

Report for Resolution

Report to Cabinet
14 March 2012
Report of Director - Regeneration and Development
Subject Norwich City Council social housing allocations policy

Item

12

Purpose

To seek Cabinet's approval for a revised allocations policy for social housing in Norwich.

Recommendations

- (1) To note the outcome of the consultation on changes to the social housing allocations policy for Norwich
- (2) To approve an amended social housing allocations policy, attached as appendix B to this report.

Financial Consequences

There are no additional financial consequences of this report, the costs are provided for within the existing budget.

Risk Assessment

Legal

The Housing Act 1996 and Codes of Guidance allow local authorities some leeway in defining their allocations policy, as long as certain categories of person/situation are given reasonable preference. The recommended policy changes do not adversely impact on these categories of reasonable preference.

Equalities

The policy is subject to an equality impact assessment

Strategic Priority and Outcome/Service Priorities

The report helps to meet the strategic priority "Strong and prosperous city – working to improve quality of life for residents, visitors and those who work in the city now and in the future"

Cabinet Member: Cllr Victoria MacDonald

Ward: All wards.

Contact Officers

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Background Documents

Greater Norwich Home Options partnership allocations policy.

Report

Background

1. Since November 2007, the city council has allocated social housing through a sub-regional allocations scheme, known as Greater Norwich Home Options. On 20th September, cabinet acknowledged that, following the decision of all partners to resign from the Greater Norwich Home Options partnership, it would be necessary to establish local arrangements for the allocation of social housing. To help the transition from a sub-regional arrangement to a more local allocations process, Cabinet agreed that as an interim measure amendments to the scheme should be focused on those that were necessary to reflect the end of the sub-regional partnership and the transfer to a local scheme. A more comprehensive review could then be undertaken during 2012/13.
2. To meet the requirement for a revised policy to be in place by April 2012 the proposed changes have been subject to a 6 week consultation with service users. Within this period focus groups have been held with registered providers, support agencies, accessing Home Options group and tenants. In addition a consultation document was prepared for wider circulation.

Proposed policy changes

3. Attached as appendix A is a copy of the consultation document that identifies the proposed changes. In summary the main changes impact on eligibility and the priority or banding of applicants. There are a number of other procedural changes. Overall the feedback from the consultation has been overwhelmingly in favour of the proposals.
4. Attached as appendix B is a copy of the revised the policy that is based on the former sub-regional social housing allocations policy and includes all the changes proposed in the consultation. The revised policy is considered to be an interim arrangement pending a more comprehensive review that will involve all key stakeholders, during 2012/13.

Appendix A

CONSULTATION DRAFT

Norwich City Council Housing Allocations policy

Currently the City Council allocates social housing in the City of Norwich as part of a scheme involving neighbouring authorities of South Norfolk and Broadland. This process is known as Home Options and prospective tenants can bid for properties which are allocated according to housing need. From April 2012 the Council will operate its own Home Options Scheme and as part of this change, consideration is being given to amending certain aspects of the existing policy. The following questionnaire identifies the areas where we are seeking views on proposed changes. A copy of the existing policy can be viewed at www.gnhomeoptions.org.uk in the 'news' section.

	Issue	Proposed change	Your comments
1.	Currently, the council has an open housing register available to all with exception of households that are specifically not eligible, for example those subject to immigration control. Maintaining the housing register is expensive and time-consuming. Limiting the number of people allowed to join the register reduces administration and costs and would allow us to provide a more focussed service to those with the most need. Under the current sub-regional scheme 40% of applicants on our housing register do not live in Norwich. Because they do not meet local connection criteria, these applicants are all in the low need or bronze band.	It is our view that it would be more worthwhile to focus our limited resources to meeting local housing need. For this reason we should limit eligibility to those with a housing need and those who have a local connection. This means that applicants with no housing need or with no underlying connection to Norwich would not be able to join our housing register. Examples of an underlying connection or need to live in Norwich could be: - Somebody who can be evidenced as having lived in Norwich for the majority of their life but who has moved away for a relatively short period. - Somebody with a welfare need to live in Norwich to be near family for support. - Somebody who needs to live in Norwich to be near specific medical care unavailable elsewhere. - A member of the armed forces or somebody leaving the armed forces who is evidenced as having a previous connection to Norwich.	
2	At present if you have recently been housed through the Home Options scheme, there	It is our view that if applicants have recently been housed through the home options scheme then they should not be allowed back on the	

	is no restriction on how soon you can re-apply to be re-housed.	housing register for a year. This restriction would not apply where the household circumstances have changed and the property is no longer suitable for them.	
3	At present if you are a home owner you are eligible to join the housing register.	It is our view that home owners should not be allowed to join the housing register unless there are extenuating circumstances – examples of extenuating circumstances could be someone who requires sheltered housing or someone having to move because of fleeing violence.	
4	At present if, as part of a home options application, a household knowingly provides false information there is no restriction on them remaining on the housing register	It is our view that no advantage should be gained by providing false information and in fact this should be actively deterred. Therefore we propose that any applicant who provides false information should not be allowed to re-apply for housing for a minimum 12 month period.	
5	At present, households are awarded a priority based on an assessment of their application, and sometimes this is supported by a home visit.	It is our view that to ensure fairness across the system the information provided by applicants will be verified either through a home visit or cross referencing with other council held information, (eg council tax or housing benefits). Furthermore until an application has been verified the household will not be given a priority banding.	
6	At present, one of the factors that influence the priority for an applicant is housing conditions, including over-crowding and shared facilities. However there has been a lack of clarity as to how these factors relate to bed sit accommodation.	It is our view that a household living in bed sit accommodation (defined as a room within a house of multiple occupation with shared bathroom and kitchen facilities) is adequately housed unless there are extenuating circumstances. Extenuating circumstances could be over-crowding, medical requirements or domestic violence or abuse.	
7	At present the current framework means that landlords can only advertise properties to households of a certain size, which occasionally can result in low demand for some property types.	It is our view that landlords should be allowed to decide on the household size able to bid for their properties. Therefore they can ensure that there is demand for the property from a household with a housing need. Likewise, opening up the number of households able to bid for a certain property type increases an applicant's	

		choice. It will be for the applicant to consider any affordability or benefit issues that may arise.	
8	At present an applicant can remain on the register without having any need to bid for properties. 50% of applicants on the register have never bid on a property. Maintaining the register is expensive and the fact that a household does not bid for a property would imply that they are adequately housed.	It is our view that an applicant who has not bid for a property through the home options scheme for a year will have their application reviewed and, unless there are extenuating circumstances, their application will be cancelled.	
9	At present, there is no restriction on the number of properties a household can bid for and, if they are offered a dwelling, the number of properties they can refuse. There is a considerable cost in processing property shortlists and in arranging and attending viewings. It is accepted that there will be occasions where a property is not suitable for an applicant but some households view a high number of properties and when offered them, continually refuse the tenancy or fail to attend the viewing.	It is our view that there should be a limit on the number of times an applicant can refuse to take up a tenancy. This needs to be balanced against the need to maintain the applicants right to choose their accommodation. For this reason we feel that an applicant who has refused 5 offers of accommodation should be suspended from the bidding process for a 6 month period.	
10	At present we advertise properties, and applicants can bid for these properties by phone, text message, on the web site, public access terminal, or digital TV. Most people use the internet to bid (97%), and a very small number use digital TV. There is a £4,000 per	It is our view that the digital TV option is not cost effective and this arrangement should be withdrawn.	

	annum cost to maintain the digital TV option.		
11	<p>At present there are certain circumstances where properties are allocated to applicants outside of the choice based lettings process. These direct lets are small in number and can include lettings where an individual has specific social related issues, or the applicant's home is subject to substantial repair that requires the accommodate to be vacated, or where the applicant is part of a witness protection scheme. In a number of instances this direct letting arrangement has become complicated,</p>	<p>It is our view that, to simplify the direct letting process, landlords should be allowed to allocate certain properties without advertising them. These properties will include accommodation provided to support agencies who accommodate specific client groups with special needs. These arrangements will be supported by a service level agreement between the council and the housing provider.</p>	

Appendix B

Norwich Choice Based Lettings Draft Allocations Scheme April 2012

This document contains the draft allocation scheme of:

Norwich City Council

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1.1 Introduction:

1.1.1 This document contains the allocations scheme (as required by the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) for Norwich City Council. It sets out the priorities and procedures that Norwich City Council will follow in the letting of housing to applicants on their housing register. The policy is based upon that used by the Greater Norwich Home Options partnership, 2007-2011.

