NORWICH
City Council

Scrutiny committee

Date: **Thursday, 15 January 2026**
Time: **16:30**
Venue: **Mancroft room City Hall, St Peters Street, Norwich, NR2 1NH**

Committee members:

Councillors:
Wright (Chair)
Galvin (Vice-Chair)
Champion
Fulton-McAlister
Hoechner
Kendrick
Lawes
Sands (M)
Sands (S)
Smith
Stutley
Oliver

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Agenda

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1	**Apologies** To receive apologies for absence	
2	**Declarations of interest** (Please note that it is the responsibility of individual members to declare an interest prior to the item if they arrive late for the meeting)	
3	**Minutes** To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 18 December 2025.	**5 - 14**
4	**Revisions to the Home Options Policy** **Purpose -** To update the Scrutiny Committee on proposed changes to the Council's social housing allocations policy to incorporate new legislation and statutory guidance.	**15 - 82**
5	**Housing Development at Mile Cross Depot Site - to follow**	
6	**Nutrient Neutrality Review Scope** **Purpose -** In May 2025, Audit Committee resolved to 'request that Scrutiny Committee considers reviewing the current position around Nutrient Neutrality and the mitigations'. At the June work programming session, the Scrutiny Committee added Nutrient Neutrality to their Work Programme for March 2026. The purpose of this item is for the Scrutiny Committee to scope the review.	**83 - 90**
7	**Work Programme** **Purpose** - To approve the Scrutiny Work Programme 2025-26.	**91 - 102**
8	**Exclusion of the public** Consideration of exclusion of the public.	

EXEMPT ITEMS:

(During consideration of these items the meeting is not likely to be open to the press and the public.)

To consider whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during consideration of an agenda item on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as specified in Part 1 of Schedule 12 A of the Local Government Act 1972 or it being confidential for the purposes of Section 100A(2) of that Act.

In each case, members are asked to decide whether, in all circumstances, the public interest in maintaining the exemption (and discussing the matter in private) outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

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***9 Exempt Minutes - to follow**

To confirm the exempt minutes of the meeting held on 18 December 2025.

Date of publication**: Wednesday, 10 December 2025**

Scrutiny Committee

16:30 to 19:45 **Thursday, 18 December 2025**

Present: Councillors Wright (Chair), Galvin (Vice-Chair), Champion, Hoechner, Kendrick, Lawes, Sands (M), Sands (S), Oliver, Knight (substitute for Stutely)

Apologies: Councillors Fulton McAlister, Smith and Stutely

In attendance: Councillor Stonard, Leader of the Council

Councillor Padda, Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Justice

Emily Yule, Executive Director of Resources

Davina Howes, Executive Director of Communities and Housing

John East, Interim Executive Director of Major Projects

Neville Murton, Finance Lead – Capital Strategy and Major Projects

Andrew Turnbull, Development Strategy Manager

Bek Seeley, Place Partners UK

Julia Medler, Head of Customers, IT and Digital

Clive Morgan, Infrastructure, Security & Support Manager

Tracy Woods, Strategic Procurement Manager

Charlotte Spragg, Senior Procurement Business Partner

Annessa Salmon, Interim Director of HR

Nick Bodger, Strategy Manager

Joe Siggins, Strategy Officer (Equalities)

35. Declarations of Interest

35.1 There were no declarations of interest.

36. Minutes

36.1 **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2025 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

37. Call in of IT Infrastructure Refresh Decision Taken at the meeting of the Cabinet on the 3 December 2025

37.1 **RESOLVED** to adopt the Scrutiny Protocol for call in as detailed in the report.

37.2 The Chair introduced the call in and highlighted the scope that had been put forward by the signatories, as detailed in the report.

37.3 The Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Justice addressed the Committee and explained the rationale behind the decision which was taken by Cabinet.

37.4 The Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Justice explained that the Council's core IT hardware was procured in 2020 and would be 6 years old by 2026/27, at which point it would become vulnerable to failures and be harder to support. Some services had already been moved to third party/cloud solutions. She explained that the rationale behind the recommendation to Cabinet was that the IT Refresh reduced risk of service failure, ensured that the Council had a stable IT platform during Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and provided flexibility for the new government entity to decide it's long-term IT strategy without inheriting unsupported infrastructure.

37.5 The Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Justice sought to address the concerns listed in the call in. She noted that the IT infrastructure Refresh proposed to replace 11 end-of-support services, the primary and secondary storage area network, the top of rack network equipment and the primary and secondary backup servers with their associated storage, which were procured and installed in 2020. The IT infrastructure supported many of the Council's core services.

