

Review of Allocations Policy – Appendix D
Summary of Changes and Benefits of the Home Options
Allocations Policy

1.0 Provide an on-line rehousing application

- 1.1 A user-friendly, on-line rehousing application form linked to the web-based paperless Locata system, which is currently being implemented, will improve customers' experience of the service and improve efficiency.
- 1.2 The form will include embedded medical information, enabling documents to be scanned and processed immediately via an electronic workflow system.
- 1.3 The form will be accessed via a user-friendly website used to advertise properties and process bids made by applicants. The website will emulate the market-leading Rightmove site and will link to the Council's main website.
- 1.4 Support and assistance will be provided to enable applicants that are not skilled in using IT based systems, to still complete applications and bid for housing.
- 1.5 The paperless application form will remove the need for storage of documents.

2.0 Introduce simplified priority band system

- 2.1 The current CBL and Allocations Policy uses a points-based prioritisation system. Points-based systems are no longer considered to be good practice and are no longer commonly used throughout the sector.

- 2.2 Replacing the points-based, quota system with a priority band system to assess individual applicants' overall housing need would stop applicants from 'chasing points'.
- 2.3 A priority band system is simple to administer, transparent and is easier for applicants to understand.

3.0 Assess medical need using category groups

- 3.1 Using category groups to assess applicants' medical needs and the direct impact of the applicants' current housing on their health, will make the system easier for applicants to understand, will be more transparent and will be more efficient than the current system as well as reducing costs.

4.0 Revise residency requirement criteria

- 4.1 Amending the residency requirement to allow applicants who have lived in the Borough for three out of the last five years to join the housing register would bring the residency requirement in line with s199, Housing Act 1996 which is used with regard to local connection for homelessness.
- 4.2 Amending the residency requirement to allow applicants who have a family connection to join the housing register would assist applicants wishing to move to Chesterfield to give or receive family support. This could benefit elderly people who wish to return to Chesterfield to live near their family.
- 4.3 Reducing the current 12-month employment requirement to 6 months would be of greater benefit to people who are employed within Chesterfield.
- 4.4 Applicants meeting these criteria would be given preference over applicants who do not meet this criteria or who currently reside out of the borough.

5.0 Accept out of borough applicants on to the Housing Register

- 5.1 The current 12-month residency requirement has been a major contributing factor in the increase in long term voids which led to a significant loss of income to the Council during 2016/2017.
- 5.2 A Local Lettings Plan was introduced in October 2017 to address this issue. This allowed a number of out of borough applicants to accept flats in areas of Chesterfield that have historically been unpopular with Chesterfield residents. In the main, these new tenancies have been offered to working applicants.
- 5.3 In total since the introduction of the Local Lettings Plan in October 2017 there have been 105 applicants from out of the Borough area that have registered for housing. Of these, 41 out of 940 allocations have been made to out of Borough applicants (4.36%).
- 5.4 This demonstrates that there is demand for accommodation from outside of Chesterfield but that the vast majority of the council's properties will still be allocated to Chesterfield residents.
- 5.5 This has proven to be an essential mechanism in not only addressing housing need for Chesterfield first but also to minimise the length of time that a property is empty and maximise the rental income for the council.
- 5.6 Preference would continue to be given to applicants from within Chesterfield Borough Council boundary. Bids from out of borough applicants would only be considered when advertised properties received no bids from applicants who meet Chesterfield's residency requirement.

6.0 Introduction of an equity assessment

6.1 Introducing an equity assessment would ensure that people who have sufficient equity or assets to address their own housing need, either through home ownership or the private sector, are not allocated social housing.

7.0 Introduce a time restriction on re-applying to the housing register after being rehoused

7.1 Introducing a time restriction on re-applying to the housing register after being rehoused would prevent applications being made unless there has been a change in the housing need of the household.

7.2 This would prevent tenants who do not have a housing need from repeatedly moving from property to property within a short space of time. Preventing unnecessary transfers will reduce void costs, repairs costs and loss of rent.

8.0 Revise property size (number of bedrooms) eligibility criteria

8.1 Aligning the property size (number of bedrooms) eligibility with welfare reform guidance would reduce the number of tenants, claiming welfare benefits, who are liable for the under occupancy charge (bedroom tax).

8.2 Allocating bedroom eligibility to pregnant applicants at 25 weeks of pregnancy would enable pregnant women to bid for suitable properties before their baby is born.

9.0 Introduce a pre-allocation financial assessment of affordability.

- 9.1 Due to welfare reform, we are currently encountering an increasing number of cases where we believe that the rent and household bills are unaffordable to the applicant but we are unable to refuse an offer of accommodation.
- 9.2 Introducing a pre-allocation financial assessment of affordability would enable us to withdraw an offer where it is clear that the prospective tenant has insufficient resources to be able to pay the rent and household bills. This is essential in ensuring that tenancies are only offered to applicants who can maintain payment of their rent and successfully sustain their tenancy.
- 9.3 Where applicants are identified as having financial difficulties appropriate advice and support would be provided or a referral made for specialist advice.
- 9.4 Alternative options will also be explored with the applicant such as shared accommodation.

10.0 Revise housing register exclusion times and financial levels

- 10.1 Revising housing register exclusion times and financial levels will ensure that they are sufficient to demonstrate an applicant's ability to sustain a tenancy but are also achievable in light of Chesterfield being a full service Universal Credit area.

11.0 Align the Allocations Policy with the Adaptations Policy 2017

- 11.1 Aligning the Allocations Policy with the Adaptations Policy 2017 to give preference for adapted properties to households who require adaptations will make better use of the Council's adapted properties rather than continuing to adapt more properties.