1.1.2 Norwich City Council's allocates properties through a choice based lettings scheme which gives applicants choice in selecting where and in what property type and tenure they wish to live.

1.1.3 The allocations policy sets out:

- the objectives of the allocations scheme
- how the housing register operates
- who is eligible to be rehoused
- how customers' housing needs are assessed
- how social rented homes are let in Norwich
- how the allocations scheme operates

1.1.4 The scheme landlords are:

- Broadland Housing Association
- Orwell Housing Association
- Cotman Housing Association
- Orbit Housing Association
- Guinness Trust
- Wherry Housing Association
- Peddars Way Housing Association
- Saffron Housing Trust
- Hastoe Housing Association
- Places for People Housing Association
- Habinteg Housing Association
- Granta Housing Society
- Victory Housing Trust
- Norwich City Council
- Sanctuary Hereward
- St Matthew Housing

1.2 Background:

1.2.1 Since 2007, social housing in the Greater Norwich sub-region has been allocated through a choice based lettings system. Although the partnership ended in April 2012, Norwich City Council has decided to continue to allocate through a choice based lettings system, based on the principles and policies of the previous system.

- 1.2.2 Under a choice based lettings system the landlords advertise their properties for rent and invite bids on each property from applicants who are registered with the scheme. The applicants are assessed and awarded a banding according to their need for a new, suitable home. The landlord offers the property to the applicant who falls into the highest banding of those who have applied and has been registered for the scheme the longest. A range of other housing options are also promoted, to applicants, through the scheme including shared ownership properties, mutual exchanges and private rented properties.
- 1.2.3 Norwich is an area of very high housing need and it must be remembered that a choice based lettings system will not produce any more affordable housing but will provide a fairer, more efficient and transparent way of letting the current scarce social housing resources. The system will also promote to applicants a range of other housing options.
- 1.2.4 The allocations policy takes into account changes in legislation by the Localism Bill.
- 1.2.5 The allocations policy takes account of the need for the council to provide a cost-effective, efficient service which focuses resources on applicants in the most housing need.
- 1.2.6 The system we have developed is designed to be easy to use, provide the highest levels of customer service and allow clients to have a realistic and honest understanding of their housing situation so they can make the best choice for their needs from the full range of housing options available to them.

1.3 Scheme objectives:

- 1.3.1 The key objectives of the allocations scheme are:
- To meet the legal requirements for the allocation of social housing as set out in the Housing Act (1996) as amended by the Homelessness Act (2002)
 - To assist customers in the highest assessed need
 - To operate the scheme so that it is open and fair, quick and easy to use and consistent.
 - To operate the scheme so that it improves accessibility and customer service for vulnerable groups within Norwich
 - To allow scheme users, through the transparent nature of the scheme, to have an understanding and control of their housing situation and, therefore, to make more informed decisions, and consider options other than social housing
 - To provide a full housing options service in accordance with the scheme. This will offer scheme users a large range of other housing options, services and advice to find the solution best suited to their particular needs
 - To prevent homelessness and reduce the use of temporary accommodation through an effective prioritisation system

1.4 Statement on choice:

- 1.4.1 The council and scheme landlords are fully committed to enabling applicants to play a more active role in choosing where, and in what property type and tenure they live, whilst continuing to house those people in the greatest need and complying with all relevant legislation.
- 1.4.2 It is important to realise that the demand for accommodation is higher in some areas than in 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.

1.5. Legal framework:

Local authorities are required to act within the legal framework for allocating social housing, laid down in the 1996 Housing Act, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002. There is a code of guidance on allocation of accommodation which assists councils to understand and apply the law. This allocations scheme complies fully with all parts of the legislation.

1.6 How will the scheme work?

- 1.6.1 The allocations scheme provides a way of letting social housing and promoting shared ownership properties, private rented properties, and other housing options to applicants in Norwich.
- 1.6.2 The council and scheme landlords will advertise their vacant social rented housing properties to those on the housing register. The adverts will include a detailed description of the property and state which applicants are able to apply. Applicants can then bid for the property of their choice as long as they meet the qualifying criteria and are on the housing register.
- 1.6.3 The successful applicant will be selected from those who have bid for the property who meet the stated qualifying criteria. Selection will be based on the highest needs band, followed by the application date where there is more than one applicant from the same band.
- 1.6.4 Feedback will be provided through a range of methods on what kind of demand there was for vacant properties previously advertised. This will help applicants to make more informed choices including looking at the other housing options being promoted through the scheme.

2 Application Procedure:

2.1 Who can apply?

- 2.1.1 To apply for a social housing property in Norwich an applicant must be registered with Norwich City Council's housing register.
- 2.1.2 The housing register is open to anyone aged 16 or over who meets the eligibility criteria however a tenancy will not usually be granted to a person who is under 18 unless:

- The applicant is found to be statutorily homeless

AND

- The applicant will be supported in the tenancy and the particular scheme council is satisfied with the level of support provided

2.1.3 In all cases the scheme landlords will require that when a tenancy is offered to an applicant under 18 that a rent guarantor is provided until they reach the age of 18.

2.1.4 Applications can be made in person at council offices or over the telephone on 0344 980 3333. All applications will involve a discussion of an applicant's housing need with an adviser.

2.2 Eligibility:

Eligibility categories:

2.2.1 Anyone who is over 16 years of age can apply to the housing register if they are eligible to be re-housed however, this does not guarantee re-housing under the scheme. By law, there are defined groups of customers who cannot be re-housed through the scheme. There are also exceptions or restrictions to an application which may apply in certain cases.

Examples of exceptions, where an application cannot be made to the register are as follows:

2.2.2 The Housing Act 1996 (as amended by Homelessness Act 2002) says that accommodation can only be allocated to people who are eligible. Section 160A sets out the position in full. In broad terms, there are two categories of applicant who are not eligible (whether such applicant applies for housing alone or jointly with others).

- (a) Certain people from abroad, including some who are subject to immigration control, are not eligible.
- (b) Applicants are not eligible if the council is satisfied that they, or a member of their household, have been guilty of unacceptable behaviour making them unsuitable to be a tenant at the time the application is considered. Behaviour is only unacceptable if it is of a kind that would entitle the council to a possession order if carried out by one of its secure tenants or a member of the household.

2.2.3 Eligible applicants have the right to request such general information as will enable them to know how their application is likely to be treated, what preference they are likely to be given, what kind of accommodation is likely to be made available to them, and when such accommodation is likely to become available.

2.2.4 Applications are processed by the council's housing options staff in accordance with this scheme. The staff, nevertheless, considers applications individually to try and ensure that the scheme is not applied so rigidly as to produce a manifestly unfair outcome in a particular case.

2.2.5 Decisions and reviews

- (a) Where the council decides that an applicant is ineligible, it must notify the applicant of that decision and the grounds for it.
- (b) Eligible applicants have the right to ask the council to inform them of any decision about matters to be taken into account in processing their application.

