a scheme by Liverpool, Knowsley and Wirral Councils. In December 2009, DCLG awarded a further £67,000 to enable Halton and Sefton to join the Merseyside scheme.
- 4.2 Approximately 2,000 social housing lets per year are made in Wirral and the Wirralhomes partner landlords let at least 90% of their vacancies through the Wirralhomes CBL service. In December 2010 there were 13,822 applicants on the Wirralhomes register, a reduction from 22,430 at the peak in 2010 after a renewal process had been carried out. This compares with 12,978 applications following the previous renewal exercise in 2008, and represents a 6.5% increase in applications on the register in two years.
- 4.3 Currently in Wirral, urgent need priority is awarded to applicants in the reasonable preference groups – medical and welfare needs, overcrowding, displacement due to regeneration, violence and harassment and under occupation. In December 2010, only 897 applicants, that is 6.5%, were registered with an urgent need priority. The vast majority (93.5%) of the applicants on the Wirral housing register therefore have no priority award but are considered for housing according to the length of time they have been waiting. These households do not necessarily have a housing need but want to move for other reasons such as affordability, security of tenure or type of property.
- 4.4 In Wirral two thirds of properties are advertised giving preference to applicants with urgent need priority, but due to the choice exercised by those applicants, less than 40% of tenancies are currently granted to applicants who have urgent need priority; most properties (64% in 2008-09) are allocated to applicants outside the urgent need groups according to the length of time they have been waiting. Waiting times across Wirral vary according to the type of accommodation on offer and the area in which it is located.
- 4.5 Applicants who have been accepted by Wirral Council as homeless and to whom the Council owes a full housing duty are currently housed outside the Wirralhomes service, by way of direct nominations. Fewer than 2% of allocations in 2009-10 were to such homeless applicants. Because of the preventative approach now taken to homelessness in Wirral, the number of homeless acceptances fell by 89% from 496 in 2007-07 to 51 in 2009-10. The 2007 independent Wirral Homeless Review and the 2008 Wirralhomes

Review by Heriot Watt University both recommended that Homelessness is brought within the CBL system, for equality reasons and to give more choice to homeless applicants about where they live thereby leading to greater tenancy sustainability. The government is intending that in future Councils will be able to discharge their duty to homeless applicants through an offer in the private rented sector.

The Proposed Policy

4.6 In general the consultation has resulted in minor changes being applied to the draft policy. However there are two areas which generated detailed debate and have led to two changes in the policy from the draft presented to Cabinet in May 2010. These are:

- the effect that a poor tenancy history of rent arrears or anti-social behaviour should have on a person's housing application and
- the award of a priority for housing to people who are working but otherwise not in housing need.

4.7 These changes have resulted in the number of priority Bands for applicants on the Housing Register changing from four (A, B, C and D) in the policy which was consulted upon, to six (A, B, C, D, E and F) in the proposal presented for approval by the five partner local authorities now. This is a change from the current Wirralhomes policy which in effect has 3 priority need bands. The proposed bands are given in table 1:

Table 1: Proposed banding in sub-regional choice based lettings scheme

BAND	REASON FOR HOUSING NEED
BAND A URGENT PRIORITY	Health/Welfare (Urgent) Statutory Homeless (Priority Need and Unintentional) Regeneration Overcrowded (2 or more bedrooms)
BAND B HIGH PRIORITY	Health / Welfare (High) Overcrowded (1 bedroom) Disrepair Under occupation
BAND C MEDIUM PRIORITY	Health/Welfare (Medium) Homeless (No priority need) Homeless (Priority Need and Intentional) Living with family and friends
BAND D LOW PRIORITY	No assessed housing need and in employment
BAND E NO PRIORITY	No assessed housing need and not in employment
BAND F REDUCED PRIORITY	Reduced preference status due to unacceptable behaviour

Ineligibility due to unacceptable behaviour and reduced preference

- 4.8 In Wirral 88% of respondents felt that rent arrears or anti social behaviour should result in applicants being given reduced opportunity for rehousing: with 48% saying they should and 40% saying they should but only in severe cases. This response was replicated in the other local authority areas.
- 4.9 In order to comply with the statutory guidance on the treatment of applicants with a poor tenancy history, the local authority partners are now proposing that applicants with a poor tenancy history will be treated in two different ways according to the severity of their previous unacceptable behaviour.
- 4.10 Firstly, the local authority can decide that an applicant is to be treated as ineligible for an allocation of housing (Section 160 (7) Housing Act 1996) if they are satisfied that the applicant, or a member of their household, has been guilty of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable to be a tenant, and at the time their application is considered, the applicant or a member of their household is unsuitable to be a tenant by reason of that behaviour. In this case the applicant will be classed as ineligible to join the housing register. There will be the right to appeal and review which is detailed in the draft policy.
- 4.11 Secondly, for less serious behaviour such as lower rent arrears or a history of minor anti social behaviour which was not serious enough to warrant their exclusion from the register, the applicant will be afforded "Reduced Preference" and placed into priority Band F until they have addressed their rent arrears or can demonstrate that their behaviour has improved. In the meantime they will be able to apply for properties but will have very little preference for those properties compared with other applicants. Whilst they are in Band F, they will be able to accrue waiting time on the register.

Preference to applicants in employment

- 4.12 The other area in which the proposed policy has changed from the consultation draft is with respect to the employment status of applicants. This was consulted on initially following a request from Knowsley and the attitude of stakeholders towards giving preference to households who are working and on a low income was measured. In Halton, Liverpool and Wirral, 90%, 63% and 76% of respondents respectively felt that additional priority should be given to applicants who are employed on a low income and this proposal was also well-liked by the stakeholders. This policy is in accordance with the previous Government's Fair and Flexible guidance and the ongoing agenda to encourage applicants and tenants into employment. The Government is currently consulting on the future of social housing tenancies and it is felt that this proposed policy is in accordance with any plans for flexible social tenancies according to the housing need and employment status of applicants and tenants. This can be seen as particularly appropriate in Wirral where currently over 60% of properties are allocated to applicants who are not in a housing need category.
- 4.13 The proposal for the sub-regional scheme is that the employment status of applicants will only be taken into consideration for those with no housing need. This will give first preference to those in housing need, but then give

preference to applicants and tenants who are not in housing need but are working, over applicants and tenants who are not in housing need but who are not working. This will ensure that those in housing need get first preference for housing but then give preference to applicants and tenants who are working and contributing to the regional economy and encourage people who can, to work. This is to encourage applicants and tenants into employment, to help create mixed and sustainable communities and to acknowledge applicants and tenants who are contributing to the sub-regional economy. Applicants with no housing need but who are employed will be placed into Band D (Low Priority) and applicants with no housing need who are not working will be placed in Band E (No Priority).

- 4.14 For the purpose of the scheme, employment will mean paid employment of over 16 hours per week which has been carried out for the last 9 months. This proposal has been considered against equality requirements and will be closely monitored. It was felt that the proposal could adversely affect older people or those with a disability. In mitigation, there is a high availability of accommodation designated for older people in Wirral. For people with a disability they are likely to be in urgent need groups for health and welfare reasons.
- 4.15 In order to reduce running costs it is proposed that a limit of earnings will not be applied to this preference group in the first instance, but this will be monitored and may be affected by future legislation. An earnings limit is not currently applied to Wirralhomes applicants however Scheme Landlords may take the financial circumstances of applicants into account and decline a nomination through the scheme if they consider that the applicant has the financial means to resolve their own housing situation.
- 4.16 The option to give preference to applicants making a community contribution through unpaid work or on employment training was less popular with respondents and also due to the need to reduce ongoing staffing costs and bureaucracy and the difficulty in distinguishing between different types voluntary activity and training courses, it is not proposed to give priority to such applicants in the scheme.

Bedroom standard

- 4.17 To bring the bedroom standard for overcrowding into line with the CLG bedroom standard and the standard for Local Housing Allowance, the age at which children of the opposite sex can share a bedroom has been raised from 8 to 9. In Wirral there are currently 110 applicants with urgent need status for overcrowding but no distinction is made on whether they are overcrowded by 1 or 2 or more bedrooms. In the proposed policy, households which are overcrowded by 2 or more bedrooms will be placed in the top priority band and therefore it is not expected that this change will disadvantage those most severely overcrowded.

Cross Boundary moves and Local Connection

- 4.18 The proposed scheme, whilst running on one shared computer system and a common allocations policy, will allow each local authority to operate sub-

regional CBL in a way which suits each local authority's mode of operation and needs.

- 4.19 Scheme Partners have agreed that a maximum of 5% of all properties advertised through the Scheme will be let to applicants living in another partner Local Authority Area. Wirralhomes currently operates an open register which anyone can join, Priority is normally only awarded to applicants who can demonstrate a local connection and need to move to Wirral for family support. In the year 2009-10 a total of 3.9% of lettings were to households from outside the Wirral area. Only 1.6% of lettings were to people from other parts of Merseyside.
- 4.20 In order to give reasonable preference to local residents, in the sub-regional scheme, priority for rehousing within each Local Authority Area will take into consideration any local connection within that area.
- 4.21 To demonstrate a local connection with a Local Authority Area, an applicant must satisfy at least one of the following criteria;
- Have lived in the Local Authority Area for 6 months out of the last 12 months or 3 years out of the last 5 years;
 - Have a permanent job in the Local Authority Area;
 - Have a close family association (parent, adult child or adult brother/sister) who is currently living in the Local Authority Area and have done so for more than 5 years;
 - Have a need to be in a specific Local Authority Area to be near to a particular health facility for long term treatment;
 - Have a need to be in a specific Local Authority Area to give or receive support;
- 4.22 Unless an applicant needs to move to another area for safety reasons, priority due to Statutory Homeless (Unintentionally) and Regeneration in Band A will be awarded for the applicant's current Local Authority Area only. With these exceptions applicants in Bands A, B, C and D will be awarded that priority for the Local Authority Areas for which they can demonstrate a local connection. Applicants in Bands E and F may apply for vacancies in all Scheme Areas and local connection will not be taken into consideration. Those applicants with a housing need who live outside the combined Scheme Area may be considered for a priority Band but only if they can demonstrate a local connection with one of the Local Authority areas and the priority will apply only to vacancies in that Local Authority Area.
- 4.23 Applicants in Bands A, B, C and D may apply for vacancies in Scheme Areas other than those with which they have a local connection, but their housing need will not be taken into consideration and they will be considered to be in Band E when bidding for those vacancies. Those applicants who do not have a local connection with any Local Authority in the Scheme Area will be placed in Band E. An exception to this would be a need to move to another area for safety reasons.