37.6 The Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Justice explained that the Cabinet did not require the detailed specification of IT equipment to be procured as officers would ensure that the specification met the requirements. However, she stated that the procurement exercise would specify the requirements.

37.7 In regard to delegation, the Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Justice explained that as Cabinet had established the scope, budget and procurement route, delegation was sought to allow the Executive Director of Resources to complete the contract award, in consultation with the Portfolio

Holder, through the Council's established procurement process. She noted that the approach maintained Member oversight whilst avoiding duplication.

37.8 The Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Justice detailed that a capital bid had been submitted in 2024-25 to fund an IT infrastructure refresh. Following discussions with Finance, it was agreed that the refresh would be deferred by 1 year and alternative quotations were sought to extend support during the interim period. A quotation of £63,000 for combined hardware and software support and a quotation of £13,000 for hardware-only support were received. The capital programme budgets, including the IT Infrastructure Refresh budget, were approved by Full Council in February 2025, subject to the submission and approval of a business case by the Capital Board. She explained that, on the basis that the capital spend would be deferred from 2024-25 to 2025-26, work was undertaken to ensure that the server and storage environment was upgraded to the latest supported software versions. To manage the 1-year deferral and mitigate risk during 2025-26, the hardware-only support option was selected and that arrangement would expire in May 2026. The Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Justice noted that there remained a risk that any newly identified software vulnerabilities would not be able to be addressed without active vendor software support. However, following the application of software updates in April 2025 and other security controls, the hardware-only option for 1 year was assessed as an acceptable level of risk. She added that the Capital Boad confirmed the capital budget decision in September 2025 following the submission of the approved business case.

37.9 The Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Justice explained that there was a finite period for which the IT equipment refresh was able to be deferred and emphasised that it was essential that the Council did not put services to residents or internal operations at risk or become overly reliant on suppliers without viable alternatives. She stated that any further delay would require full hardware and software support at an estimated cost of approximately £63,000 per annum, compared with an estimated £100,000 per annum for new infrastructure. The Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Justice expressed concerns that the availability of compatible replacement components would reduce significantly as the equipment continued to age beyond its original lifecycle. Additionally, she explained that the cost of maintaining support for ageing infrastructure year on year would increase due to higher risk and limited availability of spares. Therefore, she advised Members that the estimated £63,000 per annum for full hardware and software support was to be considered as a minimum, with costs expected to rise over time.

37.10 The Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Justice advised Members that investment in new infrastructure at an estimated £100,000 per annum provided full vendor support, guaranteed availability of replacement parts, access to ongoing security updates, and improved performance and resilience. The Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Justice stated that,

when assessed over the medium term, the new infrastructure option represented better value for money and a more sustainable risk position.

37.11 The Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Justice addressed a point detailed in the call in about the 'neutral' effect of the refresh on safeguarding adults and children. She clarified that the impact was assessed as neutral because the IT refresh maintained existing safeguarding arrangements, as opposed to changing them.

37.12 In response to points in the call in about why a cloud mitigation or Hardware as a Service (Haas) model had not been considered, the Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Justice explained that the capital business case and the IT Strategy referenced cloud-based solutions. Alternative models such as HaaS were most appropriately considered on a service-by-service and application-by-application basis. The Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Justice explained that a wholesale migration to cloud-based services within the next 2 years was not feasible as it required engagement with multiple suppliers and Council service leads, redesign of services and interfaces, and clarity over future application services which was not available due to LGR. She added that it was possible that some HaaS models would result in higher total costs compared to a capital-funded refresh.

37.13 Lastly, the Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Justice addressed concerns in the call in about the procurement framework. She explained that at the time of writing the Cabinet report, the specific framework had not been confirmed due to the need to align procurement timescales with committee approval cycles and to ensure that the renewal and associated IT hardware and software procurement would be timed as close as possible to May 2026. She concluded that the imperative was to avoid the need to further extend warranties beyond May 2026 and scheduling the procurement activity in January and February 2026 allowed for orders to be placed in April, aligning delivery and implementation with the May timeframe.

37.14 The Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Justice thanked officers for their hard work on the IT Infrastructure Refresh and concluded her remarks.

37.15 The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Justice for the detailed explanation, which he noted was lacking in the report submitted to Cabinet. He asked officers why the business case was not presented to Cabinet. The Head of Customers, IT and Digital explained that the business case was crafted for the Capital Board for assurance. The Chair explained that he was concerned that Cabinet did not have sight of the points highlighted by the Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Justice, which would have supported their decision. He noted that even if it was not directly related, the business plan needed to be included in the report to Cabinet in some capacity.

