

## **DEVELOPMENT OF SUB-REGIONAL CHOICE BASED LETTINGS SCHEME**

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### **1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report outlines the progress made in establishing a Merseyside sub-regional choice based lettings (CBL) scheme in line with Government policy. It recommends that Cabinet approves
- (i) the continued development of the scheme with the sub-regional partners
  - (ii) a draft common allocations policy for consultation according to statutory guidance
  - (iii) the proposed governance arrangements including that the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management be authorised to enter into an agreement with the other local authorities (Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool and Sefton, or at least 3 of them) to govern the implementation of the Abris contract referred to at (iv) below
  - (iv) that the Director of Regeneration enters into a contract with Abris as the preferred IT supplier
  - (v) the estimated one-off set-up and annual running costs of the scheme together with a preferred cost sharing model.

### **2.0 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Since the previous report to Members (virtual Cabinet report September 2009), officers have continued to work with Merseyside partners on the proposals to develop a sub-regional CBL scheme. 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. (Central Government is requiring that all local authorities operate a CBL scheme by 2010 and is further encouraging local housing authorities to work with neighbouring authorities to establish sub-regional schemes, recognising that housing markets do not always follow local authority boundaries.) In December 2009, DCLG awarded a further £67,000 to enable Halton and Sefton to join the Merseyside scheme.
- 2.2 A project manager was appointed by Knowsley Council, the lead Local Authority for the Merseyside sub-regional choice based lettings project, in September 2008 initially on an 18 month contract funded from the Regional Choice Fund. The Project Manager has worked to a steering group of the local authority partners. The key elements of this work have included:
- A common allocations policy
  - A framework for operation and governance of any sub-regional scheme
  - Identification of IT systems and procurement methods
  - A model for the allocation of the costs of setting up and operating a CBL scheme
- 2.3 Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool and Wirral have been the most active Local Authorities involved in the development of the scheme. Sefton initially adopted a watching brief but has now indicated an intention to join in the scheme.

2.4 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. Progress on developing the sub-regional scheme has taken some time to develop because the partners have historically all operated lettings in different ways:

- 'Wirralhomes' is a CBL scheme run by the Council for 13 Registered Social Landlord (RSL) partners and covers most of the social housing stock in Wirral;
- Liverpool has a CBL scheme, 'Property Pool', largely operated by their partner RSLs;
- Knowsley and Halton do not currently have CBL schemes and are looking to their stock transfer landlords, Halton Housing Trust and Knowsley Housing Trust, which currently manage their housing waiting lists, to manage their CBL schemes;
- Sefton operates a CBL scheme through its stock transfer landlord One Vision, which provides the service for a number of RSLs.

2.5 It can be argued that Wirral's is the ideal model, as it allows Councils to fulfil their statutory requirements to meet housing need through centrally managing its nominations for all the available social housing. Ultimately, it may be possible to move towards one centrally run scheme which operates the same way in each local authority area, but this is some way off because of the complexity of the operation. Any developments in this direction will be reported back to a future Cabinet for agreement before being implemented.

### 3.0 **DRAFT ALLOCATIONS POLICY**

3.1 Most CBL schemes adopt a banding system whereby applicants are allocated to a priority band according to their circumstances and housing need. In framing a policy, authorities must have regard to the reasonable preference categories set out in the Housing Act 1996, amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and the legislative framework. Recent further statutory guidance "Fair and Flexible" re-affirmed Government commitment to giving priority to those in greatest housing need through CBL whilst reinforcing councils' ability to meet local housing needs and priorities through their allocation policies at the same time as promoting regional and national mobility.

3.2 The Sub Regional CBL (SRCBL) Steering Group has drafted a policy for the five local authority areas involved in the Merseyside sub-regional scheme which, subject to approval by each local authority, is now ready for wider stakeholder consultation as required by statutory guidance (see Appendix 1). Agreement has been reached on the priority bandings and the categories of housing need that fall into these bands. There is some flexibility within the scheme to reflect specific issues within the different local authority areas. The percentage of property available for each priority group will be decided in each local authority area.

3.3 Wirralhomes to date has only 3 priority bandings: Double Urgent Need, Urgent Need and Non-Urgent Need. Within the Urgent Need band falls Medical and Disability, Welfare, Regeneration, Disrepair, Overcrowding, Under occupation and Violence or Harassment. It is acknowledged that these 3 groups are limited in their ability to distinguish between different levels of housing need. Homelessness is dealt with outside Wirral's CBL scheme via direct nominations to RSLs. 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.

3.4 The Merseyside SRCBL draft allocations policy proposed for consultation covers a wide range of topics in detail including the aims and principles of the scheme, eligibility for registering, the criteria for prioritising applications, assistance for vulnerable applicants, suspensions, property advertising methods, the bidding and selection process, cross boundary movement and appeals. The proposal is for four priority bands with a number of reasons for housing need within each band as follows;

**Table 1: Merseyside Allocations Policy Proposed Priority Bandings**

<b>Band</b>	<b>Reason for housing need</b>
BAND A URGENT PRIORITY	Health/Welfare (Severe) Unintentionally Homeless Priority Need Regeneration Overcrowded (2 Beds)
BAND B HIGH PRIORITY	Health/Welfare (High) Under occupation Overcrowded (1 Bed) High Level of disrepair
BAND C MEDIUM PRIORITY	Health/Welfare (Medium) Unintentionally Homeless Non Priority Need Living with Family and Friends
BAND D	General Needs

3.5 Severe Health and Welfare Priority will be awarded for reasons including:

- Applicants with an exceptional medical need due to physical or mental health issues who are unable to occupy their current accommodation;
- Applicants with an exceptional welfare need where continued occupation of their current dwelling could place lives at risk;
- Applicants ready to be discharged from hospital or residential care where it has been determined they have no suitable home;
- Applicants living in the private rented sector where Environmental Health have confirmed that the property is a severe danger to health and 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.