- 4.24 A summary of the areas where the policy has changed from the one presented to Cabinet in May are as follows:

	Changes
Chapter 1	Greater clarity to the legal wording and partnership arrangements
Chapter 2	Improved wording regarding sheltered, extra care and adapted accommodation
Chapter 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ineligibility divided into immigration status and unacceptable behaviour making one unsuitable to be a tenant • Unacceptable behaviour explained more fully • Section on 16/17 year olds amended • Section on offenders/ex-offenders added • Renewal procedure explained more fully
Chapter 4	Suspensions for unacceptable behaviour changed to ineligibility and reduced preference and greater clarity on all aspects of this
Chapter 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Banding altered from 4 to 6 Bands to take into account applicants without housing need who are working and those with Reduced Preference status • Details of date of entry into Bands amended and clarified • Under-occupation separated from Health/Welfare • Homeless not in Priority Need and Intentional homeless Priority Need added to Band C • Band D Changed to general needs and working • Band E Added for general needs not working • Band F Added for Reduced Preference status • Wording for Cross Boundary mobility amended for clarity • Bedroom standard altered to CLG standard
Chapter 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A guide indicating the size and type of property an applicant can apply for has been added • The number of reasonable offers an applicant can receive has been made into a table
Chapter 7	None
Chapter 8	Slight changes in wording

5.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 5.1 The current Wirralhomes service is relatively expensive for member RSLs and does not represent value for money. Without a new system, there is a high risk that member RSLs will seek a service elsewhere.
- 5.2 If one or more Councils decide not to join the sub regional scheme, the costs to Wirral will be higher. Members have agreed that Wirral go ahead with the scheme if 3 other Merseyside authorities commit to the scheme. If approval is not gained from this many authorities, a further report will be brought to Cabinet. Approval of the proposed sub-regional allocation scheme is to be sought from each local authority through their respective decision making processes with the following scheduled dates for decision:

- Halton 3rd March 2011
- Sefton 3rd March 2011
- Knowsley 9th March 2011
- Liverpool 9th March 2011
- Wirral 17th March 2011

6.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 6.1 The Wirralhomes review carried out by Heriot Watt University in 2008 considered several options for the service. A sub-regional approach brings benefits in terms of reduced initial capital costs and a more accessible and transparent service for customers.

7.0 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 Since May 2010, the 5 local authorities in the partnership Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton and Wirral have focussed on the consultation on the draft shared allocations policy in accordance with statutory guidance. Each local authority has carried out consultation with its stakeholders according to local practice. In Wirral that consultation ran from 23 August to 15 November 2010 and included:

- A letter sent to 20,477 applicants on the Wirralhomes housing register (as part of the annual renewals process) explaining the consultation and how to take part
- A notice on the Wirralhomes advert advising applicants that a consultation was taking place and how to be involved
- A questionnaire on the Council website
- A consultation event in Wallasey Town Hall attended by 48 stakeholders from a list of 64 invitees
- A questionnaire sent to 120 stakeholders including other Council Departments, the PCT, voluntary and community groups, landlords and accommodation, advice and support agencies
- A letter sent to all Wirral Councillors and MPs explaining the consultation and how to take part

- 7.2 The other partner local authorities also undertook widespread consultation exercises; in Halton and Knowsley these included consultation on choice based lettings itself which is new to those areas.

- 7.3 The Wirral consultation document and questionnaire outlined the aims and objectives of the proposed scheme and how it would be operated in each local authority area including advertising, bidding, support for vulnerable applicants and local connection criteria. It included a list of frequently asked questions and answers. It outlined the proposal to have 4 Priority bands and which housing need category would be in each band. The questionnaire asked if respondents agreed that the banding system gave priority to those in housing need and whether that priority was at the right level. It asked stakeholders what effect a poor tenancy history with respect to rent arrears or anti social behaviour should have on an applicant's priority. Following

Government statutory guidance on social housing allocations in England “Fair and Flexible” issued in December 2009, it also asked respondents whether they thought that additional priority should be given to applicants who were working and on a low income, on employment training or doing community voluntary work.

- 7.4 The Wirral consultation event held in Wallasey Town Hall asked more detailed questions through 4 focus groups on
- the proposed priority banding scheme,
 - reduced opportunity for housing due to a history of rent arrears or anti-social behaviour,
 - practical details about the scheme including setting quotas for different priority bands including those with no priority, the number of bids and refusals applicants can make, local connection and cross boundary mobility
 - homelessness, moving on from supported accommodation (hostels) and time-limiting the award of priority need status

Consultation Responses

- 7.5 The detailed results of the consultation in all the local authority areas can be found on the Wirral website. The Wirral consultation resulted in 127 completed questionnaires: 42 of these were completed on line and 85 were submitted on paper; 103 were from Wirralhomes applicants and 12 were from stakeholders or organisations with an interest in choice based lettings. The respondents were nearly equally split between males and females, 90% were heterosexual, 30% considered themselves to have a disability, 95% were White British, 11% were aged 16 to 17 and one third were in the age group 18 to 24 compared with 14% aged 35 to 44 and 14% aged 45 to 54. The 48 attendees at the stakeholder event represented at least 25 different organisations and included social landlords, tenants, Councillors and support agencies.

8.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

- 8.1 Voluntary, community and faith groups advocating for and supporting applicants will find the new scheme provides a more accessible and clearly defined service.

9.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

- 9.1 The proposed system will require a contribution for IT acquisition and set-up costs from the Council of £51,100 if 5 local authorities take part and £60,100 if 4 local authorities take part in the sub-regional scheme. This can be met from an existing provision set aside for this purpose and is significantly less than would be required if the Council proceeded independently outside the sub-regional framework.
- 9.2 The annual running costs for Wirralhomes are currently in the order of £387,000. The projected budget for the proposed system is £330,900 giving a saving of £56,100. At present the RSLs pay 77% of the Wirralhomes costs and the Council pays 23% but this is based on historical charging rather than

function. A number of cost sharing options have been considered and sharing the total costs of operating a housing register equally between the Council and the RSLs, and assigning all the costs associated with letting properties to the RSLs, has resulted in a division of the overall costs as 74% for the RSLs and 26% to the Council. The new system will therefore bring a small saving in annual running costs to the Council, reducing the Council contribution from £90,000 per annum to approximately £86,000. The saving to the RSLs will be greater and bring their annual charges in line with modern, efficient systems elsewhere.

- 9.3 In addition the new web based system is expected to bring savings to the One Stop Shops (OSSs) through greater use of technology. These savings are expected to grow as internet penetration and user knowledge of the system increase. This has been experienced by other areas where web-based systems have already been introduced. Annual benchmarking shows that where on-line bidding is available, the percentage of bids placed in this way ranges from 40% to 78%, while the percentage of bids taken face-to-face is typically 10% or fewer. Currently, around 38% of Wirralhomes bids are made face to face at OSSs
- 9.4 The proposed system, once fully implemented, will bring staffing savings of 2 posts from the existing team of 9.5 full time equivalent staff. This would be dealt with through existing Council procedures. The staff savings will be possible due to the increased level of automation (automatic telephone and on-line bidding and registrations) of the proposed system compared with the current labour intensive, more manual system (as detailed above in item 9.2). It is envisaged that these savings will be made within 3 months of the implementation of the new system to allow for a transition period. The current project plan has a go-live target for Wirral of December 2011.

10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The scheme has been designed to comply with the 1996 Housing Act (as amended by the 2002 Homelessness Act) which requires that local authority allocation schemes must afford reasonable preference to certain categories of persons over those with no reasonable preference

11.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 Wirralhomes provides a service for all members of the community regardless of age, gender, disability, ethnic background, faith or sexual orientation and monitors clients in these groups. A new IT system is needed for Wirralhomes to improve customer access to the service for all members of the community. The Wirralhomes lettings policy aims to let affordable social housing primarily to those in need and secondly to those with an aspiration to move. The new draft policy for Merseyside aims to do the same with the addition that it will encourage people who can to become economically active by awarding some preference for an allocation to those who are in employment, but only after those in housing need have been considered.

- 11.2 An Equality Impact Assessment on the proposed scheme has been undertaken and an action plan developed to mitigate any possible areas of concern. The draft scheme was sent to a wide range of organisations representing minority and ethnic groups for their comments during the consultation period, and these were taken into account in amending the proposals for the scheme. Once implemented the scheme will be monitored and reviewed to ensure no adverse consequences to minority groups arise.

12.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 The proposed scheme is a web based system with automatic telephone options which will reduce the need for customers to travel to our offices and will reduce the use of paper based forms. However face to face and paper based forms will still be available for customers who prefer these methods of engagement.

13.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 CBL has been shown to contribute to sustainable communities through reducing turnover and increasing tenants' commitment to their property through their exercise of choice, when compared with a traditional officer led "allocation" process.

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APPENDICES

Attached: PROPERTY POOL PLUS Sub Regional Choice Based Lettings Allocations Scheme

REFERENCE MATERIAL

Review of Wirralhomes by Heriot Watt University 2008 can be found in the Members' library

SUBJECT HISTORY

Council Meeting	Date
Cabinet: DEVELOPMENT OF SUB-REGIONAL CHOICE BASED LETTINGS SCHEME	September 2009
Cabinet: DEVELOPMENT OF SUB-REGIONAL CHOICE BASED LETTINGS SCHEME	May 2010

PROPERTY POOL PLUS

Sub Regional

Choice Based Lettings

Allocations Scheme

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

1.1	Introduction	6
1.2	Aims and principles of the sub regional scheme	7
1.3	Statement of choice	8
1.4	The legal framework	9
1.5	Equality and diversity	9
1.6	Information sharing, confidentiality and data protection	10

CHAPTER 2

2.1	Allocations and nominations	11
2.2	Local letting plans	11
2.3	Housing association direct lets	11
2.4	Sheltered accommodation	12
2.5	Extra care housing	12
2.6	Adapted Properties	12
2.7	Target setting and quotas	13

CHAPTER 3

3.1	Registration on the Property Pool Plus scheme	14
3.2	Assistance for vulnerable applicants	14
3.3	Who can apply for accommodation?	14
3.4	Ineligibility (Immigration status)	14
3.5	Ineligibility (Unacceptable behaviour)	15
3.6	16 and 17 year olds	16
3.7	Councillors, board members, employees and close relatives	17
3.8	Offenders and ex-offenders	17
3.9	The Property Pool Plus register	17
3.10	Assessment of an application	18
3.11	Change in circumstances	19
3.12	Renewal of applications	19
3.13	Cancelled applications	20

CHAPTER 4

4.1	Applicants with a history of unacceptable behaviour	21
4.2	Applications which are ineligible due to unacceptable behaviour	21
4.3	Notifying applicants who are classed as ineligible due to unacceptable behaviour	23
4.4	Reduced Preference Status	23
4.5	Modifying unacceptable behaviour including rent arrears	24

CHAPTER 5

5.1	Assessment of housing need	26
5.2	Prioritising applications within bands	27
5.3	Date of entry into Band	27
5.4	Band A – Urgent Priority	29
5.5	Band B – High Priority	31
5.6	Band C – Medium Priority	32
5.7	Band D – Low priority	33
5.8	Band E – No priority	33
5.9	Band F – Reduced Priority	33
5.10	Local Connection	33
5.11	Cross Boundary Mobility	34
5.12	Bedroom Standard	35
5.13	Staying contact with children	35

CHAPTER 6

6.1	Advertising vacant properties	36
6.2	Bidding for vacancies	36
6.3	Short listing of applications	37
6.4	Reasons why an applicant may be bypassed for an offer	38
6.5	Number of offers	39
6.6	Feedback on Lettings	40

CHAPTER 7

7.1	Information and advice	41
7.2	Contact details	41
7.3	Support services	41
7.4	To prevent homelessness	42
7.5	Independent advice	42

CHAPTER 8

8.1	Review of decisions	43
8.2	Request for a review of a Registration Decision	43
8.3	Request for a review of a selection process decision	44

CHAPTER 1

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 The following Councils are members of a Sub Regional Choice Based Lettings Scheme, known as Property Pool Plus, and have adopted this common allocations scheme (as required by the Housing Act 1996 amended by the Homelessness Act 2002):

Halton Borough Council
Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Liverpool City Council
Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council
Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council

The five Councils are known as the Scheme Councils.