2.2.6 In either case, applicants have the right to request a review and to be informed of the decision on review and the grounds for it. (Please see Section 5, reviews of decisions)

Who is eligible?

2.2.7 By law, the council will consider all applications for housing made in accordance with the council's requirements.

2.2.8 The following groups of people are eligible to be considered for re-housing:

- existing tenants – all existing secure or introductory tenants of a housing authority;
- British Nationals who are habitually resident within the Common Travel Area;
- Commonwealth citizens who have the right of abode and are habitually resident in the CTA;
- European Economic Area Nationals who are habitually resident within the CTA, are workers, or who have a right to reside in the UK.

2.2.9 The following groups are persons subject to immigration control who are eligible to be rehoused.

- Class A - a person who is recorded by the Secretary of State as a refugee within the definition in Article 1 of the Refugee Convention, and who has leave to enter or remain in the UK;
- Class B –
 - a person who has exceptional leave to enter or remain in the UK, granted outside the provisions of the immigration rules;
 - a person who is not subject to a consideration requiring them to maintain and accommodate themselves and any person dependent on them, without recourse to public funds;
- Class C - a person who is habitually resident in the CTA whose leave to enter or remain in the UK is not subject to any limitation or condition, **other** than the following groups:

- a person who has been given leave to enter or remain in the UK upon an undertaking given by their sponsor;
- a person whose sponsor is still alive;
- a person who has been resident in the CTA for less than five years beginning on the date of entry or the date on which his sponsor gave the recommendation.
- Class D - a person who left the territory of Montserrat after 1st November 1995 because of the effect on that territory of a volcanic eruption.

Who is not eligible to be housed?

2.2.10 By law, the council is unable to accept onto the housing register anyone who is subject to immigration control within the meaning of the *Asylum and Immigration Act 1996*, unless they fall within a class exempted from this restriction by Government regulations.

2.2.11 The council cannot, by law, allocate housing to other classes of persons from abroad if the Government makes regulations to that effect.

2.2.12 A person who is not subject to immigration control is to be treated as a person from abroad who is ineligible for an allocation of housing accommodation under Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 and statutory instruments if;

- they are not habitually resident in the CTA;
- their only right to reside in the UK is:
 - derived from their status as a jobseeker or the family member of a job seeker;
 - is an initial right to reside not exceeding three months under *regulation 12 of the EEA Regulations*¹;
- their only right to reside in the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man or the Republic of Ireland is a right equivalent to one of those mentioned in the sub-paragraphs above, which is derived from the treaty establishing the European Community.

2.2.13 The council is by law, unable to allocate housing accommodation to two or more persons jointly, if any of them falls within the above categories. A property can be allocated to a household if anyone other than the main or joint applicant is ineligible to be re-housed.

2.2.14 The Secretary of State may, by regulations, stipulate other classes of persons from abroad who are ineligible for an allocation of housing accommodation, either in relation to local housing authorities generally or any specific housing authority. These are subject to change.

Habitual residence:

2.2.15 Customers deemed habitually resident include:

- a) a worker;
- b) a self employed person;
- c) a person who is an accession state worker requiring registration and who is treated as a worker for the purpose of the definition of “qualified person” in regulation 6(1) of the EEA Regulations pursuant to regulation 5 of the accession Regulations;
- d) Family members of a-c;
- e) A person with a right to reside permanently in the United Kingdom by virtue of regulation 15 (c) (d) or (e) of the EEA Regulations;
- f) A person who left the territory of Montserrat after 1st November 1995 because of the effect on that territory of a volcanic eruption; and
- g) A person who is in the United Kingdom as a result of their deportation, expulsion or other removal by compulsion of law from another country to the United Kingdom.

Ineligibility due to unacceptable behaviour:

2.2.16 The council will deem an applicant ineligible for housing if the:

Applicant’s previous behaviour would (if they were a secure tenant of the particular scheme council) entitle the council to a 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):or

2.2.17 Previous behaviour of a member of the applicant’s household, which would (if they were a person residing with a secure tenant of the particular scheme council) entitle the council to a possession order.

Notifying an ineligible customer:

2.2.18 If it is decided that an applicant is *ineligible* for housing under the criteria above, their housing application will not be added to the particular housing register. The applicant will be notified in writing by the council, of the decision and the grounds for the decision on eligibility will be explained.

2.2.19 Applicants found to be ineligible for one of the housing register have a right to ask for this decision to be reviewed by the council (see section 5, reviews of decisions). In requesting a review, the applicant will normally be able to show that they have addressed issues relating to their suitability to be a tenant over a minimum 12 month period (for example by addressing former tenancy arrears issues).

Restrictions

2.2.20 Applications to the housing register are restricted to those with a local connection to Norwich or a verified housing need. Local connection within the terms of this scheme will normally mean that an applicant lives in Norwich or has an underlying connection or need to live in Norwich. This means that applicants with no housing need or with no underlying connection to Norwich are unable to join the housing register.

Examples of an underlying connection or need to live in Norwich could be:

- Somebody who can be evidenced as having lived in Norwich for the majority of their life but who has moved away for a relatively short period.
- Somebody with a welfare need to live in Norwich to be near family for support.

Somebody who needs to live in Norwich to be near specific medical care unavailable elsewhere.

- A member of H.M armed forces or somebody leaving H.M. armed forces who is evidenced as having an existing or previous connection to Norwich.

2.2.21 Existing homeowners and owner-occupiers will generally not be accepted onto the housing register unless there are extenuating circumstances. Examples of extenuating circumstances could be someone who requires sheltered housing or someone having to move because of fleeing violence.

2.2.22 Applicants who have knowingly provided false information to the council will be unable to reapply for housing for a minimum 12 month period.

2.2.23 Applicants who have been housed under Home Options will not be able to reapply for the housing register for a 12 month period from the commencement of their new tenancy. This restriction does not apply where the household circumstances have changed and the property is no longer suitable or where there are extenuating circumstances.

2.3 Assessment of applications:

Legal background:

2.3.1 All applicants who are eligible housing register will be placed in the appropriate housing needs band based on an assessment of their household's needs. This is to ensure that the council allocates homes to those in the greatest assessed need and to ensure that they meet their legal obligations as set out in the Housing Act (1996), as amended by the Homelessness Act (2002).

2.3.2 The law states that reasonable preference must be considered in the following cases

- (a) people who are homeless (within the meaning of Part 7);
- (b) people who are 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 an such authority under section 192(3);
- (c) people occupying unsanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions;
- (d) people who need to move on medical or welfare grounds; and

(e) people who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or others).

2.3.3 Applicants outside the reasonable preference categories can also be given additional consideration to meet local priorities.

2.4 The housing need bands:

2.4.1 The council will assess all applicants to their housing registers, who are eligible, according to the particular level of housing need of each applicant. All applications will be placed, by the council's housing options staff, into one of five bands:

EMERGENCY STATUS:	Urgent Priority
GOLD:	High Priority
SILVER:	Medium Priority
BRONZE:	Urgent/High/Medium/Prioritybut with reduced preference
LOW NEED:	Low or No Priority

Priority banding will only be awarded where the applicant's circumstances have been verified.