3.6 High Health and Welfare Priority will include:

- Harassment;
- Domestic Violence;
- Victims of Hate Crime;
- People with severe health conditions whose housing is unsuitable because they are unable to use the facilities without excessive pain and/or difficulty or they are unable to easily access facilities inside and within the boundary of the property or whose housing has a detrimental effect on mental health issues;
- Young people leaving the care of the Local Authority;
- Applicants who have been assessed as ready to move on from Hostel/Supported schemes, and where their continued support needs have been assessed and, if required, are in place;
- Members of the Armed Forces who will be discharged within 3 months and have no medical needs;

- Formal referrals from Adult/Children Social Services where it is confirmed the applicants have an urgent need to move, such as Children Act referrals;
- Applicants who are tenants of social housing owned by the Scheme Landlord who are under occupying their present home and where the property is designated by the Scheme Council as being in demand by other priority cases. This will include 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.

### 3.7 Medium Health and Welfare Priority will include:

- Applicants who have a medium medical condition that is caused or made worse by their living conditions and a move will improve their quality of life. This will include applicants where there is an identified issue of mobility within the property or whose housing has a detrimental effect on mental health;
- Those living in a property where there is a health and safety hazard to the applicant which cannot be remedied by repair or adaptation to the property;
- People whose relationship has permanently broken down and who have to leave a shared home and have been assessed as unable to resolve their own housing situation;
- People who need to move to a particular locality to give or receive care or support.

3.8 In accordance with the legislative framework, applicants will not accrue more than one priority, but their priority banding will be according to their highest housing need.

3.9 Unless an applicant needs to move to another area for safety reasons, priority due to Statutory Homelessness and Regeneration will be awarded for the applicant's current Local Authority Area only. With the exception of priority due to Homelessness and Regeneration, applicants will be awarded the appropriate priority for Local Authority Areas for which they can demonstrate a local connection.

3.10 Those applicants who live outside of 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.

3.11 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.

3.12 A consultation plan is being produced to ensure that a co-ordinated approach is adopted across the SRCBL scheme area in terms of the groups consulted with and the consultation material produced. All elected members will be included in the consultation when comments will be invited on all aspects of the detailed policy.

## 4.0 OPERATION AND GOVERNANCE OF THE SUB REGIONAL CBL SCHEME

4.1 The operation of the scheme in each local authority will be a matter for local agreement between the Council and the RSLs operating in that area. RSLs which operate across local authority boundaries, whilst wishing to reduce the number of schemes in which they

are involved and simplify operations, recognise the reasons for the different ways of operating to suit the local situation.

- 4.2 A partnership agreement is being drafted for the local authority partners. This covers a joint statement of objectives, the management arrangements that will be put in place, the financial commitments, information sharing and dispute resolution. This is being co-ordinated by Knowsley MBC's legal team with the legal representatives of the other local authorities.
- 4.3 A service level agreement between the local authorities and the participating RSLs is also to be drafted between each Local Authority and the RSLs operating in their area. The detail within this agreement will be different depending on how each authority operates the scheme.

## **5.0 IT SYSTEMS AND PROCUREMENT**

- 5.1 As previously outlined to Members, the sub-regional partners have agreed that they wish to proceed with Abritas as the IT supplier for a sub-regional scheme through the Northern Housing Consortium (NHC). The NHC selected Abritas, via an OJEU compliant competitive procurement process, as the preferred partner for the provision of CBL IT services for its members. Purchasing a system through the Consortium, which is in accordance with Wirral's Financial and Procurement Rules, removes the need for multiple tenders, saving time and money on purchasing and on licences through discounts available to NHC members.
- 5.2 The Abritas system is web-based and would be hosted, managed and maintained by the supplier thus removing the need for one of the local authority partners to take on this responsibility and the additional charges which this would incur from Abritas. However one local authority will need to take responsibility for initial running of operational tests and sign off of the system.
- 5.3 The Abritas system is compliant with the requirements specified for Wirralhomes in the Wirralhomes Review. It gives greater access to customers through modern communication methods including on-line registration and bidding and automatic telephone and text bidding. It will also give instant feedback to applicants about their place on the list when bidding for a particular property, enabling them to make more a more informed choice about how to use their bids. It will also provide information on a wide range of housing options including shared ownership and renting in the private sector.

## **6.0 FINANCING THE PROPOSED SYSTEM**

- 6.1 Replacement of the current Wirralhomes IT system, which is now managed by Wirral Partnership Homes, is needed to bring about efficiency savings and to meet the requirements of new legislative and Central Government requirements. Participation in a 'shared service' sub-regional scheme including the provision of a single IT system would bring considerable savings to Wirral on the initial purchase cost.
- 6.2 The financial arrangements relating to the establishment of a sub-regional CBL scheme are complicated and reaching agreement among the local authority and RSL partners has proved difficult.
- 6.3 The main issues to be considered include:

- The total purchase and set up costs and how these are to be apportioned between the local authorities and partner RSLs
- The total annual operating costs and how these are to be apportioned between the local authority and partner RSLs
- The basis on which participating RSLs will be charged e.g. per property or per letting

#### 6.4 Purchase and Set up Costs

The main elements included in the set up costs are:

- IT purchase and interface costs
- Consultation
- Uploading of current housing registers
- Re-assessment of existing applicants
- Training

6.5 The independent market assessment carried out as part of the Wirralhomes Review resulted in a wide range of estimates to replace the existing system from as low as £50,000 for a 'no frills' hosted service to the most expensive being approximately £180,000. The estimate provided by Abris for Wirral, was between the two at £103,000.