- 1.1.2 The scheme applies to all properties available to the Scheme Councils for nomination purposes.
- 1.1.3 The Scheme Councils also endorse the use of this policy by Housing Associations for lettings for which the Scheme Councils do not have nomination rights.
- 1.1.4 The Housing Associations, known as the Scheme Landlords, who have agreed to participate are listed below.

Arena Housing Association
Beechwood and Ballantyne Community Housing Association
Cobalt Housing
Cosmopolitan Housing
Contour Housing
Crosby Housing Association
Guinness Northern Counties
Halton Housing Trust
Knowsley Housing Trust
Leasowe Community Homes
Liverpool Mutual Homes
Liverpool Housing Trust
One Vision Housing
Pierhead Housing Association
Plus Dane Group
RegendaFirst
Riverside/ECHG
South Liverpool Housing
Venture Housing Association
Villages Housing
Wirral Methodist Housing Association
Wirral Partnership Homes

- 1.1.5 The Scheme Councils and Scheme Landlords are collectively known as the Scheme Partners who operate in the Scheme Area.
- 1.1.6 The Councils of Halton, Knowsley and Sefton have each agreed to contract out the function to administer the scheme to Scheme Landlords. In Wirral the scheme will be administered through the Council and in Liverpool the scheme will be administered through the City Council in partnership with the Scheme Landlords in their area. The organisation which administers the Scheme in a particular Scheme Council area is known as the Administering Scheme Partner.
- 1.1.7 The Administering Scheme Partners for the Scheme Council areas are as follows:
- Halton: Halton Housing Trust
Knowsley: Knowsley Housing Trust
Liverpool: Liverpool City Council and Scheme Landlords
Sefton: One Vision Housing
Wirral: Wirral Council
- 1.1.8 To improve the service to applicants and to avoid duplication an applicant can apply to any of the Administering Scheme Partners or through the scheme website. Applicants who apply to the Scheme Partners will be assessed on a consistent basis and can apply for vacancies across the whole Scheme Area.
- 1.1.9 Property Pool Plus features a common application form, a common housing register, a common allocations policy and a shared IT system. It is intended that this approach will offer a simple, accessible service for customers as well as creating efficiencies for Scheme Partners.
- 1.1.9 The scheme will be subject to periodic review. Where this results in a significant change it will be approved through each participating Scheme Council approval process.

1.2 Aims and principles of the Property Pool Plus Scheme

- 1.2.1 The overall aim of this Scheme is to ensure that all social housing in the Scheme Area is allocated fairly and objectively to those most in need, having regard to any law, official guidance and good practice.
- 1.2.2 The aims of the Property Pool Plus Scheme are to:
- Contribute to the development of balanced communities and sustainable regeneration, including encouraging current and future social housing tenants into employment;
 - Stimulate new markets and interest in social housing in the Scheme Area;
 - Contribute to the strategic objectives outlined in the Scheme Councils' Housing and Regeneration strategies;

- Improve the quality of service to customers and ensure that applicants have ready access to information on their prospects of housing through the scheme;
- Increase customer choice and broaden housing options by facilitating cross boundary movement within the constraints of the availability of accommodation throughout the Scheme Area;
- Work sub-regionally in partnership to achieve efficiencies of scale and extend opportunities to meet people's housing demands, needs and aspirations across the Scheme Area.

1.2.3 The principles of the Scheme are to:

- Operate a lettings policy based on housing need, which is simple, easy to understand, transparent, open and fair reflecting local priorities;
- Ensure that every application is dealt with fairly and consistently in accordance with Equal Opportunities;
- Give adequate priority to people who fall within the Government's 'Reasonable Preference' categories;
- Prevent homelessness and give adequate priority to homeless people to reduce the use of temporary accommodation, whilst maintaining a balance between the needs of the homeless and other applicants ;
- Empower applicants by giving them more opportunity to express choice and preferences about where they want to live, whilst having regard to the availability of housing resources and the high demand for housing;
- Make best use of housing stock by minimising re-let times and by the marketing of 'difficult to let' properties;
- Reduce under-occupation of social housing and therefore assist in the re-housing of overcrowded applicants and other priority need applicants;
- Ensure that supported housing goes to those for whom this type of housing is most suitable and who are in the greatest need of the support;
- To make best use of public funds.

1.3 Statement on Choice

- 1.3.1 The Scheme Partners are fully committed to enabling applicants to play an active role in choosing where they live, whilst continuing to house those people in the greatest need, making the best use of the available housing stock and complying with all relevant legislation.
- 1.3.2 It is important to realise that the demand for accommodation is higher for some types of property and for some areas than others. In making a decision about the options available, applicants need to consider their housing need priority against the availability of properties in any given area.
- 1.3.3 Applicants can determine whether they are likely to be successful when placing a bid as they will be informed of their position on the shortlist for that vacancy at the time of making the bid. This enables an applicant to make an informed choice when deciding which property to apply for and whether social housing is a realistic option in their circumstances.

1.4 The Legal Framework

1.4.1 The Housing Act 1996 and the Homelessness Act 2002 state that local authority allocation schemes must afford reasonable preference to certain categories of person over those with no reasonable preference. These reasonable preference categories include:

- people who are homeless (within the meaning of Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002);
- people owed a duty by any local housing authority under section 190(2), 193(2), or 195 (2) of the 1996 Act (or under section 65 (2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985) or who are occupying accommodation secured by any such authority under section 192(3). These sections relate to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness;
- people occupying unsanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions;
- people who need to move on medical or welfare grounds (including grounds relating to disability);
- 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 to others).

1.4.2 However, there is no requirement to give equal weight to each of the reasonable preference groups, and Councils may identify additional preference groups providing they do not dominate the Scheme at the expense of those in the statutory reasonable preference groups. The prioritisation scheme set out at 5.1.1 reflects this approach.

1.4.3 This Scheme has been framed to address these requirements, and with due regard to the requirements of the 'Allocation of Accommodation Code of Guidance for Local Authorities' November 2002, supplementary guidance 'Allocation of Accommodation: Choice Based Letting' August 2008, and 'Fair and flexible: statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England' December 2009.

1.4.4 Every application for housing received will be considered according to the facts unique to that application, as every applicant's individual circumstances will vary.

1.5 Equality and Diversity

1.5.1 The Scheme Partners are committed to promoting equality of opportunity within the housing allocation process and eliminating unfair and unlawful discrimination in its policies, procedures and practices.

1.5.2 The aim of the Scheme is to deliver a quality service without prejudice and discrimination to all its customers, regardless of age, ethnicity, disability, gender, marital status, religious or political persuasion, sexual orientation or culture and lifestyle choice.

1.5.3 The Scheme Partners will continue to improve their service to all their customers including addressing the needs of disadvantaged and under-

represented groups. This will be achieved by monitoring of the Scheme Register, routine analysis of letting outcomes and regular consultative meetings with stakeholders to ensure that the operation of the Scheme meets the needs of all customers.

- 1.5.4 All Scheme Partners have in place corporate policies and action plans aimed at eliminating discrimination and valuing diversity.

1.6 Information Sharing, Confidentiality and Data Protection

- 1.6.1 The Scheme Partners will share information in accordance with their existing protocols which will be further developed across the sub region to ensure consistency in sharing information with other statutory and voluntary organisations.
- 1.6.2 The information which an applicant provides relating to their housing application will be treated as confidential in accordance with guidelines on handling personal data. These guidelines relate to the Data Protection Act 1998 that covers both electronic and manual records and governs what can be done with the data, including collecting, storing, using and disposing of it.

CHAPTER 2

2.1 Allocations and nominations

- 2.1.1 This Scheme constitutes the nominations agreement between the Scheme Councils and the Scheme Landlords. The Scheme Landlords will be required to allocate at least 50% of their lettings through the Scheme. However, the Scheme Landlords will be encouraged to exceed this proportion in agreement with their Scheme Council.
- 2.1.2 All properties owned by Scheme Landlords that become vacant will be recorded on the Property Pool Plus Scheme. Those properties that the Scheme Landlord wishes to allocate as Direct Lets (see Section 2.3) will not be advertised through the Scheme. However, information concerning these properties will be made available through the Property Pool Plus feedback mechanism.

2.2 Local Letting Plans

- 2.2.1 There may be occasions when Scheme Landlords will want to adopt Local Letting Plans for a limited period of time to address issues in particular neighbourhoods such as severe anti-social behaviour. This would involve the temporary use of revised allocations criteria for the affected area. Such plans will be developed and agreed with the relevant Scheme Council to ensure they do not unduly disadvantage those in reasonable preference groups. Local Lettings Plans will be published by the Scheme Partners and properties affected by such plans will be clearly identified when they are advertised.

2.3 Housing Association Direct Lets

- 2.3.1 In certain circumstances a Scheme Landlord will allocate properties directly to applicants outside the Choice Based Letting Scheme. Illustrative examples of Direct Lets are as follows:
- Where an allocation is required to ensure protection of the public for example following a decision made by a multi agency public protection panel meeting;
 - Where a customer has been referred as part of the Witness Protection Scheme;
 - Where a sensitive let is required for a particular property because of issues such as drug dealing, violence, public protection or anti-social behaviour;
 - Where a Scheme Landlord tenant's home is being repaired and they need to be moved from the property on a temporary or permanent basis;
 - Where an applicant from outside the Scheme Area needs to move due to extenuating circumstances e.g. where life is at risk. In this instance, the applicant may be considered for a direct let even when there is no local connection with the area;
 - Where accommodation is required following emergencies, such as fire, flood, serious harassment or other major incidents;

- Where a targeted offer is made to an applicant who is statutory homeless;
- Where a targeted offer is made to a young person leaving the Care of the local authority;
- Where a targeted offer is made to an applicant living in a Scheme Council clearance area;
- Any other reason as supported by the Scheme Landlord's policies and procedures.