37.16 The Executive Director of Resources commented that there was a separation between officer and Councillor roles, and expert officers were employed by

the Council to make recommendations. She advised that Cabinet had made a decision around allocating spend, which was based on officer recommendations that the equipment put in place would satisfy Council requirements. The Chair thanked the Executive Director of Resources for the clarification but noted a lack of consistency in reports. He stated that some reports on Council spend in other areas included very detailed reports. He was concerned that a lack of detail had been provided in the report due to the technical subject matter.

37.17 In response to a question about the decision to delegate authority, the Head of Customers, IT and Digital explained that timing was a key factor. She detailed that the support contract expired in May 2026 and the Council needed to have either the new infrastructure in place or an extension of a support contract which would be costly. Delegation sought to streamline the process and was a normal process which had previously been undertaken.

37.18 The Chair noted the three possible courses of outcome for the Scrutiny Committee to undertake, following the additional information which had been provided by the Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Justice and officers during the meeting. He remained concerned about the decision to not include the business case in the report to Cabinet. The Scrutiny Committee agreed that a clear rationale ought to be provided for all decisions to be made by the Council or Cabinet. Members agreed that had a more comprehensive report been provided, a call in would not have been necessary.

37.18 Members discussed whether their concerns about the business plan and limited rationale in the report necessitated a referral of the matter back to Cabinet for reconsideration. The Executive Director of Resources advised that if the Committee decided to refer the matter to Cabinet, the item would be placed either on the agenda for their next meeting on 14 January 2026 or an extraordinary meeting would be called.

37.19 Discussion ensued on the impact of LGR. A Member queried whether LGR had impacted the decision-making process and noted that they would like to see the impact of LGR quantified in reports. The Executive Director of Resources suggested that a section on LGR implications could be added to Council and Cabinet reports. Members agreed that that would be helpful going forward.

37.20 The Chair concluded the discussion by noting that the call in had been the result of a significant lack of information within the original Cabinet report. He agreed that the issue had been resolved in the meeting due to the further information that had been provided. Going forward, the Scrutiny Committee noted that a clearer rationale behind recommendations needed to be included in reports, as well as related business cases, for greater transparency and understanding.

37.21 The Committee agreed that they were satisfied with the detail provided by the Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Justice.

37.22 **RESOLVED** unanimously to uphold the decision for immediate implementation.

37.23 **RESOLVED** to note the following actions:

1. Officers to include an 'LGR Implication Sections' in reports to Council and Cabinet going forward.

38. Equality Information Report 2026

38.1 (Councillor Kendrick left the meeting)

38.2 (The Chair agreed to take this item next)

38.3 The Cabinet Member for Equalities introduced the report. She invited the Scrutiny Committee to provide comments or recommendations on the report ahead of its presentation to Cabinet on 14 January 2026. The publication of the Equality Information Report was a statutory requirement.

38.4 Discussion ensued on Council staff. Members noted that they had previously requested overall trend data regarding the diversity of Council employees over the past 5 years. Members asked officers what prevented people from giving this information to the Council. The Strategy Manager explained that the Council could only encourage participation in staff surveys and officers ensured that surveys were short and brief to encourage more participation. The Interim Director of HR noted that there were many reasons why some people chose not to declare diversity information to the Council. She stated that the Council needed to do more to ensure that staff members understood how their information would be used and that it was confidential. She emphasised that the data was sought to better enable the Council to support all members of staff.

38.5 In response to a Member's question about armed forces recruitment, the Interim Director of HR clarified that the Council guaranteed interviews for reservists who met essential criteria, had leave provisions and was looking to explore links with Cadet organisations.

38.6 In response to Member's question about the disability pay gap, the Interim Director of HR commented that more needed to be done to understand the Council's profile through greater communication with staff as a starting point.

38.7 A Member stated that honorifics had been removed from Council web forms, which contradicted the resolution of a September 2022 Council motion, which resolved to 'provide a gender-neutral option such as Mx on all Council forms'. Officers agreed to look into that outside of the meeting and the Strategy team agreed to meet with the Member to further discuss the audit of policies and

procedures that they had identified as potentially requiring updates once national guidance was provided following the Supreme Court ruling.

38.8 Discussion ensued on the Go4Less card. A Member noted the lack of uptake by young people in Norwich and asked officers how young people would be engaged. The Strategy Manager explained that the application process for the card had been digitised, which aimed to increase uptake and accessibility. He agreed to look into any targeted promotions to young people outside of the meeting.