6.6 Taking a Sub-Regional approach, the costs to the individual constituent authorities will vary depending on the number of local authorities that ultimately commit to joining the Merseyside scheme. However it is probable that at least four Merseyside authorities will join. The initial set-up cost estimates for Wirral, based on all the local authorities sharing the total costs equally are shown below, which also assumes that the local RSLs will input approximately £39,000 of staff resources to help with the implementation:

**Table 2: Purchase, consultation and set-up costs Wirral**

	<b>5 partner LAs</b>	<b>4 partner LAs</b>
IT purchase and set up incl contingency	36,500	45,500
PC upgrades and information services support	10,000	10,000
<b>IT set up subtotal</b>	<b>46,500</b>	<b>55,500</b>
Policy consultation including events, printing and mailing	12,500	12,500
Re-registration printing and mailing costs	30,500	30,500
Training material costs	1,000	1,000
<b>Consultation and re-registration subtotal</b>	<b>44,000</b>	<b>44,000</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>90,500</b>	<b>99,500</b>

6.7 Identified budget savings likely to be achieved in 2010/11 from the Wirralhomes budget will assist in funding the consultation and re-registration costs detailed above leaving the cost of the IT purchase and set up to be funded by Wirral to be £51,100 if 5 local authorities take part and £60,100 if only 4 local authorities take part

6.8 It is proposed that the Councils are jointly responsible for making the IT purchase and each entering into contract with Abris but contracts between Abris and each local authority, and the partnership agreement between the local authority partners, will need

to be entered into simultaneously to facilitate this. There are a number of contractual issues outstanding including the preliminary specification to be attached to the contract with Abris. Variations between the preliminary specification and the final specification will have a set-up cost impact and a contingency sum has been included for this.

#### 6.9 Annual Running Costs

The total annual Wirralhomes budget for the new system is estimated to be in the order of £330,900 compared with £387,000 for the current system (a 14.5% saving) based on 4 local authorities joining the scheme (see Table 3 below). There will be a slightly greater saving (15.3%) if 5 authorities join. . The new system will also bring a reduced reliance on face to face interactions and thus One Stop Shops (OSSs) will save on registrations and taking bids enabling them to redirect resources to other service areas, Graphics will not need to type set the advert on a weekly basis, RSLs will have decreased void turn around time and other potential staff efficiencies, and WPH will cease managing the Northgate system. In addition to these yet to be quantified savings, the new system will give enhanced customer access and service, a wider range of housing options and make better use of technology (automatic bidding, telephone bidding, internet registrations etc).

**Table 3 Wirralhomes Budget (based on 4 authorities)**

	<b>Existing Budget</b>	<b>Proposed Budget</b>	<b>Saving</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Employees	272,200	220,000	52,200
IT costs	3,500	16,900	(13,400)
Supplies and Services	29,000	29,000	0
Support Costs	82,300	65,000	17,300
	<b>387,000</b>	<b>330,900</b>	<b>56,100</b>

6.10 It is therefore clear that year on year savings can be achieved by a sub-regional approach.

#### 6.11 Potential One Stop Shop (OSS) Savings

Further to the annual saving identified in paragraph 6.10, the new system will have the potential to make considerable savings in staff time through reduced reliance on face to face transactions. The new system progresses the Council's customer access strategy, and as internet penetration increases, OSS savings will increase.

6.12 At present, in addition to the Wirralhomes operational budget, Wirralhomes contributes around £270,000 to the OSSs who register applications, take bids and respond to enquiries about Wirralhomes. In 2008-09, the OSS carried out 32,000 transactions for Wirralhomes taking an average of 16 minutes each. It is expected that in future, the use the OSS will reduce as customers begin to access the service via the internet and the 24 hour automated telephone and text bidding services.

6.13 Currently, approximately 85% of Wirralhomes registrations are carried out face to face at OSSs and around 38% of Wirralhomes bids are made face to face at OSSs. In a survey in 2006, 47% of 5,500 Wirralhomes applicants said they would register via the internet if this were possible and 53% said that they would use internet bidding if it were available. Wirralhomes is a member of the North West CBL Benchmarking Forum which has over 20 members including Leeds, Bolton, Gateshead and Sheffield where on-line CBL services are well established. 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.

#### 6.14 Apportionment of annual running costs

The costs of operating Wirralhomes have always been shared between the Council and the RSL partners and in recent years the levy per property to the partner RSLs was increased from £13.32 in 06-07 to £15.48 in 08-09 and then reduced in 09-10 to £14.70 after newspaper advertising was stopped. Updated CBL systems in other authorities have become cheaper to operate than Wirralhomes and Wirral RSLs have begun to raise concerns about the value for money offered by the system. At present Wirral Council contributes around £90,000 per annum plus an £270,000 annual contribution to the OSSs. The RSLs contribute a total of £297,000 with Wirral Partnership Homes contributing the largest share of £184,000. The Council needs to operate a housing register in order to meet housing need and the Council contribution is already considered to be good value for money, but the RSL share is more than paid for modern efficient systems elsewhere. If the Council contracted out the task of operating a housing register and making nominations, the cost would be higher than the cost of running Wirralhomes, based on benchmarking with other organisations.