The criteria for being placed in each band are:

EMERGENCY STATUS:

2.4.2 Emergency status will only be issued in certain circumstances where an applicant needs an urgent move to ensure their well-being or safety. The award of Emergency status will be determined by the council's housing options team leader or in more complex cases by the council's assessment panel and significant evidence will be required. This status will only be valid for 6 weeks and the applicant will be expected to accept the first available appropriate property which they successfully bid for. If the applicant has still not successfully applied for a suitable property within that time period they will be offered the next available property suitable to their needs. If they then refuse that offer of the property the particular scheme council will view any duty as having been discharged. Circumstances where emergency status could be awarded include:

- For those under threat of immediate and serious violence as determined by the police and/or the housing options team leader or in more complex cases by the council's assessment panel
- Those required to move as determined by the police for witness protection reasons
- Applicants accepted as unintentionally homeless or threatened with homelessness and in priority need by the council and currently residing in temporary accommodation or homeless at home
- The award of an extremely urgent and serious medical assessment (as determined by the housing options team leader or in more complex cases by the council's assessment panel)

- Those applicants requiring urgent hospital discharge where their current accommodation is totally unsuitable for their needs
- Those applicants required to leave their homes as a result of an emergency prohibition order served in relation to the premises under the Housing Act 2004 or as the result of action taken by the Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service
- Applicants with either a combination of high needs or a combination of needs within the household such as being awarded high medical/welfare by the housing options team leader or in more complex cases by the council's assessment panel combined with being awarded high priority by the private sector housing team of the council
- Other very extreme circumstances as determined by the housing options team leader or in more complex cases by the council's assessment panel

GOLD BAND:

2.4.3 Homelessness:

Applicants threatened with homelessness who are likely to lose their accommodation through no fault of their own, for which there is no legal redress, in the next 12 weeks, who are assessed by the particular scheme council as likely to be in priority need and who are receiving housing advice from the council to prevent homelessness (this would require a homelessness prevention referral from the council's advice and homelessness service)

2.4.4 Medical

High medical needs as determined by the housing options team leader or in more complex cases by the council's assessment panel.

2.4.5 Welfare:

High welfare needs as determined by the housing options team leader or in more complex cases by the council's assessment panel. This would include people who need to move to the district where failure to meet that need would cause extreme hardship to themselves or others.

2.4.6 Housing Conditions:

A prohibition order or demolition order has been served, or is about to be served in relation to the applicant's dwelling by the private sector housing team. This indicates that the property contains one or more category 1 hazards that probably cannot be remedied.

An improvement notice has been, or is about to be, served in relation to the applicant's dwelling by the private sector housing team of the particular scheme council and

- the remedies that are needed to reduce the hazard will require the property to be vacated for a significant period of time
- the cost of the remedies are beyond the means of the applicant (where applicable)

- the remedies will make the property unsuitable for occupation by the applicant

In such cases the award of priority banding is dependent upon individual circumstances, which will be considered on a case by case basis by the housing options team leader.

2.4.7 Overcrowding/shared facilities:

Applicants lack two or more bedrooms.

Or

Applicants lacking access to a kitchen and/or bathroom.

2.4.8 Under-occupation/council interest:

Tenants of council or scheme landlord accommodation under occupying by two or more bedrooms and prepared to move to significantly smaller accommodation, or occupying a substantially adapted property that they no longer require.

2.4.9 Supported Housing/Hostels:

Applicants in supported housing/hostels who participate in the hostel move on agreement and are assessed as needing to move on (as determined by the council's housing options team leader or in more complex cases by the council's assessment panel following the required evidence and risk assessment being submitted from an accredited supporting agency) and where, if deemed necessary by the council, there is a suitable support package in place and where it is reasonably expected that any tenancy will be sustained.

Gold band will be awarded only where the applicant has a local connection, as defined by that particular council.

2.4.10 Violence/Harassment:

Significant evidence of serious harassment or violence where a change of accommodation could be reasonably expected to alleviate the problem.

2.4.11 Multiple Needs:

Applicants with either a combination of medium needs or a combination of needs within the household.

SILVER BAND:

2.4.12 Homelessness:

Applicants who are homeless and have lost their accommodation through no fault of their own or threatened with homelessness who are likely to lose their accommodation through no fault of their own, for which there is no legal redress, in the next 12 weeks, who are assessed by the council as not likely to be in priority need and who are receiving housing advice from the council to prevent homelessness (this would require a homelessness prevention referral from the council's advice and homelessness service)

2.4.12 Medical:

Significant medical needs as determined by the housing options team leader or in more complex cases by the council's assessment panel.

2.4.13 Welfare:

Significant welfare needs as determined by the housing options team leader or in more complex cases by the council's assessment panel.

2.4.14 Housing Conditions:

A hazard awareness notice has been served by the private sector housing team of the particular scheme council. In relation to a category 1 or 2 hazard at the applicant's dwelling and

- the remedies that are needed to reduce the hazard will require the property to be vacated for a significant period of time; or
- the cost of the remedies are beyond the means of the applicant (where applicable); or
- the remedies will make the property unsuitable for occupation by the applicant

A suspended improvement notice or prohibition order exists but a foreseeable change in the applicant's circumstances will cause it to become active and result in a high priority situation.

In such cases the award of priority banding is dependent upon individual circumstances, which will be considered on a case by case basis.

2.4.15 Overcrowding/Age differential :

Applicants lack one bedroom. This will include:

Households where 2 children of the same sex have an age gap of eight or more years between them that have to share a bedroom.

Applicants with legally determined regular access to children of 4 nights or more a week, who do not permanently live with them, and require an extra bedroom for their overnight stays.

2.4.16 Under occupation:

Applicants in scheme council or scheme landlord accommodation, who are under occupying by 1 bedroom and are willing to move to smaller accommodation.

2.4.17 Children in flats or maisonettes:

Applicants with children aged 10 or under and lives in a maisonette or a flat without a garden on the same level as the property.

Where a household includes a child or children aged six or under and the applicant lives in a property on the second floor or above where there is no lift access, an extra unit of priority will be added. Please note that any combination of issues related to children in flats would not normally exceed gold band.

2.4.18 Multiple Needs:

Applicants with either a combination of low needs or a combination of needs within the household, when assessed together equate to a medium level need.

BRONZE BAND:

2.4.18 Priority but no 2 year local connection:

Applicants with one of the assessed needs as detailed in emergency, gold or silver band but they do not have a 2 year local connection to Norwich. Please see section 2.5 for how local connection is assessed.

2.4.19 Homelessness:

Applicants who following a homelessness application have been deemed to be in priority need but are intentionally homeless.

2.4.20 Reduced preference:

Applicants with one of the assessed needs as detailed in emergency, gold or silver band but who have been assessed for reduced preference as set out in section 2.5

LOW NEED BAND:

All other applicants to the scheme will be placed in the low need band. The following groups will normally be found in the low need band:

2.4.22 Adequately housed:

Applicants who live in a property that is adequate to meet their needs in terms of property type, size and facilities.

2.4.23 Supported Housing/Hostels:

Applicants in supported housing/hostels and undergoing a resettlement programme and either not yet ready to move on or not engaging fully with the programme (Based on the required evidence from an accredited supporting agency)

Or

Applicants in supported housing/hostels who do not participate in the hostel move on agreement.

2.4.24 Significant financial resources:

Applicants who have significant financial resources and are able to purchase or rent a property in the private sector to meet their needs.

2.5 How the criteria for each band will be assessed:

Assessment of local connection:

2.5.1 In terms of priority banding, an applicant will only be deemed as local connection under the following conditions:

If the applicant is resident in the Norwich City Council boundary and has been living in Norwich for a minimum of 2 years immediately prior to the date of their application in Norwich (this includes people of no fixed abode).

2.5.2 An applicant with no 2 year local connection but who due to their needs would otherwise be in emergency status, gold or silver band will have their preference downgraded by the council to bronze band unless one of the following exceptions apply:

- If the applicant needs to move to Norwich where failure to meet that need would cause extreme hardship to themselves or others.