38.9 A Member added that whilst the report stated that refugees and asylum seekers were now eligible to apply for the Go4Less card, the table which broke down total amount of different service users, did not include them. The Strategy Officer (Equalities) explained that a process to collect that data was underway by the Culture and Leisure team. The Strategy Officer (Equalities) hoped that when the Equality Information Report returned to the Scrutiny Committee in 2026, that information would be provided.

38.10 A Member noted that the detail and narrative regarding Homes for Ukraine (H4U) in the report was helpful and requested to see a similar narrative regarding refugees and asylum seekers as a whole. She also noted that the Scrutiny Committee would benefit from an update on the City of Sanctuary work.

38.11 The Chair asked officers to explain the order of languages requested for translations and interpretations that was listed in the report. The Strategy Manager explained that the table included the top ten languages in order of most requested to least requested. He clarified that the data only demonstrated which languages were requested for translation and interpretation services, not population size or changes.

38.12 Discussion ensued on protected characteristics. The Strategy Manager clarified that groups with protected characteristics were embedded within the Council's Corporate Strategy. The Strategy Officer (Equalities) added that the Council considered additional groups beyond the 9 protected characteristics in decision making through the utilisation of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) for proposals put forward.

38.13 Members discussed a table in the report which highlighted the race, sex and disability of applicants who applied for jobs at the Council between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025. A Member asked officers for more information on whether employees on recruitment panels received unconscious bias training. Officers confirmed that unconscious bias training had been delivered. The Interim Director of HR explained that there were other considerations also, such as ensuring that recruitment panels were balanced.

38.13 Discussion ensued on complaints. The report included a table which provided a breakdown of complaints received by the Council between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025, categorised by race, disability status, and sex. A Member

noted that 72.7% of complainants did not record their race and requested that officers explored why the figure was so high and what action would be taken to change it. The Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Justice agreed to look into it outside of the meeting.

38.14 In response to a Member's question about homelessness amongst refugees and asylum seekers, the Executive Director of Communities and Housing explained that it was more challenging to understand where people were once they were granted leave to remain status as that permitted them to live and work wherever they wished. She added that the Council offered specialist support to refugees and asylum seekers and was confident that the Council had the resourcing that it needed. A Homelessness Strategy was also being explored.

38.15 **RESOLVED** to recommend that:

1. A research exercise is undertaken with council staff to better understand the specific reasons why council staff and employees may choose not to share their demographic data.
2. Any future data collection exercises are accompanied by clear communication explain how data will be handled and why it is being collected.
3. A refresh on unconscious bias training is provided for those engaging in the recruitment process.
4. A policy is developed to inform the make up of recruitment panels in line with the council's EDI strategy.
5. That Transgender and non-binary people are consulted on policies put forward and on the audit of strategies and policies that may need to change as a result of guidance.
6. The Equality Information Report includes trend data relating to workforce diversity figures over past 5 years in the Equality Information Report (EIR) from EIR 2027 onwards.

38.16 **RESOLVED** to note the following actions:

1. Officers to add a paragraph in the EIR about the wider picture for refugees and asylum seekers and not just the Homes for Ukraine scheme.
2. Officers to look into why 72.7% of complainants did not record their race/demographic data.
3. Strategy team to meet with a Councillor to review the current audit of the strategies and policies that may need to change as a result of guidance.

4. Officers to explore and explain the removal of honorifics in online forms.
5. Officers to explore the lack of uptake in the Go4Less card.

(The Committee adjourned for a ten-minute break)

39. Update on HR Processes Actions and Recommendations

39.1 (The Chair agreed to take this item next)

39.2 The Interim Director of HR delivered a presentation which addressed the actions and recommendations which were made by the Committee at their meeting on 18 September 2025 under the item, HR Processes.

39.3 The Interim Director of HR highlighted the following points:

- The Executive Leadership Team (ELT) planned to discuss reinstating the Mental Health Steering Group to coordinate actions.
- A new staff survey was being prepared to gather insight into mental health-related absences and understand staff perceptions of support and wellbeing.
- The HR action plan was produced and shared amongst the HR team. As a result, a HR restructure would take place. Stage 1 of the restructure was due to begin in January 2026. Recruitment for a permanent Director of HR was underway.
- The Interim Director of HR had worked with the Head of Legal and Governance to discuss how to better support Member development going forward. An enhanced induction programme for Members would be launched in May 2026, which the Member Development Group had fed into.
- The Council had 9 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Champions across service areas and Senior Leadership EDI Champion had been appointed. Mental health support had been strengthened as 16 new Mental Health First Aiders received training in November 2025 and the Thrive Wellbeing App had been launched.
- Staff dealing with infertility or fertility issues were supported by the Council through the Employee Assistance Programme, the Council's occupational health provider and support was available on the Thrive Wellbeing App.
- Reservists who met essential criteria were guaranteed interviews for roles at the Council.
- Facility time for trade union colleagues was under review.