6.15 A model has been developed, to identify all the costs of operating the proposed CBL scheme and assess any activity or cost according to whether it is related to operating a housing register, or to advertising and letting RSL property. This has been built up on the individual elements of the running costs including:

- Registration and verification of applications
- Queries from applicants
- Assessment of applicants for priority banding
- Renewals of applications
- Expressions of interest (bids)
- Assistance to vulnerable applicants/housebound applicants
- Appeals
- Advertising properties
- Queries from elected members, MPs etc
- Quality, Performance and System development
- Management
- IT license and management
- Supplies and services

6.16 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.

## 7.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 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.

7.2 The system will 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.

- 7.3 In addition the new web based system is expected to bring savings to the OSS through greater use of technology. These savings are expected to grow as internet penetration and user knowledge of the system increase.
- 8.0 STAFFING IMPLICATIONS**
- 8.1 The proposed system once 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.
- 9.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS/ EQUALITY IMPACT**
- 9.1 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 is to improve customer access to the service for all members of the community. An initial Equality Impact Assessment on the draft policy has been undertaken and is to be considered by the Merseyside Equality Forum. The draft policy will be sent to a wide range of organisations representing minority and ethnic groups for their comments, during the consultation period, and these will be taken into account as part of a second stage impact assessment.
- 10.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**
- 10.1 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.
- 11.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS**
- 11.1 Reducing the number of face to face transactions and increased use of the internet and telephone bidding has a positive contribution to Agenda 21 by reducing the need to travel.
- 12.0 PLANNING IMPLICATIONS**
- 12.1 This report has no Planning implications.
- 13.0 ANTI-POVERTY IMPLICATIONS**
- 13.1 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.
- 14.0 SOCIAL INCLUSION IMPLICATIONS**
- 14.1 The proposed new CBL system in Wirral will increase customer access options.
- 15.0 LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS**
- 15.1 This report will be of interest to all Members of the Council.
- 16.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS**
- 16.1 Review of Wirralhomes by Heriot Watt University

16.2 Report to Cabinet DEVELOPMENT OF SUB-REGIONAL CHOICE BASED LETTINGS SCHEME September 2009

<http://wir06metrognome.admin.ad.wirral.gov.uk/ecSDDisplay.aspx?NAME=SD342&ID=342&sch=doc>

17.0 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

17.1 That Cabinet approves:

- (i) the draft common allocations policy for consultation according to statutory guidance
- (ii) the proposed governance arrangements
- (iii) the selection of the IT supplier, Abrisas
- (iv) the estimated set-up and annual running costs of the scheme together with a preferred cost sharing model

17.2 The report recommends that Cabinet approves:

- the elements of the scheme listed above
- that the Director of Regeneration be authorised to enter into an agreement with the other local authorities (Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool and Sefton, or at least 3 of them) to govern the implementation of the Abrisas contract referred to below
- the Director of Regeneration to enter into a contract with Abrisas for the provision of the IT
- the one-off set-up costs to be paid from existing provision and
- continued development of the scheme with the sub-regional partners.

Jim Wilkie

Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Corporate Services

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Final Draft for Consultation 10.12.09

**MERSEYSIDE**  
**CHOICE BASED LETTING**  
**ALLOCATIONS POLICY**

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## CHAPTER 1

### 1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This document contains the allocation scheme (as required by the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) for the following Scheme Councils:

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

1.1.2 The Scheme Councils no longer own or manage any housing stock and have transferred all their properties to Registered Social Landlords. Although they have no stock Local Authorities are required by S167 of the Housing Act 1996 to have an allocation scheme for determining priorities and for defining the procedures to be followed in allocating social housing accommodation in their areas.

1.1.3 The Scheme Councils and their Partner Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) have agreed to introduce a shared Choice Based Lettings (CBL) Scheme known as XXX. This will feature a common application form, a common housing register, a common allocations policy and a shared IT system. It is envisaged that this approach will offer a simpler, more accessible service for customers as well as creating efficiencies for partner organisations.

1.1.4 A number of RSLs, listed below, have agreed to work in partnership with the councils, allocating their housing through XXX. *full list to be included*

Arena Housing Association  
Beechwood and Ballantyne Community Housing Association  
Cobalt Housing  
Cosmopolitan Housing  
Contour Housing  
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 Housing  
South Liverpool Housing  
Venture Housing Association  
Villages Housing  
Wirral Methodist Housing Association  
Wirral Partnership Homes

1.1.5 The Scheme Councils and Scheme Partner RSLs are collectively known as the Scheme Partners who operate in the Scheme Area.

## **1.2 Aims and principles of the Sub Regional Scheme**

1.2.1 The overall aim of this policy 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 legislative requirements and or Codes of Guidance issued by Government; guidance from any regulatory bodies and having regard to good practise.

1.2.2 This aims of the xxxx Scheme are:

- Contribute to the development of balanced communities and sustainable regeneration;
- Stimulate new markets and interest in social housing in the Scheme Area;
- Provide an opportunity to meet the strategic objectives as outlined in Local Authorities' Housing and Regeneration strategies;
- To improve the quality of service to customers and to ensure that applicants have ready access to information on their prospects of housing;
- To increase customer choice and broaden housing options by facilitating cross boundary movement within the constraints of the availability of accommodation throughout the Scheme Area;
- To work sub-regionally in accordance with the North West Regional Housing Strategy, working in partnership to achieve efficiencies of scale and extend opportunities to meet people's housing demands, needs and aspirations across the sub-region.