- Homeless applicants (whereby the local connection criteria as laid down in the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the homelessness Act 2002 would apply)

Assessment of reduced preference:

2.5.3 Section 167 (2A) of the Housing Act (1996) as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 allows allocation schemes to give reduced preference to the following groups of customers:

- a customer with significant financial resources, “where the customer was financially able to secure alternative accommodation at market rent for himself”,
- where the “behaviour of the applicant (or member of his household) affects his suitability to be a tenant”.

Reduced preference criteria:

2.5.4 An applicant will be given reduced preference if the particular scheme council is satisfied they:

- are a tenant of any landlord with current arrears outside of an agreed payment cycle.
- are a former tenant of any landlords with arrears on the rent. Debts with other local authorities, registered social landlords and private landlords could also be taken into account. Although this may not necessarily result in reduced preference criteria if it can be demonstrated that the applicant has entered into and maintained effective arrangements for repaying this debt
- have (or members of their prospective household) committed acts causing or likely to cause a nuisance or annoyance to their neighbours or others in the locality of where they live or where they have previously live
- have failed to maintain a rented property in a proper and reasonable condition
- have deliberately damaged a property
- have committed acts of anti-social behaviour
- are under 18 (unless they are pregnant or have primary responsibility for a child)
- Are owed a full housing duty under the Housing Act 1996 and are assessed by their Support Worker and the Home Options team manager as not ready to move on
- Deliberately did or failed to do something which, in consequence, led to a worsening of their housing circumstances.

2.5.5 In these circumstances, the applicant’s application will be placed, by the particular scheme council, into the bronze band, even if they hold another assessed housing need.

Informing customers of their status:

2.5.6 Applicants who have reduced preference will be notified in writing by the particular scheme council. They have the right to a review of the

decision. Applicants will be informed in writing, by the particular scheme council, of what action they should take for their application to be moved from bronze band into another band. Decisions will be reviewed each year.

2.5.7 This is not a blanket policy. In exceptional circumstances, applicants will be given additional preference despite meeting one of the criteria outlined above. This may occur, for example, where an owner-occupier has a severe medical need and may need sheltered housing, or a person fleeing domestic violence with rent arrears; this would be agreed on a case-by-case basis.

2.5.8 Applicants with reduced preference will be notified by the particular scheme council of how their application can be removed from the bronze band, for example, through agreeing an arrangement to make payments towards rent arrears, and maintaining regular payments for a specified time. Each case will be treated individually.

Assessment of overcrowding:

2.5.9 The scheme councils will use the following guidelines to assess the level of overcrowding.

Households.

- A single person or couple can occupy one bedroom.
- Two children of the same sex are expected to share a bedroom up to the age of 16. When the oldest child is 16 years old, the family is classed as lacking one bedroom.
- Two children of different sex would be expected to share a bedroom until the oldest child is 6. When the child is 6, the family is classed as lacking one bedroom.
- Where an adult aged 16 or over are sharing a room, but not living as a couple, they will be classed as lacking one bedroom.
- Where 2 children of the same sex have an age gap of eight or more years between them that have to share a bedroom the household will be classed as lacking one bedroom.

Assessment of multiple/cumulative need:

2.5.10 Where a household's circumstances meet more than one assessed housing need, this will be taken into account, by the council, when prioritising the applicant. This could occur, for example, when a family is severely overcrowded and one of the family members also has a medical need, which could be met by moving the family into more suitable accommodation. Multiple needs could also be classified as two family members having different, but severe, medical needs. When any one household has two or more housing needs within any one band, they will be moved one band higher to take into account the multiple needs. If an applicant has multiple needs represented in several bands, their application will be held in the band which represents their highest need.

Assessment of medical needs:

- 2.5.11 Priority will be awarded based on information supplied by the applicant and/or a specialist professional (medical practitioner/occupational therapist/private sector housing officer etc).
- 2.5.12 The medical assessment will be carried out, in most cases, by the council's housing options team leader. They have been specifically trained to carry out this role. However, in complex, non-standard cases they may refer the case to the council's assessment panel. They in turn, where it is necessary, may request a report from a medical specialist or occupational therapist to help them make the assessment.
- 2.5.13 Each case will be assessed on its merits to determine whether medical priority should be awarded. The council's team leader and/or assessment panel will look at whether the medical condition is serious and enduring and whether it is directly affected by the applicant's present housing and whether it would improve if rehoused.

Assessment of welfare needs:

- 2.5.14 The welfare assessment will be carried out, in most cases, by the council's housing options team leader. They have been specifically trained to carry out this role. However, in complex, non-standard cases they may refer the case to the council's assessment panel.
- 2.5.15 Each case will be assessed on its merits to determine whether welfare priority should be awarded. The council's team leader and/or assessment panel will look at whether the situation is serious and enduring and whether it is directly affected by the applicant's present housing and whether it would improve if rehoused. An example of where welfare priority would be awarded would be people who need to move to a particular district where failure to meet that need would cause extreme hardship to themselves or others.

Assessment of housing conditions

- 2.5.16 This would be carried out by the private sector housing team of the council. Assessment would be carried out in line with the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System and priority awarded as set out in the bands above.

Assessment of homelessness:

- 2.5.17 This would be carried out by the council's advice and homelessness service in line with the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and priority awarded as set out in the bands above.

Assessments made by the council's housing options team leader

2.5.18 Please note that where this document states that an assessment can be made by the council's housing options team leader this means them or their trained equivalent.

Assessments for applicants who are members of staff or elected members of one of the scheme councils:

2.5.19 Applications from elected members or members of their family will be dealt with by a relevant manager of the council. The award of a housing need band (priority) under the scheme to elected members or to members of their family will need to be authorised by the Chief Executive Officer.

2.5.20 Applications from staff members will be dealt with by a relevant manager of the council. The award of a priority banding under the scheme to staff members will need to be authorised by the council's Director with the responsibility for housing.

2.6 Determination of application date:

2.6.1 All applications will be awarded an application date by the council. This date will determine who is successful in being offered a social rented property where two or more people from the same band bid on the same property. The date that will be used for applications will be as follows:

- Statutorily homeless applicants – the date the homelessness application was made.
- Emergency status holders – the date of award of emergency status (if the applicant is statutorily homeless and currently accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation or its equivalent then it would be the date of the homelessness application)
- All other applicants (including transfers) the date their application was received for assessment.

2.7 Change in circumstances:

2.7.1 If an applicant's circumstances change it is up to the applicant to inform the council so that their application can be reassessed. Examples of changes of circumstances could include the serious deterioration in a medical condition, threat of homelessness or an increase in household size due to the birth of a child. Following the reassessment, if the applicant moves into a higher band then their application date will be considered as the date that the council was notified of their change of circumstances. Alternatively, if an applicant moves into a lower band than the application date will be the original date they applied.

2.8 Revision of applications:

2.8.1 Every applicant on the housing registers is sent a revision form on the anniversary of their application to ensure that their circumstances are kept up to date. They are required to update, sign and return the form to

confirm they wish to remain on the housing register. The application will automatically be cancelled, if not returned.

2.9 Property size qualification:

2.9.1 Each applicant will be assessed, by the council, to determine what size of property they qualify for. The table below gives an indication of how this will be assessed.

This is a guide and each participating landlord may choose to take account of local issues in determining what household size is eligible to bid for a property. This will be made clear at point of advertisement. Any potential affordability or housing benefit issues arising from this will be discussed with the applicant prior to their accepting the tenancy.

Once proof of pregnancy is provided (MATB1) the unborn child will be classed as a child for the purposes of property size eligibility only.

Please note:

- Assessment will be based on the suitability of the property for the size of the household.
- If an applicant has access to a child or children for four or more nights a week they will be classed as part of the applicant's household. We will require proof of this.