39.4 The Interim Director of HR offered to respond to questions outside of the meeting via email.

39.5 **RESOLVED** to note the update.

40. Exclusion of the Public

40.1 **RESOLVED** to exclude the press and public from the meeting during consideration of item 41 (below) on the grounds that they contained exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

*41. Pre-Scrutiny of Anglia Square Business Plan

41.1 (An exempt minute exists for this item)

41.2 Members asked questions and received answers on the report.

42. Work Programme

42.1 This item was taken as unopposed business.

42.2 **RESOLVED** to agree the Work Programme.

CHAIR

NORWICH City Council

Item 4

Committee name: Scrutiny

Committee date: 15/01/2026

Report title: Revisions to the Home Options Policy

Portfolio: Councillor Jones, Cabinet Member for Housing

Report from: Director of communities and housing

Wards: All wards

OPEN PUBLIC ITEM

Purpose

To update the Committee on proposed changes to the Council's social housing allocations policy to incorporate new legislation and statutory guidance.

Recommendation:

The Committee is asked to note the proposed policy changes and make any recommendations to Cabinet before its approval and adoption of a new Home Options policy.

Policy framework

The Council has five corporate priorities, which are:

- An open and modern Council.
- A prosperous Norwich.
- A fairer Norwich.
- A climate responsive Norwich.
- A future-proof Norwich.
- This report meets the 'A fairer Norwich' corporate priority

Background

1. Part VI of the Housing Act determines that local authorities must have an allocation scheme to determine priorities between applicants for social housing and to set out the procedure to be followed when allocating social housing in their area. In Norwich, the allocation scheme is called Home Options.

2. The current Home Options allocations policy (Norwich Home Options Allocation

Scheme | Norwich City Council) dates from October 2021 and needs updating to incorporate new legislation and statutory guidance. The update also presents the opportunity to ensure that policy reflects local needs and issues.

3. The proposed policy changes, while minimal, take into account legislative changes, statutory guidance (Providing social housing for local people - GOV.UK) as well as the recently published 'National Plan to End Homelessness' and Government Homelessness Strategy (A National Plan to End Homelessness - GOV.UK).

4. The proposed changes have recently been subject to public consultation and the policy is scheduled to be considered by Cabinet in February.

5. The draft revised policy is attached at Appendix A with the proposed changes to the policy detailed below in paragraphs 7 to 11.

6. An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken and is attached as Appendix B.

Proposed changes to policy

7. All applications will involve a discussion of an applicant's housing need with an adviser. Applicants who do not meet the criteria for a priority banding category are extremely unlikely to be rehoused through the Home Options scheme and will be given advice about alternative housing options.

8. In accordance with statutory guidance and to ensure that the council's housing policies benefit local people, applicants must have been continuously resident in Norwich for at least the last two years. Exceptions, as set down in legislation, will apply.

9. The number of refusals allowed before an application is cancelled for 12 months will be reduced from five to three to reflect extremely high demand for social housing. This will not apply to homelessness clients, who, as required by legislation, receive one offer.

10. Clarification of priority banding for rough sleepers: where it has been confirmed that an applicant is sleeping rough, meets the qualification criteria and it has been assessed that there is no other accommodation available to them, silver band will be awarded by the council's rough sleeper team. The team will carry out a needs-led assessment and use professional judgement to engage and support people sleeping rough in each case. Priority will not be awarded when the client does not engage with the council's support or where accommodation has been made available to the applicant which they have chosen not to accept.

11. In accordance with the Armed Forces Covenant, U.K. armed forces veterans will be prioritised within bands.

Consultation

12. The Home Options policy public consultation took place between 10 November and 12 December 2025. An online survey was hosted on Get Talking Norwich, the council's consultation and engagement platform.

13. A dedicated project page was created for the consultation which, which included a narrative, the survey, and the Home Options draft policy, Equality Impact Assessment and briefing note. The consultation was additionally shared with relevant stakeholders via email.

14. Key partners were contacted directly and the proposals were taken to a service users group.

15. A total of 72 responses were received.

16. Responses showed broad agreement (see Appendix C) for all proposals and will be published, along with council comments, in an online report.