1.2.3 The principles of the Allocations Policy are:

- To operate a lettings policy based on housing need, which is simple, easy to understand, transparent, open and fair reflecting local priorities;
- To ensure that every application is dealt with fairly and consistently in accordance with Equal Opportunities;
- To give adequate priority to people who fall within the Government's 'Reasonable Preference' categories;
- To 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 ;
- To 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;
- To make best use of housing stock by minimising Re-let times and the marketing of 'Difficult to let' properties;
- To reduce Under-occupation of social housing which will assist in the re-housing of overcrowded applicants;
- To ensure that supported housing goes to those who are suitable for this type of housing and in the greatest need of the support.

## **1.3 Statement on choice**

1.3.1 The Scheme Councils and Scheme Landlords are fully committed to enabling applicants to play an active role in choosing where and in what property type and tenure they want

to 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 choices 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 before placing a bid as they will be informed of their relative 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 policies must afford reasonable preference to certain categories of person. These 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 This policy 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, and supplementary guidance 'Allocation of Accommodation: Choice Based Letting' August 2008.
- 1.4.3 Every application for housing received will be considered according to the facts unique to that application, as every applicant's individual circumstances will vary, but all lettings will be made in accordance with this policy.

## **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. The Equality Impact Assessment for this policy is attached at Appendix XXX.

- 1.5.2 The aim 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 customers including addressing the needs of disadvantaged and under-represented groups. This will be achieved by effective 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 racial discrimination and valuing cultural 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 the guidelines on handling personal data. These guidelines are included in 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 policy constitutes the nominations agreement between the Scheme Partners and the Scheme Landlords who will be required to put forward at least 50% of lettings to 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 XXX 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 Choice Based Letting feedback mechanism.

### **2.2 Local Letting Plans**

- 2.2.1 There may be occasions when partners within the scheme 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 may involve the temporary use of revised Lettings Plans for the affected area, such plans to be developed and agreed with relevant Scheme Council. Properties affected by such plans will be clearly identified when they are advertised.

### **2.3 RSL Direct Lets**

- 2.3.1 In certain circumstances the Scheme Landlord will allocate properties directly to applicants outside of the Choice Based Letting Scheme. Illustrative examples of Direct Lets are as follows:
- 2.3.2 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 an RSL tenant's home is being repaired and they need to be moved from the property on a temporary or permanent basis;
  - Applicants from outside the Scheme Area who need to move due to extenuating circumstances e.g. where life is at risk, 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 an applicant living in a Scheme Council clearance area.
  - Any other reason as supported by the RSL's policies and procedures.

## **2.4 Sheltered Accommodation**

2.4.1 Sheltered housing is designed for older applicants 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.

2.4.2 Sheltered accommodation will be included in the XXX scheme with the exception of the Liverpool City Council area where there are separate arrangements using ACCESS Liverpool. Applicants are advised to contact ACCESS direct for more information.

## **2.5 Extra Care Housing**

2.5.1 Extra Care Housing offers accommodation for older applicants who need 24 hour care services. These properties are not included in the XXX scheme and applicants are advised to contact their Local Authority 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 who will make best use of the particular adaptations.

2.6.2 Adapted accommodation will be included in the XXX scheme with the exception of the Liverpool City Council area where there are separate arrangements using ACCESS Liverpool. Applicants are advised to contact ACCESS direct for more information.

## **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; people with an urgent need to move such as harassment; domestic violence etc;
- the need to meet strategic responsibilities, particularly those being displaced through the clearance proposals.

- 2.7.2 To achieve these objectives, Scheme Councils may choose to agree an overall percentage target for each of the Bands or reason for housing need which will be subject to annual review.
- 2.7.3 Targets will be published annually on the XXX website and at Scheme Partners' offices so that applicants may see what proportion of properties will be allocated to their Band, helping them to identify how long they might expect to wait for an offer.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **3.1 Registration on the XXX scheme**

3.1.1 The xxx 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 and area in which they wish to live.

### **3.2 Assistance for Vulnerable Applicants**

3.2.1 Applicants indicating the need for support to take part in the XXX Scheme will be offered help and assistance. This may include applicants with a physical disability, learning disability, illness, those for whom English is not a first language or for any other reason that may make it harder for someone to participate in the scheme.

### **3.3 Who can apply for accommodation?**

3.3.1 Applicants who wish to apply for social housing owned by the Scheme Landlords must register on the XXX register which is open to anyone over the age of 16 years, unless they are specifically ineligible as outlined below.

### **3.4 Eligibility**

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 nationality and immigration status or on the basis of unacceptable behaviour.

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;
- Exceptional leave to remain provided there is no condition that they shall not be a charge on public funds;
- 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;
- 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).

3.4.3 In addition a Local Authority 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 him unsuitable to be a tenant and
- at the time his application is considered, the applicant or a member of his household is unsuitable to be a tenant by reason of that behaviour.

3.4.4 The only behaviour which may be regarded by the authority as unacceptable for the purposes are:

- behaviour of the person concerned which would, if he were a secure tenant of the authority at the time, entitle the authority 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 authority 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 his household which would (if he were a person residing with a secure tenant of the authority) entitle the authority to such as possession order.

3.4.5 The Scheme Partners reserve the right to seek independent advice and assistance to resolve the issue of eligibility.

### **3.5 16/17 year olds**

3.5.1 Applicants aged 16 or 17 years will be accepted onto the XXX register and will also be referred to the Housing Options Service for further advice. If a tenancy is offered to an applicant who is under 18 years, an equitable tenancy will be offered and a rent guarantor may be required until they reach the age of 18 years. A person under 16 years of age is not eligible to join the housing register.

### **3.6 Councillors, board members, employees and close relatives**

3.6.1 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 may register on the XXX Scheme but this must be declared at the point of registration. Failure to do so may be considered as withholding information and may affect any future tenancy.