2.4 Sheltered Accommodation

- 2.4.1 Sheltered housing is designed for older applicants, generally those over the age of 55 years, as a way of providing independent living with added security and support. Scheme Landlords may have differing eligibility criteria for this type of accommodation and this will be made clear in the labelling of properties when advertised. Occasionally, a vacancy may be allocated to younger applicants who have identified support needs.
- 2.4.2 Sheltered accommodation will be included in the Property Pool Plus scheme in all the Scheme Areas except in the Liverpool City Council area, where there are separate arrangements using Access Liverpool Service. Applicants who wish to move to sheltered accommodation in the Liverpool area are advised to contact Access Liverpool Service for more information.

2.5 Extra Care Housing

- 2.5.1 Extra Care Housing offers accommodation for older applicants who may need additional care and support services and there are specific assessment criteria to ensure an appropriate balance of residents with high/medium/low care needs.
- 2.5.2 Extra Care housing vacancies may be advertised as part of the Property Pool Plus scheme, but Scheme Landlords will directly match vacant properties to applicants who meet their qualifying criteria following a detailed assessment of their need for this type of accommodation. Applicants are advised to contact the relevant Administering Scheme Partner for more information.

2.6 Adapted Properties

- 2.6.1 Some properties are adapted, for example there may be a stair lift or level access shower. To meet the needs of disabled applicants, preference for adapted vacancies will be given to those applicants whose needs best match the particular adaptations. In general, the suitability of a property must be supported by the applicant's Occupational Therapist.
- 2.6.2 Adapted accommodation will be included in the Property Pool Plus scheme with the exception of the Liverpool City Council area where there are separate arrangements using Access Liverpool Service.

2.7 Target Setting and Quotas

- 2.7.1 It is important that priority for accommodation goes to those in greatest housing need. However, this does not mean that, in operating a choice based lettings scheme, every property which is advertised will be open to bids from households in all Bands. An allocation scheme may include other objectives, such as:
- ensuring a balance between meeting the housing needs of existing tenants and new applicants;
 - promoting more sustainable and balanced communities;
 - the need to meet a Scheme Council's legal responsibilities to homeless and vulnerable applicants, people living in overcrowded and insanitary conditions and people with an urgent need to move for reasons such as harassment, domestic violence etc;
 - the need to meet strategic responsibilities, for example in relation to applicants being displaced through the clearance scheme.
- 2.7.2 To achieve these objectives, Scheme Councils may choose to target a percentage of lettings to applicants in particular Bands or Sub Bands. Bands and Sub Bands are described in Section 5.1.1.
- 2.7.3 Where such percentage targets are set, they will be published annually on the Property Pool Plus website and at Scheme Partners' offices so that applicants may see what proportion of properties will be allocated to different Bands, helping them to identify how long they might expect to wait before making a successful bid.

CHAPTER 3

3.1 Registration on the Property Pool Plus Scheme

- 3.1.1 The Property Pool Plus Scheme is a way of presenting housing options to applicants within the Scheme Area. Scheme Partners will normally no longer use the traditional method of 'matching' applicants to properties. Instead applicants will be encouraged to choose the property in the area in which they wish to live.
- 3.1.2 Applicants who wish to apply for social housing owned by the Scheme Landlords must register on the Property Pool Plus Register.

3.2 Assistance for Vulnerable Applicants

- 3.2.1 Applicants indicating the need for support to take part in the Property Pool Plus Scheme will be offered help and assistance by the Administering Scheme Partners. This need may be due to a physical disability, learning disability, illness, language difficulty or for any other reason that may make it harder for someone to participate in the Scheme.
- 3.2.2 The support may include proxy bidding on behalf of applicants who are unable to access the scheme, mailing copies of the advert to those people who are housebound and have no internet access, adverts and other documents in large print and other languages and formats.

3.3 Who can apply for accommodation?

- 3.3.1 The Property Pool Plus Register is open to anyone aged 16 years or over, unless they are specifically ineligible as outlined in Sections 3.4 and 3.5.
- 3.3.2 The Scheme Councils do not intend to restrict access to the Property Pool Plus Scheme on the basis of financial means. However Scheme Landlords may take the financial circumstances of applicants into account and decline a nomination through the scheme if they consider that the applicant has the financial means to resolve their own housing situation.

3.4 Ineligibility (Immigration status)

- 3.4.1 Under the Housing Act (1996), Local Authorities must consider whether applicants are eligible for housing assistance. An applicant may be ineligible due to their immigration status.

- 3.4.2 Persons from abroad who are subject to immigration control under the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 are not eligible for housing assistance unless they:
- Have refugee status;
 - Have exceptional leave to remain provided there is no condition that they shall not be a charge on public funds;
 - Have Indefinite leave to remain under certain conditions;
 - Are Nationals of a country that has ratified the European Convention on Social and Medical Assistance or the European Social Charter, providing they are habitually resident in the Common Travel Area.
- 3.4.3 Similarly Persons from abroad who are not subject to immigration control but who are not habitually resident in the Common Travel Area (the UK, Channel Islands, Isle of Man, Republic of Ireland) are not eligible for housing assistance.
- 3.4.4 If it has been established by the Administering Scheme Partner that an applicant is ineligible on the grounds of their immigration status then their application will be removed from the housing register and no waiting time on the register will be accrued. This decision will be made by an appropriate Senior Officer from the Administering Scheme Partner.
- 3.4.5 Any applicant who has been found to be ineligible on the grounds of immigration status has the right to a review of this decision (see Chapter 8).

3.5 Ineligibility (Unacceptable behaviour)

- 3.5.1 In addition a Scheme Council can decide that an applicant is to be treated as ineligible for an allocation of housing by them (Section 160 (7) Housing Act 1996) if they are satisfied that:
- the applicant, or a member of their household, has been guilty of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable to be a tenant, and
 - at the time their application is considered, the applicant or a member of their household is unsuitable to be a tenant by reason of that behaviour.
- 3.5.2 The only behaviour which may be regarded by the Scheme Council as unacceptable for the purposes of the Act is;
- behaviour of the person concerned which would, if they were a secure tenant of the Scheme Council at the time, entitle the Scheme Council to a possession order under section 84 of the Housing Act 1985 in relation to any of the grounds in Part 1 of Schedule 2 (other than Ground 8). The Scheme Council must be satisfied that a court would decide that it was reasonable to grant a possession order and that the possession order would not be suspended
 - behaviour of a member of their household which would (if they were a person residing with a secure tenant of the authority) entitle the Scheme Council to such as possession order.

3.5.3 If the Administering Scheme Partner has reason to believe that Section.160A (7) may apply they must consider all of the following:

- That they are satisfied that there has been unacceptable behaviour that would lead to a possession order being granted both in terms of the grounds for possession, and the 'reasonableness' of the order in regard to the interest of the parties, and the public. In taking a view on whether it would be entitled to a possession order, the Administering Scheme Partner will need to consider fully all the factors that a court would take into account in determining whether it was reasonable for an order to be granted, and
- Having concluded there would be entitlement to an order, the Administering Scheme Partner will need to satisfy itself that the behaviour is serious enough to make the person unsuitable to be a tenant. They will also consider whether if the possession order was granted, that it would not be suspended by the court. The basis for this suspension of order will be factors beyond the applicant's control rather than behaviour that is deemed to be wilful or deliberate, and
- The Administering Scheme Partner will need to satisfy itself that the applicant is unsuitable to be a tenant by reason of the behaviour in question – in the circumstances at the time the application is made. Where previous unacceptable behaviour is being considered, the Administering Scheme Partner will be required to take into account behaviour that can be shown to have improved. In making this decision the Administering Scheme Partner will consider recommendations from appropriate panels, for example the Knowsley High Priority Resettlement Panel, where they confirm that the applicant is engaging with support providers and is demonstrating an ongoing commitment to resolve any behavioural issues.

3.5.4 If it has been established that an applicant is ineligible on the grounds of unacceptable behaviour then their application will be classed as ineligible and no waiting time on the register will be accrued.

3.5.5 The application will remain ineligible until such time as the applicant can provide evidence of mitigation or modification of their behaviour (see Section 4.5)

3.6 16/17 year olds

3.6.1 Applicants aged 16 or 17 years may register on Property Pool Plus but will not normally be offered a tenancy before they reach 18 years of age. If a pressing need to house such individuals is established by either the Housing Options Service or Children and Young People's Service, the Scheme Landlord may require a rent guarantor and a support plan.

3.7 Councillors, Board Members, employees and close relatives

- 3.7.1 People who are Councillors, Board Members, employees and their close relatives (this would include partner / spouse, parent, brother, sister or child) of the Scheme Partners (see Chapter 1) may register on the Property Pool Plus Scheme but this must be declared at the point of registration. Failure to do so may be considered as withholding relevant information and may affect any future tenancy.

3.8 Offenders and ex-offenders

- 3.8.1 When registering on the Property Pool Plus scheme all applicants are required to state whether they have any unspent criminal convictions. In most cases, a conviction will be 'spent' when the rehabilitation period has expired.
- 3.8.2 The existence of criminal convictions will not prevent an applicant from being included on the Property Pool Plus register unless this conviction was as a result of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable to be a tenant (see section 3.5 on ineligible applicants).
- 3.8.3 Applicants who are in custody may register on the Property Pool Plus scheme but will be unable to bid for vacancies until two weeks prior to their release date.
- 3.8.4 Ex-offenders will be offered advice and assistance by the Housing Options service when released from custody or whilst in custody if it is sought.

3.9 The Property Pool Plus Register

- 3.9.1 There are several ways that an applicant may register on the Property Pool Plus Register:
- on line by visiting the Property Pool Plus website;
 - by returning an application form which can be requested by telephone;
 - in person by visiting a Scheme Partner office or Scheme Council One Stop Shop.
- The full list of access points and phone numbers is available on the Property Pool Plus website.
- 3.9.2 The Scheme Partner with whom the applicant is registered is known as the Administering Scheme Partner for that application. The Administering Scheme Partner will be the point of contact responsible for registering, amending, renewing and assessing that application, and dealing with any requests for review of a decision.
- 3.9.3 Applicants will be asked to provide current information to confirm the circumstances of all household members before the application can be checked and assessed. Applicants should be aware that it is a criminal offence to provide false information or deliberately withhold information upon which their application will be assessed.

- 3.9.4 Applicants may be asked to provide references at initial registration by some Administering Scheme Partners. These may be from a current or previous landlord or someone who knows the applicant in an official capacity such as local community representative, advice worker, health visitor, social worker or probation officer. It is appreciated that some applicants have difficulty in providing a reference and these will be considered on an individual basis. In addition Scheme Landlords will normally request references if an applicant is being considered for an offer (see Section 6.3.3)
- 3.9.5 The information that an applicant has provided will be verified before an applicant can apply for vacancies. Following verification, some applicants may be found to be ineligible due to their immigration status as explained in Sections 3.4 or on the basis of unacceptable behaviour as explained in Section 3.5. In these instances, their application will be classed as ineligible.