Consultation key comments

17. In terms of local connection, a respondent raised concerns that people without local connection will remain in hostels longer, blocking move-on pathways.

18. However, this concern can be mitigated as the Council's hostel move-on agreement with supported accommodation providers sets out how the partners will explore alternative housing and reconnection options for residents without a local connection to Norwich, to ensure that people are supported into housing.

19. In regard armed forces prioritisation, a respondent raised concerns that concerns that veterans may be prioritised over people with disabilities, domestic abuse survivors, or those in unsafe housing, who may be in greater need of accommodation.

20. However, the prioritisation of armed forces members is in alignment with the requirements of the Armed Forces Covenant, to which the council is signatory.

21. In terms of the clarification of the circumstances by which priority banding for rough sleepers will be awarded, several respondents raised that this banding may act as an incentive to individuals to sleep rough to be verified to receive silver priority banding.

22. In response to this concern and to mitigate such a risk, and in accordance with the National Plan to End Homelessness, we have amended the policy proposal to include a needs-led assessment and the use of professional judgement prior to the award of priority banding.

Implications

21.There are no proposals in this report that would reduce or increase resources

22. The proposals set out in the report ensure that the council's allocations policy meet legislative requirements, statutory guidance and government strategy.

Appendices:

A: Draft revised policy with amendments highlighted
B: Equality Impact Assessment
C: Consultation response data

Contact officer:

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Appendix A - Proposed 2026 Home Options policy

1. Introduction

1.1.1. This allocation policy explains the rules that determine how Norwich City Council (known throughout this document as ‘the council’) allocates social housing properties. It sets out the priorities and procedures that the council will follow in the letting of social housing to applicants on its housing register.

1.1.2. The Registered Providers (Housing Associations) that are part of the scheme are known throughout this document as ‘scheme landlords’. These are listed in Appendix D.

1.2. Background

1.2.1. The allocation scheme is also known as Home Options. Under the scheme, the council and scheme landlords advertise their properties for rent on a weekly basis on its website and invite bids on each property from applicants who are registered with the scheme.

1.2.2. Norwich is an area of very high housing need and demand for social housing far exceeds the supply of accommodation that becomes available. It must be remembered that Home Options does not produce any more affordable housing but provides a fairer, more efficient and transparent way of allocating the social housing available

1.3. Scheme objectives

1.3.1. The key objectives of the scheme are to:

- Meet the legal requirements for the allocation of social housing.
- Focus resources on those in the most need.
- Operate a scheme which is, fair, transparent and easy to use.
- Help meet the housing needs of Norwich residents
- Allow scheme users, through the transparent nature of the scheme, to make informed decisions about their housing options.

- Make best use of Norwich's social housing stock.
- Encourage and support, balanced and sustainable communities.
- Prevent homelessness and reduce the use of temporary accommodation
- Encourage through flow from hostel accommodation in order to reduce rough sleeping.
- Operate the scheme so that it improves accessibility and customer service for vulnerable groups in Norwich.
- Make sure those who have the greatest need for housing have the greatest opportunity to get it
- Pay due regard to the aims of the Norwich Homelessness Strategy and Tenancy Strategy
- Meet the council's corporate priorities of ensuring a fairer city

1.4. Legal framework

1.4.1. This allocation scheme complies with the legal framework for allocating social housing, laid down in the Housing Act 1996 and takes account of statutory government guidance on the allocation of accommodation.

1.4.2. This allocation scheme pays due regard to the Equality Act 2010.

1.4.3. The assessment of eligibility, qualification and assessment of priority for the Home Options scheme will take into account any changes to legislation made subsequent to this policy.

1.5. How does the scheme work?

1.5.1. Home Options is a choice-based lettings scheme. The council and scheme landlords advertise their vacant properties to those on the housing register. The adverts include a detailed description of the property. Applicants on the register can then bid for the property of their choice if they are eligible and meet the qualifying criteria.

1.5.2. The successful applicant will be selected from those who have bid for the property and meet the stated qualifying criteria. Selection will be based on the highest band, followed by the banding date where there is more than one applicant from the same band.

1.5.3. Feedback will be provided on what demand there was for previously advertised properties. This will help applicants to make informed choices.

1.5.4. This policy is available free of charge at the website www.norwich.gov.uk. A paper copy of the full policy is available upon request from City Hall at a cost of £25.00.