### **3.7 The XXX Register**

3.7.1 There are several ways that an applicant may register on the XXX Register (see Appendix for a full list of access points);

- on line by visiting the XXX website;
- by telephone to request an application form;
- in person by visiting a Scheme Partner office or Council One Stop Shop.

3.7.2 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 the application, and dealing with any requests for review of a decision.

3.7.3 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.

3.7.4 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 nationality and immigration status or on the basis of unacceptable behaviour, or may be suspended due to unacceptable behaviour as outlined in Chapter 4.

### **3.8 Assessment of an application**

3.8.1 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 based on the household's current circumstances and the type of home they currently live in. Assessments of need will be carried out initially at registration but also if there is a later change in circumstances. Applicants may be required to provide supporting evidence from appropriate agencies e.g. medical profession, social services, Police, Probation.

3.8.2 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 medical need and overcrowding, will be placed in the Band which best represents their highest need.

### **3.9 Change in Circumstances**

3.9.1 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 medical condition
- threat of homelessness;
- significant improvement in household income or assets which could improve the household's ability to resolve their housing situation.

3.9.2 Applicants will not have their date of application affected if they move address providing they have not been rehoused to a social housing tenancy. However, their housing need priority may be affected.

### **3.10 Renewal of applications**

3.10.1 So that we can 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. Anyone who fails to renew will be removed from the Register.

### **3.11 Cancelling Applications**

3.11.1 Applications will be cancelled in the following circumstances:-

- the applicant has been rehoused 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) in writing;
- there is no reply to renewal letters;
- notification has been received that the applicant is deceased;
- information is received which indicates that the applicant is no longer eligible for housing assistance.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **4.1 Suspensions from the housing register due to unacceptable behaviour**

4.1.1 Applications may be suspended from the register as a result of unacceptable behaviour by either the applicant or a member of their household if it is considered proportionate and reasonable to do so.

4.1.2 “Unacceptable behaviour” can include tenancy related debt or other breach of tenancy and is defined as;

- behaviour, which would, if the person was either a Secure/Assured tenant or a member of a Secure/Assured tenant’s household, entitle a landlord to an outright possession order under Section 84 of the Housing Act 1985 on any ground mentioned in Part 1 of schedule 2 to that Act (other than ground 8)

4.1.3 When making the decision to suspend an application, the following factors will be taken into consideration;

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

4.1.2 Applicants, as a result of Anti Social Behaviour not deemed serious enough to be excluded, may be suspended following the initial registration checks or at a later stage if tenancy breaches are identified. The period of suspension can be for an initial period of up to two years and the details of suspensions can be found in Appendix 2 Suspension Policy.

### **4.2 Notifying applicants who are suspended due to unacceptable behaviour**

4.2.1 All applicants who are suspended due to unacceptable behaviour, will be informed of this decision in writing and advised how they can demonstrate that the circumstances or behaviour that made them unsuitable to be a tenant have changed.

4.2.2 Applicants who have been suspended due to unacceptable behaviour have a right to ask for a review of the decision (see Chapter 8 Review of decisions).

4.2.3 If an applicant, who has previously been suspended from the housing register because of unacceptable behaviour, considers that their unacceptable behaviour should no longer be held against them, they can request that their application be reinstated. This request must be in writing to their Administering Scheme Partner.

## CHAPTER 5

### 5.1 Assessment of housing need

5.1.1 The following is a summary of the Bands which is the method of awarding priority and additional priority. There are four Bands and within each Band there are a number of reasons for housing need as follows;

Band	Reason for housing need
BAND A URGENT PRIORITY	Health/Welfare (Severe) Statutory Homeless (Not intentionally) Regeneration Overcrowded (2 Beds)
BAND B HIGH PRIORITY	Health / Welfare (High) / Under occupation) Overcrowded (1 Bed) High Level of disrepair
BAND C MEDIUM PRIORITY	Health/welfare (Medium) Homeless non priority unintentionally Living with family and Friends
BAND D	General Needs

### 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 although preference may be given to a particular reason for housing need.
- 5.2.2 There are some important differences in the way applications in Bands B and C are prioritised for accommodation in different 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 priority 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 to meet local priorities.

### 5.3 Date of entry into Band

- 5.3.1 The date of entry into a Band is the date that the reason for the priority has been fully assessed and confirmed, which is not necessarily the same date as the application was submitted.
- 5.3.2 If an applicant is subsequently reassessed and is placed in a higher Band, the date of entry is the date that the reason for the priority has been fully assessed and confirmed for that higher Band.

- 5.3.3 If an applicant is subsequently reassessed and is placed in a lower Band, the date of entry into that Band remains the same as the date of entry for the higher Band.
- 5.3.4 If an applicant loses a priority due to a change in circumstances, but is later reassessed for a further priority, the date of entry into the Band is the date that the reason for the most recent priority is fully assessed and confirmed.
- 5.3.5 For applicants in Band D (General Needs), the date of entry is taken as the date of registration on the scheme.

## **5.4 Band A – Urgent Priority**

### **5.4.1 Health and Welfare (Severe)**

5.4.1.1 This has been specifically created to demonstrate that ‘additional’ priority for certain applicants needs to be more apparent within the Allocation Scheme. It will provide a facility to move people when their needs are so urgent that unless a quick offer is made, their life could be at significant risk and re-housing is needed to remove them from immediate danger. Responsibility for carrying out assessments, banding and inclusion into this band should be approved by the Scheme Council or a Senior Manager from the Administering Scheme Partner and monitored by the Scheme Council.