3.10 Assessment of an application

- 3.10.1 Applications will be assessed to ensure that people with the greatest housing need are given the greatest opportunity to move to more suitable accommodation. The assessment will be undertaken by authorised officers of the Administering Scheme Partner.
- 3.10.2 For some assessments, the views of assessment panels will be taken into consideration. Such panels may contain representatives from relevant organisations including other Housing Associations, support agencies, social Services and Probation who are in a position to provide a broader understanding of the circumstances relating to a particular applicant. An example of such a panel would be the Knowsley High Priority Resettlement Panel.
- 3.10.3 The assessment will be based on the household's current circumstances and the type of accommodation they currently live in. Assessments of need will be carried out initially at registration but also later if there is a change in circumstances. Applicants may be required to provide supporting evidence from appropriate agencies such as Health or Social Services, Police or Probation.
- 3.10.4 The assessment will take into account the applicant's recent housing history and, if it is considered that they have moved in order to deliberately worsen their housing situation, then they may be placed in Band E (No Priority) for a period of 12 months.
- 3.10.5 The application of any applicant who knowingly provides false information in support of their application will be given Reduced Preference and placed in Band F for a period of 12 months. If as a result of false information being provided a tenancy is created, then the tenant may be subject to possession proceedings on the grounds of misrepresentation.
- 3.10.6 Applicants will be placed in a Band according to their housing need (See Chapter 5). Applicants who have more than one housing need, for example

health need and overcrowding, will be placed in the Band which affords greatest priority.

- 3.10.7 Applicants whose current or previous behaviour is considered to be unacceptable, but which is not deemed serious enough to justify a decision to treat them as ineligible, may be given Reduced Preference status. This includes applicants with current or former rent arrears and is explained in Chapter 4.

3.11 Change in Circumstances

- 3.11.1 If an applicant's circumstances change it is the responsibility of the applicant to inform the Administering Scheme Partner promptly in order that their application can be reassessed. Examples of changes of circumstances could include:

- change of address or name;
- increase in household size due to the birth of a child or addition of household member;
- decrease of household size due to bereavement or person leaving the household;
- relationship breakdown;
- the serious deterioration of, or improvement in, a health condition
- threat of homelessness;
- rent arrears in their private or social tenancy;
- a change in employment status
- a change in local connection with an area.

- 3.11.2 Applicants' date of registration will not be affected if they change address providing they have not been re-housed to a social housing tenancy. However, their housing need priority may be affected (see Chapter 5).

- 3.11.3 It is also important that the applicant advises the Administering Scheme Partner of any changes to their contact details as this may affect the ability of the Scheme Landlord to contact them.

3.12 Renewal of applications

- 3.12.1 To ensure that accommodation is allocated fairly, and to take account of any change in circumstances affecting an applicant's eligibility or current or future housing need, applicants are required to renew their application every 12 months.

- 3.12.2 The renewal procedure will be the responsibility of the applicant's Administering Scheme Partner who will issue an invitation to renew an application either by letter or email. This will take place annually on the anniversary of the registration date. Applicants will be required to respond within 4 weeks, after which their application will be cancelled.

- 3.12.3 However, if an applicant contacts their Administering Scheme Partner within 6 months of the cancellation their application will be reinstated and they will

retain their original registration date. After the 6 month period, applications will remain permanently cancelled.

3.13 Cancelled Applications

3.13.1 Applications will be cancelled in the following circumstances:-

- the applicant has been re-housed to social housing;
- the applicant has successfully moved under a mutual exchange scheme;
- a request to cancel an application has been received from an applicant (or their Advocate);
- there is no reply to renewal letters;
- letters to the applicant are returned by the Post Office;
- notification has been received that the applicant is deceased.

3.13.2 Applications which are cancelled will not accrue any waiting time on the register except for applications which are cancelled and then reinstated as part of the renewal process as described in Section 3.12.3.

CHAPTER 4

4.1 Applicants with a history of unacceptable behaviour

- 4.1.1 Applicants with a history of unacceptable behaviour, by the applicant, member of their household or any other person who would reasonably be expected to live and be re-housed with them, may be given reduced opportunity to be considered for an offer of accommodation through the Property Pool Plus Scheme, if it is considered proportionate and reasonable to do so.
- 4.1.2 The aim of this is to project a clear message to current and future applicants for re-housing that partners of the Property Pool Plus Scheme are committed to achieving stable, balanced and sustainable neighbourhoods, tackling anti-social behaviour and promoting good tenancy conduct.
- 4.1.3 Depending upon the seriousness of the unacceptable behaviour, including rent arrears, the application may be;
- Assessed as ineligible to be included on the Register due to unacceptable behaviour (See Section 3.5)
 - Given Reduced Preference status and placed in Band F (see Chapter 5)

4.2 Applications which are ineligible due to unacceptable behaviour

- 4.2.1 The criteria for ineligibility due to unacceptable behaviour have been developed on specific grounds and are structured to facilitate a period of time where the applicant will be given an opportunity to demonstrate that they are committed to addressing any previous or current unacceptable behaviour.
- 4.2.2 The decision that an applicant is ineligible due to unacceptable behaviour will be made by an appropriate Senior Officer from the Administering Scheme Partner.
- 4.2.3 The grounds upon which the Administering Scheme Partners may rely on include (though not exclusively):
- Rent lawfully due that has not been paid (current or former tenancy)
 - Conduct likely to cause nuisance and annoyance within the locality (anti-social behaviour)
 - Any conviction relating to allowing the property to be used for immoral purposes, or an indictable offence committed within the locality of the dwelling-house
 - Domestic Violence
 - Condition of the property due to neglect
 - Condition of the property due to ill-treatment
 - Grant of the tenancy by misrepresentation

4.2.4 When making the decision to assess an application as ineligible due to unacceptable behaviour, the following factors will be taken into consideration:

- when the unacceptable behaviour took place;
- the length of time that has elapsed;
- what subsequent steps the applicant has taken to address the unacceptable behaviour
- whether there has been any change in circumstances including health, dependents and the individual circumstances of the applicant.

Each application will be considered on its individual merit and any previous or current extenuating circumstances will be taken into account. Administering Scheme Partners will give necessary credence to balancing the individual's housing needs with the unacceptable behaviour that warrants consideration for classifying the application as ineligible.

4.2.5 Where the individual needs of an applicant or their household are deemed to outweigh the unacceptable behaviour being considered, then the application will not be classed as ineligible. However the Administering Scheme Partner may still rely on setting agreed conditions to ensure the unacceptable behaviour is addressed. The application will be awarded the appropriate priority according to their housing need.

4.2.6 In such circumstances where an applicant, by default or refusal, fails to address the unacceptable behaviour, then the Administering Scheme Partner may withhold an offer of accommodation until such time as the unacceptable behaviour is addressed.

4.2.7 The assessment of an application as ineligible due to unacceptable behaviour will normally occur at initial registration. However, this may be applied at any stage during the application and lettings process if tenancy breaches occur or previous unacceptable behaviour is later identified.

4.2.8 The length of time the application is held to be ineligible will initially be for a 12 month period and will be subject to an annual review. If after this period there has been no satisfactory attempt to address the unacceptable behaviour; or there has been a repetition of this behaviour; or another ground has been breached, then the application may be held to be ineligible for a further 12 month period. There is no limit to the number of times that the application can be assessed as being ineligible.

4.2.9 As indicated, all ineligible applications will be reviewed after 12 months, or earlier on request from the applicant if they can provide satisfactory evidence of mitigation or modification of their unacceptable behaviour.

4.2.10 Applications which are classed as ineligible do not accrue waiting time. Therefore the registration date for a previously determined ineligible application will be the date at which the applicant has demonstrated that they have addressed or modified their behaviour and are no longer assessed as ineligible due to unacceptable behaviour.

- 4.2.11 An applicant whose unacceptable behaviour is not deemed to be serious enough to make them ineligible may have their application re-designated to Reduced Preference Status (see Section 4.4).

4.3 Notifying applicants who are classed as ineligible due to unacceptable behaviour

- 4.3.1 All applicants will be notified in writing of a decision to assess their application as ineligible. This notification will include:

- reasons why the application has been assessed as ineligible, and
- length of time for which the application will be assessed as ineligible, and
- steps they must take to address the grounds that make them ineligible, and
- the date by when the decision will be reviewed, and
- a right of review of the decision to deem the application ineligible.

- 4.3.2 Applicants who have had their application deemed as ineligible due to unacceptable behaviour have a right to ask for a review of the decision (see Chapter 8 Review of decisions).

- 4.3.3 If the applicant is able to demonstrate they were not guilty of unacceptable behaviour sufficient to result in their being ineligible to register on the Property Pool Plus Scheme, then their application will be registered from their original date of registration and placed in the appropriate band.

- 4.3.4 If an applicant, who has previously been assessed as ineligible because of unacceptable behaviour, considers that this should no longer apply they must submit information demonstrating that they have modified or mitigated their behaviour.

- 4.3.5 If the Administering Scheme Partner then considers the applicant to be suitable to be a tenant, the applicant will no longer be considered ineligible and the applicant will be registered from the date of this latest decision, not the original date of application.

- 4.3.6 If the Administering Scheme Partner does not consider that the applicant is now suitable to be a tenant, the applicant will remain ineligible.

4.4.2 Reduced Preference Status

- 4.4.1 Applicants whose current or previous behaviour is considered to be unacceptable but which is not deemed serious enough to justify a decision to treat the applicant as ineligible will be given Reduced Preference Status.

- 4.4.4 This less serious unacceptable behaviour may relate to the same grounds set out in 4.2.3 above but where a possession order would not reasonably be sought or granted. It will also include other forms of unacceptable

behaviour such as previous poor tenancy conduct, threatening behaviour towards staff or evidence of property abandonment

- 4.4.5 Rent arrears which will be taken into consideration include current arrears for both social and private sector tenancies and arrears from former social and private sector tenancies which were terminated in the past 6 years. Checks will be made as to the reason the arrears have accrued and extenuating circumstances will be taken into account.
- 4.4.6 As a general guide, the level of rent arrears which will result in Reduced Preference Status is 4 weeks' gross rent unpaid by the applicant where the rent is due weekly. Rent owed due to delays in payment of Housing Benefit will not be taken into account.
- 4.4.7 If appropriate, Reduced Preference Status will be given to applicants who have otherwise been assessed and placed in Bands A, B, C D, and E. However, each application will be considered on its individual merit and any extenuating circumstances will be taken into account. Administering Scheme Partners will give necessary credence to balancing the individual's housing needs and the unacceptable behaviour or level of rent arrears that warrants consideration for Reduced Preference Status.
- 4.4.8 Applicants with Reduced Preference Status will be placed in Band F until such time as the applicant can either provide evidence of mitigation or modification of their behaviour or reduction of the rent arrears, (see Section 4.5).
- 4.4.9 All applications with Reduced Preference will be formally reviewed every 12 months but an applicant can request a review of their Reduced Preference Status at any stage (see Chapter 8).