2. Application Procedure

2.1. How to apply

2.1.1. To apply for a social housing property in Norwich an applicant must be registered with Home Options.

2.1.2. Applications to Home Options can be made over the telephone on 0344 980 3333. All applications will involve a discussion of an applicant's housing need with an adviser. Acceptance onto Home Options register is not a guarantee that an applicant will be offered accommodation. Home-Options is unable to meet the needs of all home-seekers and transferring tenants looking for accommodation. Applicants who do not meet the criteria for a priority banding category are extremely unlikely to be rehoused through the Home Options scheme and will be given advice about alternative housing options.

2.1.3. Home Options is a scheme which is based on verification. All applicants will be required to provide evidence of their household circumstances including income, savings and housing history.

2.1.4. Information to support an application may be asked for at any time. If the information is not provided, the application may be suspended or removed from Home-Options and any offers of accommodation withdrawn. All applicants will be offered help and advice to complete their application. This includes translation and interpreting facilities where required.

2.2. Who can apply?

2.2.1. Residents of the UK who are over 18 years old can apply to Home Options however this does not guarantee an application will be taken or that the applicant will be re-housed under the scheme.

2.2.2. By law, there are defined groups of applicants who cannot be re-housed through the scheme. There are also exceptions or restrictions to an application which may apply.

2.2.3. Under the Housing Act 1996, local authorities must consider whether applicants are eligible for housing assistance. The council will apply the relevant legislation that is in place at the time of application.

2.3. The applicant's household

2.3.1. The council will decide in each case as to whether the people included in the application by the applicant will be considered as a part of the household for purposes of assessing housing need.

2.3.2. Any person wishing to be included as part of an applicant's household must satisfy the Council that they are a permanent member of the applicant's household and show that it is reasonable to expect them to reside with the applicant on a continuing basis.

2.3.3. The council will not consider the following as members of an applicant's household:

- Anyone who falls within legislation prohibiting them from having recourse to public funds or is an asylum seeker
- Non-dependent children who have not lived within the household continually throughout their adult lives
- Relatives who do not form part of the applicant's immediate family where there is no formal care arrangement; parents or step-parents, grandparents, brothers or step-brothers, sisters or step-sisters, aunts, uncles, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, cousins.
- Any family member not resident in the UK at the time of the application.

- Any person who does not meet eligibility criteria
- Friends and acquaintances
- Lodgers
- Live in help
- Students living away from home with their own rent liability

2.3.4. Only dependent children that form a permanent part of the household can be considered. Only if an applicant is evidenced to have their child stay with them for four or more nights a week can they be classed as part of the applicant's household when making an assessment. Temporary arrangements or contact arrangements cannot be considered and household size will be determined upon evidence that any living arrangements are permanent, and the applicant can demonstrate to the council's satisfaction that they have full-time, permanent responsibility for the child. Where a formal residence agreement is not in place, the council will consider:

- Confirmation from the Courts regarding residency or parental responsibility.
- Who the children usually live with
- Who has financial responsibility for the children
- The length of time any arrangement has been in place
- Where the children go to school
- Any other relevant information

2.3.5. In cases where an applicant wishes to include their children in their Home Options application, this will not be considered where those children have adequate accommodation available to them elsewhere, for example with another parent.

2.3.6. Household members can only appear on one Home Options application.

2.3.7. Households that have been accepted to adopt or foster a child will be assessed as if they have assumed parental responsibility upon written confirmation from Norfolk County Council being provided.

2.3.8. Where an applicant feels that an additional bedroom is needed for a carer, this can only be considered where we have evidence of the need for permanent 24 hour care from a non-family member who is not part of your household and requires their own bedroom to sleep in on a continuing basis. 'Waking care' will not be taken into consideration. We would expect that the applicant would be in receipt of Carer's Allowance and Disability Living Allowance/Personal Independent Payment with the highest care/enhanced rate component. The carer must be recognised, employed by, or working on behalf of Adult Social Care and we would expect them to be a named person (unless your care is provided on a rota arrangement made by Adult Social Care or an agency on their behalf). The decision will be made by the assessment panel.

2.3.9. Where the family unit is not currently residing together, the assessment will be based on the part of the household that occupies accommodation that provides them with the most suitable housing providing there is a reasonable expectation that they should reside together.

2.3.10. Where an applicant has been assessed in accordance with the Mental Capacity Act 2005 as being unable to hold or to manage a tenancy, they may be suspended from the register until a suitable advocate is appointed to act on their behalf.

2.3.11. For an applicant to become a tenant and enter into a tenancy agreement, they must have the mental capacity to understand the contract. If an applicant does not have the capacity to understand the contract, an application should be made to the Court of Protection by an advocate for the tenancy agreement to be signed on their behalf.