5.4.1.2 These will include;

- Applicants with an exceptional medical need due to physical or mental health issues who are unable to occupy their current accommodation;
- Applicants with an exceptional welfare need where continued occupation of their current dwelling could place lives at risk;
- Applicants ready to be discharged from hospital or residential care where it has been determined they have no suitable home;
- Applicants living in the private rented sector where Environmental Health have confirmed that the property is a severe danger to health and 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 vacancies. Help and assistance in the bidding process will be available including the placing of proxy bids 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 will be given one reasonable offer of accommodation, refusal of which will result in a reassessment of the application which may result in the applicant being placed in a lower band. 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

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. The legislation requires Councils to extend choice to homeless applicants.

5.4.2.2 Applicants need to move urgently and therefore they will be expected to be actively bidding for vacancies. Help and assistance in the bidding process will be available including the placing of proxy bids 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 will be given one reasonable offer of accommodation, refusal of which will result in a reassessment of the application which may result in the applicant being placed in a lower band. Responsibility for this will be with the Scheme Council's Housing Options Service. When considering the "reasonableness" of an offer, 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 Band is urgent priority and delivery in accordance with the Local Authority's regeneration scheme is essential to ensure regeneration programmes proceed. Applicants are prioritised in accordance with the identified priority order for the Scheme Council Clearance area.

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

#### 5.4.4 Overcrowded by two bedrooms

5.4.4.1 This will include applicants who by the application for the bedroom standard outlined in Section 5.10 are overcrowded in their current tenancy and require a minimum of two additional bedrooms.

## **5.5 Band B – High Priority**

### **5.5.1 Health/Welfare (High) / Under occupation**

5.5.1.1 This will include:

- Harassment;
- Domestic Violence;
- Victims of Hate Crime;
- People with severe health conditions whose housing is unsuitable because they are unable to use the facilities without excessive pain and/or difficulty or they are unable to easily access facilities inside and within the boundary of the property or whose housing has a detrimental effect on mental health issues;
- Young people leaving the care of the Local Authority;
- Applicants who have been assessed as ready to move on from Hostel/Supported schemes, and where their continued support needs have been assessed and, if required, are in place;
- Members of the Armed Forces who will be discharged within 3 months and have no medical needs;
- Formal referrals from Adult/Children Social Services where it is confirmed the applicants have an urgent need to move such as Children Act referrals;
- Applicants who are tenants of social housing owned by the Scheme Landlord who are under occupying their present home and where the property is designated by the Scheme Council as being in demand by other priority cases. This will include 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.

### **5.5.2 High Level of disrepair**

5.5.2.1 This will include applicants living in the private rented sector where the property has been declared a danger to health and safety by Environmental Health and the problems cannot be satisfactorily resolved within a reasonable timescale by Local Authority enforcement action.

### **5.5.3 Overcrowded by one bedroom**

5.5.3.1 This will include applicants who by the application for the bedroom standard outlined in Section 5.10 are overcrowded in their current tenancy and require one additional bedroom.

## **5.6 Band C – Medium priority**

### **5.6.1 Health/Welfare (Medium)**

5.6.1.1 This will include;

- Applicants who have a medium medical condition that is caused or made worse by their living conditions and a move will improve their quality of life. This will include applicants where there is an identified issue of mobility within the property or whose housing has a detrimental effect on mental health;
- Those living in a property where there is a health and safety hazard to the applicant which cannot be remedied by repair or adaptation to the property;
- people whose relationship has permanently broken down and who have to leave a shared home and have been assessed as unable to resolve their own housing situation;
- people who need to move to a particular locality to give or receive care or support.

#### 5.6.2 Homeless not in Priority Need and unintentionally

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 and not intentionally homeless 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 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.

### 5.7 **Band D – General Needs**

5.7.1 This band has been created for applicants with no recognised priority housing need or those who do not satisfy the criteria to be included in one of the other bands.

### 5.8 **Local Connection**

5.8.1 In order to give reasonable preference to local residents, priority for rehousing within each Local Authority Area will take into consideration any local connection within that area.

5.8.2 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 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 are currently living in the Local Authority Area and has 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;

5.8.3 Unless an applicant needs to move to another area for safety reasons, priority due to Statutory Homelessness and Regeneration will be awarded for the applicant's current Local Authority Area only.

5.8.4 With the exception of priority due to Homelessness and Regeneration, applicants will be awarded the appropriate priority for Local Authority Areas for which they can demonstrate a local connection.

5.8.5 Those applicants who live outside of 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.

5.8.6 Those applicants who do not have a local connection with any Local Authority in the Scheme Area will be placed in Band D. An exception to this would be a need to move to another area for safety reasons.

## **5.9 Cross Boundary Mobility**

5.9.1 Scheme Partners have agreed that a maximum of 5% of all properties advertised through the Scheme will be let to applicants living in another partner Local Authority Area providing that they can demonstrate local connection with the accepting Local Authority Area as outlined in Section 5.8.2.

## **5.10 Bedroom Standard**

5.10.1 The standard to be applied is as follows;

5.10.2 One bedroom is required for the applicant and his/her partner. An extra bedroom is then added for the following people living with the applicant:

- pair of children aged 7 years or under regardless of sex;
- pair of adolescents aged 8-20 years of the same sex;
- any single adult aged 21 years or more;
- a carer/group of carers;

5.10.3 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.

5.10.4 Households with an expectant mother are treated as though the child has been born once the Pregnancy Maternity Certificate (MATB1) has been provided.

## **5.11 Staying contact with children**

5.11.1 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%).