4.5 Modifying Unacceptable Behaviour including rent arrears

- 4.5.1 If as a result of an applicant's unacceptable behaviour, they are considered to be ineligible or they are awarded Reduced Preference Status, then the applicant will be required to provide evidence that they have taken the necessary steps to modify this behaviour. Their application will then be reviewed and their status amended if appropriate.
- 4.5.2 The applicant will be required to reach agreement with the Administering Scheme Partner as to what is acceptable to enable their application to be re-instated.
- 4.5.3 In all instances, the applicant will be required to demonstrate they are able to satisfactorily maintain a tenancy. The following indicative criteria may apply:
- 4.5.3.1 In the case of outstanding debts owed:
- Debt is cleared, or
 - Debt is reduced to an agreed level, or

- Regular periodic payments are maintained to reduce the debt over an agreed period of time, and
- Applicant is able to demonstrate they have been able to satisfactorily maintain a tenancy since, where applicable.

4.5.3.2 In the case of anti-social behaviour:

- Signed authority under the Data Protection Act to allow supporting information to be gathered.
- Evidence of satisfactory non-offending history, (where applicable)
- Evidence of co-operation with professional support agencies, (where applicable)
- Evidence of treatment for any substance dependency issues (where applicable)
- Co-operation in any multi-agency risk assessment process (where applicable)
- Applicant is able to demonstrate they have been able to satisfactorily maintain a tenancy (where applicable).

CHAPTER 5

5.1 Assessment of housing need

- 5.1.1 Once an application has been assessed it will be categorised in one of the following Bands according to the relevant housing need that exists;

BAND	REASON FOR HOUSING NEED
Band A Urgent Priority	Health/Welfare (Urgent) Statutory Homeless (Unintentionally with priority need) Regeneration Overcrowded (2 or more bedrooms)
Band B High Priority	Health / Welfare (High) Overcrowded (1 bedroom) Disrepair Under occupation
Band C Medium Priority	Health/Welfare (Medium) Homeless (no priority need) Homeless (intentional with priority need) Living with family and friends
Band D Low Priority	No assessed need and in employment
Band E No Priority	No assessed need and not in employment
Band F Reduced Priority	Reduced preference status due to unacceptable behaviour

- 5.1.2 The assessment of housing need will be made by appropriate designated officers from the Administering Scheme Partner.

5.2 Prioritising applications within bands

- 5.2.1 Applicants in Band A are prioritised in order of the reasons for housing need as listed in the table above. However some properties may be targeted for specific housing needs when a property is advertised (see Section 2.7)
- 5.2.2 There are some important differences in the way applications in Bands B and C are prioritised for accommodation in different Scheme Council areas.
- 5.2.3 For Halton, Knowsley, Sefton and Wirral applications in Bands B and C are prioritised within each Band by date of entry into the Band and there is no distinction between the different housing need reasons.

- 5.2.4 For Liverpool, applicants in Bands B and C are prioritised in the order set out in the table above and by date of entry within each Band. For example, applicants in Band B Health and Welfare (High) will receive priority over those in Band B Overcrowded (1 Bed) even though an applicant in Overcrowded (1 Bed) may have an earlier date of entry into the Band. However preference may be given to a particular reason for housing need when a property is advertised to meet local priorities.
- 5.2.5 For all Scheme Council areas applicants in Bands D to F are prioritised within each Band by date of entry into the Band.
- 5.2.6 When applicants are prioritised for a property, if there is more than one applicant with the same date of entry into the Band, the applicants will be further prioritised in order of date of registration.

5.3 Date of entry into Band

- 5.3.1 The initial date of entry into a Band following assessment is shown in the table below;

Initial Band	Date of entry
A	Date the reason for housing need has been fully assessed and confirmed
B	Date the reason for housing need has been fully assessed and confirmed. For applicants in hostel or supported accommodation it will be the date at which they first moved into the accommodation or date of registration whichever is the later
C	Date the reason for housing need has been fully assessed and confirmed
D	Date the employment status has been confirmed
E	Registration date
F	Date the Reduced Preference status has been fully assessed and confirmed

- 5.3.2 If an applicant is subsequently reassessed and is placed in a higher Band, the date of entry into the Band is shown below;

Higher Band	Date of entry
A However if an applicant's priority is reduced to Band F, the date of entry into the Band is shown below;	Date the reason for higher housing need has been fully assessed and confirmed
5.3.4 If an applicant is subsequently reassessed and is placed in a higher Band, the date of entry into the Band is shown below;	Date the reason for higher housing need has been fully assessed and confirmed. For applicants in hostel or supported accommodation it will be the date at which they first moved into the accommodation or date of registration whichever is the later
C	Date the reason for higher housing need has been fully assessed and confirmed
D	Date the employment status has been confirmed
E	Registration date
Lower Band	Date of entry
B	Date the reason for higher housing need was fully assessed and confirmed
C	Date the reason for higher housing need was fully assessed and confirmed
D	Date the reason for higher housing need was fully assessed and confirmed
E	Registration date
F	Date the Reduced Preference status has been fully assessed and confirmed

- 5.3.4 If an applicant loses a priority due to a change in circumstances, but is later reassessed for a further higher priority, the date of entry into the Band is the date that the reason for the most recent priority is fully assessed and confirmed.

5.4 Band A – Urgent Priority

5.4.1 Health and Welfare (Urgent)

- 5.4.1.1 Responsibility for carrying out assessments, banding and inclusion into this Sub Band will be the Scheme Council or an appropriate Senior Officer from the Administering Scheme Partner and monitored by the Scheme Council.

- 5.4.1.2 These will include;

- applicants with severe long term health conditions causing substantial disabilities that are unable to access any essential facilities in their current accommodation.
- applicants with an exceptional welfare need, including severe incidents of violence where other temporary resolutions are not possible and

where continued occupation of their current dwelling could place lives at risk.

- applicants ready to be discharged from hospital or residential care where they are unable to access any essential facilities within their home
- applicants temporarily or permanently displaced from their accommodation through the intervention of Private Sector Housing/Environmental Health teams of the Scheme Councils using the Housing Act 2004 and/or 1985 to deal with Category 1 and/or 2 Hazards in the premises or Public Health legislation to deal with conditions which are prejudicial to health
- applicants temporarily or permanently displaced from their living accommodation through the intervention of Fire and Rescue Services using Fire Safety Legislation to deal with conditions which pose an imminent risk to occupiers safety
- applicants who need to move to suitable adapted accommodation because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability which he or she or a member of their household has sustained as a result of service in the Armed Forces.

5.4.1.3 Applicants need to move urgently and therefore they will be expected to be actively bidding for suitable vacancies. Help and assistance in the bidding process will be available including the placing of bids on their behalf if required. Applications will be reviewed regularly to ensure that applicants are actively bidding for suitable vacancies and are being realistic in their choice.

5.4.1.4 Applicants who are not actively bidding for suitable accommodation will be given one reasonable offer of accommodation, refusal of which will prompt a reassessment of the application. This may result in the applicant remaining in the same Band but with a revised date of entry into the Band which will be the date of refusal of the offer. Responsibility for this will be the Scheme Council or a Senior Manager within the Administering Scheme Partner. When considering the "reasonableness" of an offer, it should be recognised it may not be possible to provide an offer in the applicant's specific area of choice, but every effort will be made to meet this request.

5.4.2 Statutory Homeless (unintentionally)

5.4.2.1 This will include applicants who are accepted by the Homeless Service as being owed a full housing duty under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002).

5.4.2.2 Applicants need to secure housing urgently and therefore they will be expected to be actively bidding for vacancies. This would mean that they will be expected to check the advert each week and apply each week for vacancies in their own Scheme Council area which are suitable for their household in terms of size and type, but not necessarily in the area they would prefer. Help and assistance in the bidding process will be available including the placing of bids on their behalf if required. Applications will be reviewed regularly to ensure that applicants are actively bidding for suitable vacancies and are being realistic in their choice.

5.4.2.3 Applicants who are not actively bidding for suitable accommodation will be given one reasonable offer of accommodation, unreasonable refusal of which will prompt a reassessment of the application. The applicant will be placed in the appropriate Band; this may result in the applicant being placed in Band D or Band E. When considering the "reasonableness" of a refusal, it should be recognised that it may not be possible to provide an offer in the applicant's specific area of choice, but every effort will be made to meet this request.

5.4.3 Regeneration

5.4.3.1 This will include residents being displaced as a result of their home being included in a Regeneration Area for clearance or redevelopment by the Scheme Council or by a Scheme Landlord in partnership with the Scheme Council. Only those schemes approved by the Scheme Council will be included in this Sub-Band.

5.4.3.2 This housing need is given urgent priority to ensure Scheme Council regeneration programmes can proceed. Applicants are prioritised in accordance with the identified priority order for the Scheme Council Clearance areas.

5.4.3.3 Because of the need to re-house residents in a programmed manner, some may receive targeted offers outside the arrangements for the scheme. For example, but not exclusively, when;

- the applicant's land/property is urgently needed for redevelopment, or the remaining residents are at risk, or existing funding is at risk; or
- it can be demonstrated the needs of the resident are more urgent than those other applicants who are currently placed in this Sub Band.

This reason for housing need does not include those applicants who are required to move temporarily as a result of an improvement scheme and will later return to their original home or scheme.

5.4.4 Overcrowded by two or more bedrooms

5.4.4.1 This will include applicants who, by the application of the bedroom standard outlined in Section 5.12, are overcrowded in their current property and require two or more additional bedrooms.

5.5 **Band B – High Priority**

5.5.1 Health / Welfare (High)

5.5.1.1 This will include:

- victims of harassment, domestic violence, victims of hate crime
- people with a severe long term health condition that causes a permanent and substantial disability who are unable to access some of the facilities within the home
- applicants living in an area/community that has a serious detrimental effect on their mental health issues
- young people leaving the Care of the Local Authority
- applicants from hostel and supported accommodation where funding is provided by the Supporting People Programme or adult social services and where the residents are expected to move on within two years or where the support is no longer required. (Applicants will only be included if they have been assessed as ready to move on from such schemes and where their continued support needs have been assessed and, if required, are in place. The assessment procedure may vary in different Scheme Council areas and may include the use of an assessment panel)
- members of the Armed Forces who will be discharged within 3 months and who have no medical needs
- formal referrals from Social Services under the Children Act where it is confirmed the applicants have an urgent need to move
- applicants who are tenants of adapted properties owned by the Scheme Landlords where the adaptations are no longer required and where the property is designated by the Scheme Council as being in demand by other priority cases.

5.5.1.2 Applicants living in hostel or supported accommodation which are funded by the Supporting People programme or adult social services will be awarded a priority and placed in Band B when they have been assessed as ready to move on from the scheme. The date of entry into the Band will be the date they moved into the hostel or the date of registration, whichever is the later. This is to enable a swift move-on from the accommodation so releasing a bed space which can be used by another person.