Household Detail	Property Group
Single applicant with no other household members	<u>Bedsit</u> 1 bed flat 1 bed bungalow 1 bed house 2 bed flat/maisonette above ground floor
Applicant with partner	1 bed flat 1 bed bungalow 1 bed house 2 bed flat/maisonette above ground floor
Applicant with 1 child 10 or under	2 bed ground floor flat/maisonette 2 bed flat/maisonette above ground floor 2 bed bungalow 2 bed house
Applicant with 1 child over 10	2 bed ground floor flat/maisonette 2 bed bungalow 2 bed house 2 bed flat/maisonette above ground floor 3 bed flat/maisonette above ground floor
Applicant with 2 children of mixed gender both under 6	2 bed ground floor flat/maisonette 2 bed flat/maisonette above ground floor 2 bed bungalow 2 bed house
Applicant with 2 children of the same gender both under 16 and one 10 or under	2 bed ground floor flat/maisonette 2 bed flat/maisonette above ground floor

	2 bed bungalow 2 bed house
Applicant with 2 children of the same gender both under 16 and both over 10	2 bed ground floor flat/maisonette 2 bed bungalow 2 bed house 2 bed flat/maisonette above ground floor 3 bed flat/maisonette above ground floor
Applicant with 2 children of the same gender one 16 or over and one 10 or under	3 bed ground floor flat/maisonette 3 bed bungalow 3 bed house
Applicant with 2 children of the same gender at least one 16 or over and both over 10	3 bed ground floor flat/maisonette 3 bed bungalow 3 bed house 3 bed flat/maisonette above ground floor
Applicant with 2 children of mixed gender at least one of whom is aged 6 or over and at least one 10 or under	3 bed ground floor flat/maisonette 3 bed bungalow 3 bed house
Applicant with 2 children of mixed gender at least one of whom is aged 6 or over and both over 10	3 bed ground floor flat/maisonette 3 bed bungalow 3 bed house 3 bed flat/maisonette above ground floor
<i>Applicant with 3 children mixed gender all under 6</i>	3 bed ground floor flat/maisonette 3 bed bungalow 3 bed house
<i>Applicant with 3 children of the same gender all under 16 and at least one 10 or under</i>	3 bed ground floor flat/maisonette 3 bed bungalow 3 bed house
<i>Applicant with 3 children of the same gender all under 16 and all over 10</i>	3 bed ground floor flat/maisonette 3 bed bungalow 3 bed house 3 bed flat/maisonette above ground floor
Applicant with 3 children of same gender at least one 16 or over and one 10 or under	3 bed ground floor flat/maisonette 3 bed bungalow 3 bed house 3 bed (2 receptions) ground floor flat/maisonette 3 bed (2 receptions) bungalows 3 bed (2 receptions) house 4 bed ground floor flat/maisonette 4 bed bungalow 4 bed house
Applicant with 3 children of the same gender at least one 16 or over and all over 10	3 bed ground floor flat/maisonette 3 bed bungalow 3 bed house 3 bed flat/maisonette above ground floor 3 bed (2 receptions) ground floor flat/maisonette 3 bed (2 receptions) bungalows 3 bed (2 receptions) house 4 bed flat/maisonette 4 bed bungalow 4 bed house
Applicant with 3 children of mixed gender at least one 6 or over and one 10 or under	3 bed ground floor flat/maisonette 3 bed bungalow

	3 bed house 3 bed (2 receptions) ground floor flat/maisonette 3 bed (2 receptions) bungalows 3 bed (2 receptions) house 4 bed ground floor flat/maisonette 4 bed bungalow 4 bed house
Applicant with 3 children of mixed gender at least one 6 or over and all over 10	3 bed ground floor flat/maisonette 3 bed bungalow 3 bed house 3 bed flat/maisonette above ground floor 3 bed (2 receptions) ground floor flat/maisonette 3 bed (2 receptions) bungalows 3 bed (2 receptions) house 4 bed flat/maisonette 4 bed bungalow 4 bed house
Applicant with 4 children of the mixed gender all under 6	3 bed ground floor flat/maisonette 3 bed bungalow 3 bed house 3 bed (2 receptions) ground floor flat/maisonette 3 bed (2 receptions) bungalows 3 bed (2 receptions) house 4 bed ground floor flat/maisonette 4 bed bungalow 4 bed house
Applicant with 4 children of the same gender all under 16 and at least one 10 or under	3 bed ground floor flat/maisonette 3 bed bungalow 3 bed house 3 bed (2 receptions) ground floor flat/maisonette 3 bed (2 receptions) bungalows 3 bed (2 receptions) house 4 bed ground floor flat/maisonette 4 bed bungalow 4 bed house
Applicant with 4 children of the same gender all under 16 and all over 10	3 bed ground floor flat/maisonette 3 bed bungalow 3 bed house 3 bed flat/maisonette above ground floor 3 bed (2 receptions) ground floor flat/maisonette 3 bed (2 receptions) bungalows 3 bed (2 receptions) house 4 bed flat/maisonette 4 bed bungalow 4 bed house
Applicant with 4 children of same gender at least one 16 or over and at least one 10 or under	3 bed ground floor flat/maisonette 3 bed bungalow 3 bed house 3 bed (2 receptions) ground floor flat/maisonette 3 bed (2 receptions) bungalows 3 bed (2 receptions) house 4 bed flat/maisonette

	4 bed bungalow 4 bed house 5 + bed house
Applicant with 4 children of the same gender at least one 16 or over and all over 10	3 bed ground floor flat/maisonette 3 bed bungalow 3 bed house 3 bed flat/maisonette above ground floor 3 bed (2 receptions) ground floor flat/maisonette 3 bed (2 receptions) bungalows 3 bed (2 receptions) house 4 bed flat/maisonette 4 bed bungalow 4 bed house 5 + bed house
Applicant with 4 children of mixed gender at least one 6 or over and at least one 10 or under	3 bed ground floor flat/maisonette 3 bed bungalow 3 bed house 3 bed (2 receptions) ground floor flat/maisonette 3 bed (2 receptions) bungalows 3 bed (2 receptions) house 4 bed ground floor flat/maisonette 4 bed bungalow 4 bed house 5 + bed house
Applicant with 4 children of mixed gender at least one 6 or over and all over 10	3 bed ground floor flat/maisonette 3 bed bungalow 3 bed house 3 bed flat/maisonette above ground floor 3 bed (2 receptions) ground floor flat/maisonette 3 bed (2 receptions) bungalows 3 bed (2 receptions) house 4 bed flat/maisonette 4 bed bungalow 4 bed house 5 + bed house
Applicant with 5 or more children	3 bed (2 receptions) ground floor flat/maisonette 3 bed (2 receptions) bungalows 3 bed (2 receptions) house 4 bed flat/maisonette 4 bed bungalow 4 bed house 5 + bed house

2.10 Notification of applications:

2.10.1 Once an application has been assessed and entered on the housing registers the applicant will receive notification from the council confirming the following:

- The band in which they have been placed.

- The size of property they qualify for
- A guide on how to use the HOME OPTIONS scheme

2.11 Cancellation of applications:

2.11.1 Applications will be cancelled by the council for the following reasons:

- The applicant requests cancellation
- The applicant's circumstances change and they are no longer eligible
- The applicant fails to return a revision form
- The applicant is found to have made a false or deliberately misleading statement in connection with their application

2.12 Review of applications:

2.12.1 Where an applicant has failed to make a bid on Home Options within a twelve month timeframe, where there have been suitable properties available to meet their housing need, then their application will be reviewed and may be cancelled.

2.12.2 Where an applicant has bid for and been offered five properties, which they have refused or failed to attend the viewing without good cause, then their circumstances and banding will be reviewed. If the refusals are considered by the Home Options team to be unreasonable or without grounds, then the application will be cancelled.