5.11.2 Where access has been shared equally between 2 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 may be eligible for a two bed roomed property.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **6.1 Advertising vacant properties**

#### **6.1.1 The advert**

6.1.1.1 Properties will be advertised on a weekly cycle in the form of an advert or Newsletter which can be viewed at;

- the XXX website
- at Council One Stop Shops
- at offices of the Scheme Landlords
- at a variety of community facilities (see list in appendix)
- by mail to housebound applicants

6.1.1.2 The adverts will include a detailed description of the property, rental charge, property size and any disabled adaptations. The advert will also specify who may bid for that vacancy e.g. if there is a restriction on age group or family size.

6.1.1.3 Properties will be advertised displaying any specific criteria or restrictions on who may bid for such properties and will be offered to applicants who meet the property criteria in Band and date order of entry into that Band.

6.1.1.4 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.

6.1.1.5 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 areas.

### **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 letting 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 XXX website
- by automated telephone service
- by automated text message
- in person by visiting Scheme Partner office or Council One Stop Shop.

6.2.3 The XXX Scheme has the facility to allow applicants to view their position on the shortlist, at that point in time, before making a bid for a property. This will enable applicants to make an informed choice when placing a bid.

### **6.3 Shortlisting of applications**

- 6.3.1 As the advertising cycle proceeds, applicants who have bid for an advertised property will be shortlisted 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 Applicants who have been successful in their bid will be contacted by the Scheme Landlord who owns the property. Each landlord will have a different offer process that they follow.
- 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
  - take up of references if required.

#### **6.4 Reasons why an applicant may be bypassed**

- 6.4.1 In some situations a property will not be offered to the highest applicant who has expressed a preference for it. Shortlisted applicants may be bypassed for a number of reasons and these are set out below;
- If an applicant bids for a property and their household details do not match any household criteria set out in the advert.
  - If an applicant bids for a property that does not meet their specified medical needs. For example if an applicant has been given medical priority, or a specific medical 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 Registered Social Landlord or Local Authority due to rent arrears, damage, costs through abandonment or any other identified housing related costs. Arrangements should be made with the applicant to repay this debt in accordance with the Registered Social Landlord's Policy.
  - If there is evidence that an applicant or a member of their household has committed serious anti social behaviour for which there are statutory grounds for possession. In this case, the application will be reviewed and may be suspended.
  - 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 the household.
  - If the applicant has already successfully 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 contacted by telephone or letter, despite reasonable efforts, and the Applicant has not updated their contact details with the administering scheme landlord.

6.4.3 This is not an exhaustive list and is a general guidance as each case will be assessed individually and personal circumstances of each applicant will be taken into account at the time the applicant is shortlisted. Any shortlisted applicant who is bypassed will be informed of the reason in writing and applicants can request a review of the decision, using the Review procedure in Chapter 8 of this Policy.

## **6.5 Number of offers**

6.5.1 To ensure applicants only bid for properties they are genuinely interested in, and in order to be as fair as possible to all applicants, the number of offers an applicant can refuse is limited before triggering a review of their application and priority.

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), 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.

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

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

Band A - Health /Welfare (Severe)	One reasonable offer then priority reviewed. This could result in an application being reassessed into lower band.
Band A – Statutory Homeless	One offer only
Band A – Regeneration - Overcrowded (2 bed)	No limit.
Band B - High Priority	Two reasonable offers then priority reviewed. If circumstances remain the same, applicant will remain in same Band but entry date will be altered to date of second refusal.
Band C – Medium Priority	Two reasonable offers then priority reviewed. If circumstances remain the same, applicant will remain in same band but entry date will be altered to date of second refusal.
Band D – Low priority	No limit.

## 6.6 Introductory tenancies

- 6.6.1 All offers of Housing Association accommodation will be for an introductory tenancy for the first twelve months, except where the applicant is already a secure tenant with a Local Authority or an assured tenant with a Registered Social Landlord.
- 6.6.2 Introductory tenants are eligible to go back on the housing register to seek a transfer to another property. They are not eligible to carry out a Mutual Exchange as a way of finding alternative accommodation.

## 6.7 Feedback on Lettings

- 6.7.1 The xxx Scheme will publish feedback on who has recently been allocated properties. Accompanying each advert will be a feedback section giving details of the properties allocated.

6.7.2 Feedback will include:

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

6.7.3 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'.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **7.1 Information and advice**

- 7.1.1 Information and advice on the common allocations policy will be provided free of charge when people ask for it.
- 7.1.2 The following help is available to all applicants who apply to go onto the housing 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 partner organisations within this common allocations police can be in Appendix xxxx

### **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 housing 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 common lettings policy;
  - 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 express interest 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 whose 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 want to get independent advice about the common lettings policy 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, 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.

### **8.2 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 with the Scheme. The request for a review can be made in person, by telephone 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 database;
- How their application was processed;
- Suspension of their application;
- Decision not to award a priority or level of priority;
- Suspension or review of a priority;
- Alteration of date of entry into priority band following refusal of reasonable offers.

8.2.2 The review procedure is as follows;

- |         |   |  |
|---------|---|--|
| Stage 1 | - | Senior Officer Review (Administering Scheme Partner<br>Senior Officer) |
| Stage 2 | - | Administering Scheme Partner Review Body                               |

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 they were advised of the decision.

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 - Senior Officer Review (Administering Scheme Partner Senior Officer)
- Stage 2 - Administering Scheme Partner Review Body

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.

## **APPENDICES**

1. Glossary of Terms
2. Draft Suspension Policy
3. List of offices
4. Regeneration plans