5.5.2 Overcrowded by one bedroom

5.5.2.1 This will include applicants who, by the application of the bedroom standard outlined in Section 5.12, are overcrowded in their current property and require one additional bedroom.

5.5.3 Disrepair

5.5.3.1 This will include applicants whose accommodation has been inspected by Private Sector Housing/Environmental Health Teams of the Scheme Councils under the Housing Act 2004 to deal with Category 1 and/or 2 Hazards in the premises or Public Health legislation to deal with conditions which are prejudicial to health and where: -

- enforcement action is considered appropriate to remove the hazards/threats to health, and
- the time scales for undertaking the improvement works are such that it is reasonable for the applicant to seek alternative accommodation.

5.5.4 Under-occupation

5.5.4.1 Applicants who are tenants of social housing in the Scheme Area who are under occupying their present home. The priority is given for a move to suitable accommodation for example, single applicants or couples under-occupying a 3 bedroom property would normally be expected to move to 1 or 2 bedroom accommodation.

5.6 **Band C – Medium priority**

5.6.1 Health/Welfare (Medium)

5.6.1.1 This will include:

- applicants whose long term health condition is made worse by their living conditions
- people whose relationship has permanently broken down and who have to leave a shared home
- people who need to move to a particular locality to give or receive care or support
- applicants from hostel or supported accommodation where funding is not provided by Supporting People Programme or adult social services.

5.6.2 Homeless with no Priority Need

5.6.2.1 This will include applicants who are accepted by the Homeless Service as being eligible for assistance, homeless, not in priority need in accordance with the Housing Act 1996 Part VII (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002).

5.6.3 Living with Family and Friends

5.6.3.1 This band includes applicants who do not have a tenancy of their own, who are living with family/friends, are not overcrowded or with any other identified housing needs but want to secure a home of their own. This will include applications from people who live in separate addresses but are looking to secure joint re-housing. The date of application will be the date they were assessed as having this need and applicants must provide

supporting documentation of their situation to ensure they are not creating a priority need.

5.6.4 Intentionally Homeless

- 5.6.4.1 This will include applicants who are accepted by the Homeless Service as being eligible for assistance, homeless and in priority need but intentionally so, in accordance with the Housing Act 1996 Part VII (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002). Applicants will also be assessed against Band F Reduced Preference criteria and if appropriate will be placed in Band F

5.7 Band D – Low priority

- 5.7.1 We want to encourage people who can, to work and want to raise levels of aspiration and ambition. We will offer increased priority to applicants who are working and who are therefore making a contribution to the sub regional economy.
- 5.7.2 This Band will include households where at least one adult household member is in employment but who have no recognised housing need and do not satisfy the criteria to be included in one of the other bands.
- 5.7.3 For the purposes of this Allocations Scheme employment is described as having a permanent contract, working as a temporary member of staff or being self-employed. Applicants will only qualify if the worker has been employed for 9 out of the last 12 months and has been working for a minimum of 16 hours per week. Verification will be sought at point of application as well as point of offer under the same terms. Applicants must provide payslips, P60, bank statements or a verifying letter on headed paper in order to qualify.
- 5.7.4 Applicants must inform the Administering Scheme Partner of any changes to their employment status. This will also be checked at the time of any offer.

5.8 Band E – No priority

- 5.8.1 This will include applicants who are not in employment, with no recognised housing need or those who do not satisfy the criteria to be included in one of the other bands.

5.9 Band F – Reduced Priority

- 5.9.1 Applicants who have a Reduced Preference Status due to unacceptable behaviour (see Section 4.4)

5.10 Local Connection

- 5.10.1 In order to give reasonable preference to local residents, priority for rehousing within each Scheme Council Area will take into consideration a local connection within that area.
- 5.10.2 To demonstrate a local connection with a Scheme Council Area, an applicant must satisfy at least one of the following criteria;
- Have lived in the Scheme Council Area for 6 months out of the last 12 months or 3 years out of the last 5 years;
 - Have a permanent job in the Scheme Council Area;
 - Have a close family association (parent, adult child or adult brother/sister) who is currently living in the Scheme Council Area and have done so for more than 5 years;
 - Have a need to be in a specific Scheme Council Area to be near to a particular health facility for long term treatment;
 - Have a need to be in a specific Scheme Council Area to give or receive caring support;
- 5.10.3 Unless an applicant needs to move to another area for safety reasons, priority due to Statutory Homeless (Unintentionally) and Regeneration in Band A will be awarded for the applicant's current Scheme Council Area only.
- 5.10.4 With the exception of priority due to Statutory Homelessness (Unintentionally) and Regeneration in Band A, applicants in Bands A, B, C and D will be awarded that priority for the Scheme Council Areas for which they can demonstrate a local connection.
- 5.10.5 Applicants in Bands A, B, C and D may apply for vacancies in Scheme Council Areas other than those with which they have a local connection, but their housing need will not be taken into consideration and they will be considered to be in Band E when bidding for those vacancies.
- 5.10.6 Applicants in Bands E and F may apply for vacancies in all Scheme Council Areas and local connection will not be taken into consideration.
- 5.10.7 Those applicants with a housing need who live outside the combined Scheme Area may be considered for a priority Band but only if they can demonstrate a local connection with one of the Scheme Council Areas and the priority will apply only to vacancies in that Scheme Council Area.
- 5.10.8 Those applicants who do not have a local connection with any Scheme Council in the Scheme Area will be placed in Band E. An exception to this would be a need to move to another area for safety reasons.
- 5.10.9 Applicants must inform the Administering Scheme Partner of any changes to their local connection with an area, for example a change of address of a relative. This will also be checked at the time of any offer.

5.11 Cross Boundary Mobility

- 5.11.1 Scheme Partners have agreed that a maximum of 5% of all properties advertised through the Scheme will be let to applicants living in another Scheme Council Area. This will include applicants in Bands A, B, C and D who can demonstrate a local connection with the accepting Scheme Council Area as outlined in Section 5.10.2., and applicants in Bands E and F who have no local connection.
- 5.11.2 The 5% maximum does not apply to 'readily available' properties (see Section 6.1.1.5)

5.12 Bedroom Standard

- 5.12.1 The standard to be applied is as follows;
- 5.12.2 One bedroom is required for the applicant and their partner. One bedroom is then added for the following people living with the applicant:
- pair of children aged under 10 years regardless of gender;
 - pair of adolescents aged 10 to 20 years of the same gender;
 - any single adult aged 21 years or more;
 - a carer/group of full time carers as recognised by Social Services;
- 5.12.3 Due to the shortage of larger properties, applicants who are eligible for four bedroom properties may also be considered for larger three bedroom properties, for example a three bedroom property with two separate living rooms where one can be considered to be used as a bedroom.
- 5.12.4 Households with an expectant mother are treated as though the child has been born once the Pregnancy Maternity Certificate (MATB1) has been provided.

5.13 Staying contact with children

- 5.13.1 Where an applicant has staying contact with children, the children will only be considered as part of that housing application if the applicant can provide proof they live with the customer for the majority of the time (over 50%). The proof may be documentation from the court or solicitor, or written confirmation from the child's other parent.
- 5.13.2 Where access has been shared equally between two partners, it is unlikely that accommodation of the same size will be made available to both parents. Usually, a parent with staying contact for children for less than 50% of the time may be allocated an additional bedroom for those children, for example a single person may be eligible for a two bedroom property.

CHAPTER 6

6.1 Advertising vacant properties

6.1.1 Properties will be advertised on a weekly cycle in the form of an advert and/or Newsletter which can be viewed:

- on the Property Pool Plus website
- at Council One Stop Shops
- at offices of the Scheme Landlords
- at a variety of community facilities and
- by mail to housebound applicants who do not have internet access

6.1.2 The adverts will include a description of the property, form of tenure, rental charge, property size and any disabled adaptations.

6.1.3 Properties will be advertised displaying any specific criteria or restrictions on who may bid for such properties e.g. if there is a restriction on age group or family size. Properties will be offered to applicants who meet the property criteria in order of Band and then date of entry into that Band.

6.1.4 When it has not been possible to allocate a property after the first advert, the landlord may re-advertise the property to include households who were previously excluded from applying.

6.1.5 There may be some properties which have been advertised but the Scheme Landlord has not been successful in letting the property. In these instances, the Scheme Landlord may let the property on a 'first come, first served' basis. These are known as 'readily available' properties.

6.2 Bidding for vacancies

6.2.1 Applicants are required to bid for a property if they want to be considered for it and may bid for a maximum of 3 properties each week. Applicants who do not meet the eligibility criteria for a property will not be able to bid for the vacancy.

6.2.2 Applicants may bid for vacancies in a variety of ways;

- on line by visiting the Property Pool Plus website
- by telephone service
- by text message
- in person by visiting a Scheme Partner office or Council One Stop Shop.

6.2.3 The Property Pool Plus Scheme has the facility to allow applicants to view their position on the shortlist, when they make a bid for a property. This will enable applicants to make an informed choice as to whether they wish to withdraw a bid where they may be unsuccessful.

6.2.4 The type and size of property that an applicant may apply for, can vary depending upon household size and other circumstances. The following

table is a general guide only and will vary depending upon the availability of property and demands in particular areas.

Household type	Property type
Single person	Bedsit, one or two bedroom flat, maisonette or bungalow
Couple	One or two bedroom flat, maisonette or bungalow
Couple who need separate bedrooms due to medical reasons	Two bedroom flat, maisonette or bungalow
Two person household, not a couple	Two bedroom flat, maisonette or bungalow
Household with one child or baby expected	Two bedroom house or family flat/maisonette
Household with two children	Two or three bedroom house or family flat/maisonette
Household with three children	Three bedroom house or family flat/maisonette
Household with four or more children	Large three bedroom, four bedroom and larger houses
Household of adults, no children	Appropriate size flat, maisonette or house to allow one bedroom per adult or pair of partners
Households with specific requirements due to health needs relating to disability	Ground floor flat or bungalow Adapted house
Household requiring support due to old age or other vulnerability	Sheltered or supported accommodation Extra Care accommodation

6.2.5 There may be exceptions to the above guide in terms of property type, for example one or two bedroom houses may be advertised for singles or couples. This will be made clear on the property advert. The age group criteria for property will vary according to the Scheme Landlords' own rules.

6.2.6 There may be exceptions to the above guide in terms of household type, for example households requiring a full time carer or needing an extra bedroom on health or welfare grounds, including space for medical equipment, will be able to apply for a larger property. This will be considered on an individual basis and the applicant will be fully advised.

6.3 Short listing of applications

6.3.1 As the advertising cycle proceeds, applicants who have bid for an advertised property will be short listed according to the Banding criteria outlined in Chapter 5 and any qualifying letting criteria or property criteria specified on the property advert.