2.13 False information:

2.13.1 Any applicant who deliberately attempts to deceive or defraud the scheme councils will be dealt with very severely. An applicant who is found to have made a false or deliberately misleading statement in connection with their application will have their application cancelled.

If an applicant knowingly gives false information in order to secure a home it is likely that they will lose that home. It is also likely that they will be prosecuted and if found guilty could be liable to a fine and/or imprisonment.

3 Accessing the housing options:

3.1 Finding a home:

3.1.1 Once applicants are registered on the housing register they can start looking for a social housing property of their choice.

3.2 Advertising of vacant properties:

- 3.2.1 Social rented properties will be advertised on a weekly basis. Private rented properties, shared ownership properties and other housing options can be advertised at all times.
- 3.2.2 Social rented properties will be advertised in two main categories. These will be:
- For all applicants (this will account for 80% of available social rented properties)
 - For existing (transfer) tenants of scheme council and scheme landlords only (this will account for 20% of available social rented properties)
- 3.2.3 Properties will be advertised in the following ways:
- In a newsletter
 - On the website

The scheme guide and website explains in detail how and where to access the advertised properties.

3.3 Promotion of other housing options:

- 3.3.1 Information will also be provided about the other housing options we will be promoting through the scheme including:
- Help to stay in their current home (Renewal Grants/Loans etc)
 - Rent Deposit Schemes
 - Mutual exchanges
 - Help to access the private sale properties
 - Shared ownership

3.4 Property descriptions:

- 3.4.1 Properties advertised will, wherever possible, carry a photograph of the property or similar and will always have a full description of the property. This description will usually include the following information:
- The type of property (house, flat etc)
 - The tenure of the property (social rented housing, private rented, shared ownership etc)
 - The number of bedrooms the property has
 - The location of the property
 - The local authority the applicant will need to be registered with
 - The level of accessibility the property has for people with mobility problems/wheelchair users
 - Any services provided to the property e.g wardens, caretaker etc.
 - The heating type the property has
 - Any age restrictions on the property (sheltered etc)

- Indication of the estimated demand for the property (high/medium/low)
- Whether pets are allowed
- Availability of outside space (garden etc)
- Availability of parking
- The rent of the property and the service charges (split weekly/monthly). If there are different rent levels according to the circumstances of the applicant, these will both be advertised.
- Special information (location of bus routes/ other amenities etc)
- Property size qualification
- Whether the property is available to all applicants or transfer applicants only

3.4.2 Applicants must qualify for the size of property as advertised.

3.4.3. The scheme landlord will ascribe tenancy type(s) for their advertised properties

3.5 Bidding/application process:

3.5.1 Social rented properties - Provided the applicant meets the stated qualifying criteria and are registered on the housing register they can bid for the property by the deadline given. Applicants can bid for a maximum of two social housing properties, each week. Applicants will only require their register number and date of birth to bid for properties through any of the bidding methods.

3.5.2 Other housing options - Each property/housing option will specify how an applicant can apply for it. There is no limit on the number of these properties/housing options an applicant can apply for.

3.6 Deadlines for bids:

3.6.1 Social housing properties. All property adverts will clearly state a deadline by which bids for those properties must be received. Bids received after the specified deadline will not be considered.

3.7 Bidding methods:

3.7.1 Applicants can bid in the following ways:

- By phone
- By text message

- On the website

3.7.2 The scheme guide and website explains in detail how and where to bid.

3.8 Non-qualifying bids:

3.8.1 Applicants are restricted to making two bids for social rented properties per week. Applicants will not be considered for any property without meeting the qualifying criteria. For example, a single person would not be considered for a three-bedroom property.

3.9 Selection of the successful bids:

3.9.1 At the end of the advertising period, applicants who have bid for an advertised home will be short listed according to the allocations policy criteria and any qualifying criteria on the property. The successful applicant for each property will be the one who qualifies for the property, in the highest band and with the earliest application date subject to the provisions in 3.11.5.

3.10 Making the offer:

3.10.1 The successful applicant will be contacted by the housing officer of the council or scheme landlord whose property they have applied for to arrange for an accompanied viewing. They will then be offered the property. Photographic identification from the applicant will be required.

3.10.2 Applicants will usually be contacted within three working days of the shortlist for the property closing. If an applicant cannot be contacted following multiple attempts the next person on the shortlist will be contacted. It is therefore important all applicants ensure they are contactable or else they may lose out on a property they have applied for.

3.10.3 Applicants have up to two working days to decide whether to accept the offer of accommodation. If no response has been received after two days, the next person on the shortlist will be offered the property.

3.10.4 If an applicant refuses the offer, the property will be offered to the next on the shortlist, and so on until the property is let.

3.10.5 Scheme landlords reserve the right to carry out an assessment on applicants to ensure the particular property is appropriate for their needs before contacting them or making an offer. If following such an assessment the scheme landlords deems the property not to be suitable for the

applicant the property would then be offered to the next applicant on the shortlist.

3.10.6 Offers of accommodation may be withdrawn if it is found that the information supplied by the applicant was incorrect or if they are deemed due to their behaviour to be unsuitable to be a tenant (e.g. they have accrued rent arrears that were not previously known about).

3.11 Feedback:

3.11.1 On each newsletter, the council and scheme landlords give feedback as to the results of the social rented properties that have previously been advertised.

3.11.2 The information provided for each property will be:

1. The address
2. Number of bids
3. Band of the successful applicant
4. Application date of the successful applicant

3.11.3 The council will never include any personal details of successful applicants in the feedback.

3.11.4 This feedback is very important to applicants as it will help to identify which property types and areas are most popular and so where their best chances are of making a successful bid. It will also allow applicants the knowledge to decide whether they would be better served by pursuing alternative options to social housing.

3.12 Properties excluded from the scheme:

3.12.1 The council reserves the right to exclude certain properties and housing schemes from the allocations system. Examples of where this may occur include where a property is needed urgently to deal with an emergency or to provide temporary accommodation for a homeless family. Special housing schemes such as Housing with Care Schemes for the elderly will also be let outside the allocations scheme.

3.12.2 However, the vast majority of vacant social housing properties in Norwich will be let through the allocations scheme.

3.13 Direct lets:

3.13.1 In certain circumstances the council will allocate properties directly to applicants outside of the choice based lettings process.

3.13.2 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, or where a customer has been referred as part of the witness protection scheme.
- where the council has entered into a special arrangement with a support agency in order to accommodate especially vulnerable or challenging clients. Any such arrangement will be governed by a service level agreement signed off by the Head of Housing.
- where a sensitive let is required for a particular property, because of issues such as drug dealing, violence, public protection, or ASB.
- where a customer's home is being repaired and they need to be moved from the property on a temporary or permanent basis.

3.13.3 A tenancy may also be allocated by the council or scheme landlord, regardless of other priorities, where the applicant has enjoyed established occupancy of the property, has a reasonable expectation of a property of that type and would be a suitable tenant, (e.g. former tenants of the property, non-secure or introductory tenants or carers or family members with no succession rights.) In deciding whether to make an offer of a tenancy the council will consider whether the property is of a suitable size and type for the applicant's household (if it is not, then another property of a more suitable size and type may be offered) and the conduct of applicant in terms of rent arrears and tenancy conditions. Any grounds put forward by the applicant for offering him or her the property regardless of its suitability will also be considered and in exceptional circumstances (taking into account the length of residence, age of applicant and whether the allocation would contribute to maintaining a sustainable property) the tenancy may be offered even if this results in under occupation of the property.

Decisions to allocate properties outside of the choice based lettings system will be authorised by the Head of Housing.

3.14 Sheltered housing

3.14.1 Sheltered housing is accommodation designed specifically for people of retirement age. Residents may pay an additional charge as well as basic rent, for support services. In exceptional circumstances, younger people may be considered if they additional support and cannot be re-housed in any other type of accommodation.

3.14.2 The council and scheme landlords have different age restrictions for sheltered housing. The minimum age for the council and scheme landlords to consider a customer for sheltered housing, apart from in exceptional circumstances, will be clearly stated when each property is advertised.

3.14.3 The council and scheme landlords may carry out a needs and risk assessment for customers who bid for sheltered housing properties, to

ensure the services provided are appropriate to their needs. This will be done as part of the offer process.

4. Equal access:

4.1 Statement on equal access:

4.1.1 The council and scheme landlords are committed to ensuring equality of opportunity in all elements of the scheme. They will ensure equality in the availability and accessibility of advice and information and in access to properties and services. The council and scheme landlords are opposed to all forms of direct or indirect discrimination and will ensure effective systems are in place to prevent discrimination on any grounds. The council will monitor the ethnicity of everyone on the housing register and all successful applicants to ensure that equality of opportunity is being achieved.

4.2 Advice and assistance:

4.2.1 The council will ensure that everybody in Norwich seeking housing can easily access the information and assistance they require to use the scheme effectively and we will provide advice on the range of housing options open to them. Staff will be available throughout office hours to provide advice and assistance on the full range of housing options available through the scheme.

4.3 Vulnerable groups:

4.3.1 Due to the nature of choice based lettings, particularly the need for clients to be proactive in the process, the council realises it is essential that vulnerable and excluded people can access and participate effectively in the allocations scheme. The council will, therefore, ensure all relevant staff are well trained so they can assist vulnerable clients to access and use the scheme.

4.3.2 All literature will be available in a large font and written in plain and unambiguous language. The website is compatible with screen readers and have browse aloud capability.

4.3.3 The council will also hold an 'assisted applicants list'. This is for applicants who due to their vulnerability require additional help with the scheme. This additional help could be, for example, helping customers bid for available homes or sending the property brochures directly to people who cannot access the information in any other way. The 'assisted applicants list' can be accessed by applicants or their support workers informing the council. They will need to explain why they require this option e.g. if they are

housebound etc. However, this service will only be available for the most vulnerable clients as determined by the council.

- 4.3.4 To ensure vulnerable groups are not being disadvantaged under the scheme, the council will monitor systems to ensure all groups are using the scheme successfully. This is particularly important for those in the highest bands where, if they are not bidding for properties, it will be flagged up by the system and the housing options staff of the council will then contact them to ascertain why and offer help where necessary.

5 Retrospective Bidding

5.1 Definition of a retrospective bid request

A retrospective bid request is a request received by the council from a registered applicant, or their authorised representative, to include a bid in a bidding cycle that has already closed. This will include requests to withdraw an existing bid and replace it with another.

5.2 Receipt of requests for retrospective bids

Requests for retrospective bids must be made in one of the following ways:

- By telephone to the housing options team of the council
- In person to the housing options team of the council

5.3 Under what circumstances will a request for a retrospective bid be considered?

A request for a retrospective bid will be considered if it is received prior to close of business on the day after the bidding cycle in question has closed and the following criteria apply:

- Any of the housing options electronic bidding methods have been unavailable from midday, for a period of more than 30 minutes, on the last day of the bidding cycle and only if this unavailability can be substantiated by the I.T. providers concerned and has affected all bidders by this method.

5.4 Under what circumstances will a request for a retrospective bid be rejected?

A request for a retrospective bid will be rejected if any of the following apply:

- The request is received after close of business on the day following the close of the bidding cycle in question
- There has been no period of unavailability as defined in paragraph 5.3.1
- The applicant does not meet one or more of the eligibility criteria for the property in question

5.5 What will happen if a retrospective bid is received and accepted?

Acceptance of a retrospective bid does not guarantee a property. If a

retrospective bid is received and accepted it will be entered onto the system by a member of the housing options team on the same day. The bid will then take its correct position in the short list for the property concerned and be processed in the normal way.

- It is the responsibility of the housing options team leader to ensure that the short listing process is suspended in the event that the criteria in section 5.3.1 have been met, and that all partners are alerted to this fact.
- The housing options team leader, will alert all partners when short listing can resume this will usually be two working days after the close of the bidding cycle in question.
- The housing options team leader will be responsible for adding a message to the website once downtime has been confirmed alerting applicants to their right to request a retrospective bid.

6.0 Reviews of decisions:

6.1 Statutory reviews of decisions

6.1.1 An applicant has the legal right to ask for a review of certain decisions made regarding their application for re-housing. These are:

- if the applicant has not been given preference under the allocations scheme due to unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable to be a tenant of the authority; or
- any decision about the facts of the applicant's case which has been taken into account in considering whether to make an allocation to them. (This would include the banding given to an applicant)

6.1.2 A request for a review of a decision should be made in writing using the appropriate form. The request should be made within 21 days of receipt of the decision being received by the applicant. The request for a review will be considered by the council's assessment panel. Each assessment panel will be made up of a panel of senior officers and reviews will be considered within 28 days of the request being received and the applicant will receive a written response outlining the result of the review within a further 14 days.

6.1.3 An applicant does not have the right to ask for a review of a decision reached by an earlier review. If an applicant is still unhappy following the review of a decision, they can make a complaint through the council's complaints procedures, contact the local government ombudsman, or seek further advice from the Citizens Advice Bureau.

6.2 Homelessness reviews

6.2.1 Homeless applicants have the right to request a review of certain decisions. This includes the decision to discharge duty through a

reasonable offer of accommodation via the particular housing register for those accepted as statutorily homeless. Applicants are generally advised to accept the property and continue with their request for a review. If the review goes in their favour alternative accommodation will be provided as soon as possible, however, if the council's decision remains the same no further accommodation will be provided in relation to their homeless application. The review request must be made within 21 days of notification of a decision, although a late review request can be accepted under exceptional circumstances at the discretion of the authority. The council will provide details of their review procedure.

6.3 Complaints procedure

- 6.3.1 If an applicant is dissatisfied with any aspect of the management of their application, other than where a review can be made, they should contact the housing options team leader.

6.4 The Local Government Ombudsman

- 6.4.1 The Local Government Ombudsman investigates complaints of injustice arising from maladministration by local authorities and other bodies. They can be asked to investigate complaints about most council matters including housing
- 6.4.2 If a complainant is not satisfied with the action the council takes, he or she can send a written complaint to the ombudsman. A complainant must give the organisation an opportunity to deal with a complaint first, using its complaints procedure.

The Local Government Ombudsman can be contacted at:

Local Government Ombudsman
The Oaks No 2
Westwood Way
Westwood Business Park
Coventry CV4 8JB
Tel: 01904 380200 **Website:** www.lgo.org.uk

If an applicant wishes to make a complaint against a scheme landlord (Housing Association,) they should contact:

The Housing Ombudsman Service
Norman House
105-109 Strand
London
WC2R 0AA

Tel: 020 7836 3630 **E mail** ombudsman@ihos.org

7 Monitoring/changes to the scheme

7.1 Scheme monitoring:

7.1.1 The scheme will be monitored directly by the housing options manager. The manager will regularly submit performance reports and, where necessary, recommendations for changes to the scheme. They will look at a range of issues including the following:

- Application and bidding data, property turnover and demand
- Ensure that the highest needs applicants and those who are vulnerable are using the scheme effectively
- Monitor the scheme's performance in meeting its agreed targets
- Monitor feedback from customers and stakeholders

7.2 Changes to the scheme:

7.2.1 The council reserves the right to expand, change or alter any element of the scheme, as and when required, to meet changes in housing need, capacity, resources and legislation. Any major changes to the scheme will be carried out through a report of the housing options manager to the council executive.