- 6.3.2 Each Scheme Landlord may follow a different process when administering the shortlist. Applicants who are being considered for an offer following their bid will be contacted by the Scheme Landlord who owns the property
- 6.3.3 Before an offer is confirmed, all Scheme Landlords reserve the right to carry out pre-tenancy checks which may include;
- confirmation that application details are correct
 - confirmation of tenancy history including rent arrears and anti social behaviour issues
 - confirmation of employment status if applicable
 - confirmation of local connection if applicable
 - take up of references if required.
- 6.3.4 References may be from a current or previous landlord or someone who knows the applicant in an official capacity such as local community representative, advice worker, health visitor, social worker or probation officer. It is appreciated that some applicants have difficulty in providing a reference and these will be considered on an individual basis.

6.4 Reasons why an applicant may be bypassed for an offer

- 6.4.1 In some situations a property will not be offered to the highest ranked applicant who has expressed a preference for it. Short listed applicants may be bypassed for a number of reasons such as:
- if an applicant bids for a property and their household details do not match the household criteria set out in the advert
 - if an applicant bids for a property that does not meet their specified health needs. For example if an applicant has been given health priority, or a specific health recommendation has been made for level access accommodation without stairs and an applicant bids for a house with stairs
 - if there is evidence which had not been identified at initial verification, that an applicant owes money to any Housing Association, Local Authority or private landlord due to rent arrears, damage, costs through abandonment or any other identified housing related costs. In this instance the application will be reviewed and may be given Reduced Preference status (see Section 4.4)
 - if there is evidence which had not been identified at initial verification, that an applicant or a member of their household has committed serious anti social behaviour. In this case, the application will be reviewed and may be deemed ineligible due to unacceptable behaviour (see Section 3.5) or may be given Reduced Preference status (see Section 4.4)
 - if the applicant is a Council or Housing Association tenant and their current property is considered to be in a state of significant disrepair or neglect and there is evidence that disrepair/neglect/damage to the property has been directly caused by the applicant or a member of their household. In this case, the application will be reviewed and may be given Reduced Preference status (see Section 4.4)

- if an applicant's position on the shortlist is due to their employment and this status has changed
- if an applicant's position on the shortlist is due to their local connection with an area and this has changed
- if the applicant has already bid for another property and this has been offered to them
- if the property is adapted and the applicant does not need those specific adaptations
- no response has been received when the applicant has been contacted by telephone or letter, despite reasonable efforts
- the applicant's family is considered to be too small to fully occupy the property and if there are other applicants on the shortlist who would fully occupy the property.

6.4.2 This is not an exhaustive list and is a general guide as each case will be assessed individually and the personal circumstances of each applicant will be taken into account. Any short listed applicant who is bypassed can request a review of the decision, using the Review procedure in Chapter 8 of this Scheme.

6.5 Number of offers

6.5.1 To ensure applicants only bid for properties in which they are genuinely interested, and in order to be as fair as possible to all applicants, the number of offers an applicant can refuse is limited. When the limit is reached, a review of their application and priority will be made by the Administering Scheme Partner.

6.5.2 When an offer is refused, an assessment will be made as to whether this was a reasonable offer. With the exception of homeless applicants (where the decision about the 'reasonableness' of a refusal will be made by the Housing Options Service in accordance with legislation), the Scheme Landlord making the offer will be responsible for deciding whether or not the reason for refusing an offer is considered to be reasonable. As a guide, the following factors may be taken into account;

- the property is in the immediate location of someone who could present a danger to the applicant;
- the property has stairs which the applicant is unable to manage and this is confirmed by the health assessment;
- the applicant needs an adapted property or the current adaptations do not satisfy the applicant's needs and this is confirmed by an Occupational Therapist.

This list is not exhaustive and each case will be assessed individually.

6.5.3 If it is considered that the offers made were reasonable, then the following will apply.

Band A - Health /Welfare (Urgent)	One reasonable offer only
Band A - Statutory Homeless (Unintentional)	One reasonable offer only
Band A - Regeneration	No limit

Band A - Overcrowded (2 or more bed)	Two reasonable offers
Band B - High Priority	Two reasonable offers
Band C - Medium Priority	Three reasonable offers
Band D - Low Priority	Three reasonable offers
Band E - No Priority	Three reasonable offers
Band F - Reduced Priority	Three reasonable offers

6.5.4 In all instances, with the exception of cases outlined in Section 6.5.4.1 below, an application is reviewed following the refusal of the stated number of reasonable offers. If the circumstances remain the same, the applicant will remain in the same Band but the entry date will be altered to the date of the latest refusal. However, if the circumstances have altered the application will be placed in the appropriate Band.

6.5.4.1 For applicants in Band A (Statutory Homeless (Unintentional)) the application is reviewed following the refusal of one offer and if the offer was reasonable, the applicant will be placed in a lower appropriate Band. .

6.6 Feedback on Lettings

6.6.1 The Property Pool Plus Scheme will publish the outcome for recently advertised vacancies on the website The information provided will include:

- Property size and type
- Property location
- Number of applicants who applied for each property
- Band and effective date of successful applicant

This will allow applicants to see where properties are more likely to become available and where they may have the best chances of making a successful 'bid'. Information will also be provided for vacancies which have been allocated as a result of a direct let to applicants on the Property Pool Plus Register.

6.6.3 The Scheme Partners will also produce analytical statistics on lettings to determine demand, availability of properties and gaps in provision to inform future housing strategy.

CHAPTER 7

7.1 Information and advice

- 7.1.1 Information and advice on the Allocations Scheme will be provided free of charge.
- 7.1.2 The following help is available to all applicants who apply to go onto the Scheme Register:
- Help to complete a housing application form;
 - Written and verbal information to help them understand how their application will be dealt with;
 - The opportunity to contact staff to find out whether their needs can be met and, if so, guidance on how long they may have to wait for accommodation;
 - Help with reviews and complaints where appropriate (see Chapter 8).

7.2 Contact details

- 7.2.1 A list of the contact details for the Scheme Partners within the Property Pool Plus scheme can be found on the website.

7.3 Support services

- 7.3.1 Some applicants may need support in setting up, managing or maintaining a tenancy.
- 7.3.2 Every effort will be made by the Scheme Partners to identify applicants who need some level of support via:
- Their Scheme Register application;
 - Referrals from staff and other agencies such as Social Services, Probation and Age Concern;
 - Referrals from family members;
 - Requests from applicants themselves.
- 7.3.3 The applicant may be contacted to obtain more details of their needs to decide what type of support they need, for example:
- Advice on the Property Pool Plus scheme and assessment procedure;
 - Help to select a property;
 - Support in setting up and maintaining a tenancy.
- 7.3.4 If they need help to select a property, this can be given by a nominated relative, friend or support worker who can bid for properties on their behalf.
- 7.3.5 If the applicant needs help to set up a tenancy every effort will be made by the Scheme Partners to refer them to the most appropriate housing support service provider.

7.4 To prevent homelessness

- 7.4.1 Every effort will be made to identify applicants where threatened homelessness may be prevented. Applicants' details will be forwarded to the relevant Housing Options Team who will contact the applicant giving advice and assistance e.g. dealing with an applicant's mortgage provider or landlord or referring them to the Citizens Advice Bureau.

7.5 Independent advice

- 7.5.1 An applicant may wish to get independent advice about the Property Pool Plus scheme or any decisions made about their application. Shelter, Citizens Advice Bureau and local solicitors are some of the organisations operating within the Scheme Area who may offer free, independent advice to people about their housing application.

CHAPTER 8

8.1 Review of Decisions

8.1.1 Excluding the right to request a review of a decision made under the homelessness process which is covered under a different procedure, applicants have the right to request a review of a decision as to how their application has been dealt with. Reviews are likely to centre around 2 main areas of the process, which are:

- Issues connected with their Registration on the Scheme;
- Issues connected with the Selection Process for a particular property.

8.1.2 Requests for a review arising because the applicant has not informed the Administering Scheme Partner of any changes to their application will be dismissed, for example if an applicant has been bypassed due to no contact and the applicant has not informed the Administering Scheme Partner of a change in their contact details.

8.2 Request for a review of a Registration Decision

8.2.1 The Administering Scheme Partner who registered the application will deal with all requests for a review concerning any decision in relation to an applicant's registration on the Scheme. The request for a review can be made in person, by telephone, by email or in writing within twenty one days from the date they were advised of the decision. The request for a review may cover any issue concerning their application, such as:-

- Decision to deem an applicant ineligible to register on the Scheme Register due to immigration status or unacceptable behaviour;
- How their application was processed;
- Decision not to award a priority;
- Removal or review of a priority;
- Decision to give Reduced Preference Status due to unacceptable behaviour
- Alteration of date of entry into a Band following refusal of reasonable offers.

8.2.2 The review procedure is as follows;

Stage 1

The review will be carried out by a Senior Officer for the Administering Scheme Partner who was not involved in the original decision. A response will be provided within 15 working days.

Stage 2

If the applicant is not satisfied with the response of the Stage 1 review, they may request a review of the decision by stating their reasons to their Administering Scheme Partner within 21 days of notification. An acknowledgement will be issued within 10 working days. The review will be carried out by a designated panel from the Local Board of the Property Pool

Plus scheme composed of representatives of the Scheme Council and Scheme Landlords in that Scheme Area, but not including the Scheme Partner responsible for the original decision. A meeting will be convened within 15 working days and a decision will be provided within 10 working days of the meeting.

- 8.2.3 If applicants are still dissatisfied then they may seek other forms of external redress, such as the Ombudsman or through the relevant legal process.

8.3 Request for a review of a Selection Process Decision

- 8.3.1 All requests for a review of a decision concerning any aspect of the Selection Process for a particular property will be dealt with by the respective Scheme Landlord.

- 8.3.2 The request for a review can be made in person, by telephone or in writing within twenty one days from the date of publication of the outcome of the vacancy on the website.

- 8.3.3 Any issue that relates to the Selection Process for a property will be dealt with in this way. This may include: -

- The decision not to offer a particular property to an applicant
- The decision to withhold or withdraw an offer based on anti-social behaviour, neighbour nuisance or rent history
- Lettings Criteria used for a property
- The nature of Verification Checks made by the Scheme Landlord.

- 8.3.4 The review procedure is as follows;

Stage 1

The review will be carried out by a Senior Officer for the Scheme Landlord who was not involved in the original decision. A response will be provided within 15 working days.

Stage 2

If the applicant is not satisfied with the response of the Stage 1 review they may request a review of the decision by stating their reasons in writing to the Scheme Landlord within 21 days of notification. An acknowledgement will be issued within 10 working days. The review will be carried out by a designated panel from the Local Board of the Property Pool Plus scheme composed of representatives of the Scheme Council and Scheme Landlords in that Scheme Area, but not including the Scheme Landlord responsible for the original decision. A meeting will be convened within 15 working days and a decision will be provided within 10 working days of the meeting.

- 8.3.5 If applicants are still dissatisfied then they may seek other forms of external redress, such as the Ombudsman or through the relevant legal process.