2.3.12. Unborn children will not be considered as part of the assessment. A child cannot be added to an application until the applicant has provided a copy of the birth certificate.

2.3.13. For people in prison, applications can be made within 8 weeks of release if the client meets qualification and local connection criteria. In such instances the client does not need to apply for housing in person and applications will be accepted from a third party on behalf of a person in custody, for example by a Prison Resettlement Officer as part of a Resettlement Plan where third-party consent has been given.

2.3.14. Only household members that meet the eligibility and qualification criteria set out in this policy will be included in an application.

2.4. Eligibility

2.4.1. The Home Options team will determine the eligibility of an applicant, based on immigration status and habitual residence, by applying the legislation that is in place at the time of the application and the point of allocation.

2.4.2. Eligibility for Home Options depends on where the applicant normally lives ('habitual residence') and their immigration status. A person is not eligible if they are:

2.4.2.1. subject to immigration control (with limited exceptions)

2.4.2.2. classed as an ineligible person from abroad

2.4.2.3. A person not habitually resident in the United Kingdom or required to leave the UK by the Secretary of State.

2.4.3. Eligibility is explained in detail within statutory guidance – "Allocation of Accommodation: guidance for local authorities" which is online at: Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local authorities - Guidance - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

2.4.4. Eligibility for housing assistance can be affected if there is a change in the immigration status of the applicant(s), and therefore eligibility for an allocation of housing will be kept under review. The applicant is responsible for informing the council of any change in their immigration status.

2.4.5. Applicants whose households include a person from abroad who is ineligible will not be afforded priority if they are only homeless or in housing need as a consequence of the presence of the ineligible person.

2.5. Qualification for housing in Norwich

2.5.1. The Localism Act 2011 allows councils to make local decisions about who qualifies for social housing in their area in order to ensure that local objectives and the needs of local residents are met.

2.5.2. The decision that an applicant does not qualify for an allocation may occur at the time of joining the Home Options scheme, at any time during the life of the application, at the time the applicant is allocated a property, or when the applicant has bid and has been short-listed for a property. The Home Options team will make the decision.

2.5.3. In accordance with statutory guidance and to ensure that the council's housing policies benefit local people, applicants must have been continuously resident in Norwich for at least the last two years. If applicants cannot provide satisfactory evidence that they meet the criteria, an application will not be taken. For household members to join an application and to be included in any assessment of housing need, the same criteria apply.

2.5.4. Exceptional circumstances will be considered. In such cases, the decision as to whether an applicant qualifies will be determined by a Housing Options team leader or manager, or by the council's assessment panel.

2.5.5. Examples are:

- Somebody who needs to live in Norwich as they have a significant need to be near specific medical care which is unavailable elsewhere.
- Applicants over 60 who have a specific need for sheltered housing in Norwich to be near medical care or family support unavailable elsewhere.
- The applicant needs to move to Norwich where failure to meet that need would cause extreme hardship to themselves or others
- Tenants of social housing needing to move to Norwich for work-related reasons where failure to meet that need would cause hardship, who can evidence that they meet the criteria set out in the 2015 Regulations (SI 2015/967).

- Households accepted as homeless under the Housing Act 1996 where the council has accepted a fully duty to rehouse
- Care leavers – Applicants aged 18-21 years (or up to 25 years old if they are pursuing a programme of education agreed in their pathway plan), who are owed a duty under Children Act 1989, section 23C
- Applicants fleeing domestic abuse who are living in refuge accommodation or who need to move urgently for the safety and security of themselves and any dependent children.
- Applicants that can demonstrate a lifelong residential connection to Norwich which has been broken for only a short time.
- In the examples above, a 'reduced preference' will be applied to the applicant's banding to ensure priority to long-term local residents.

These are examples and this list is not exhaustive.

2.5.6. Residents in prison, bail hostel, hospital or approved premises, or those households referred into or placed into any form of accommodation in Norwich by another agency or local authority will not gain a local connection and time spent in such premises will not count toward local connection.

2.5.7. Applicants whose only residential connection to Norwich is through further education or student accommodation will not be considered as having gained local connection. Student accommodation is that provided by an educational establishment or where a student exemption certificate has been provided for council tax purposes.

2.5.8. Where an applicant has only become eligible for housing assistance in the last two years, their local connection will commence from the date they became eligible.

2.5.9. Where an application is taken from a client who has not lived in Norwich continuously for the previous two years, and the client would normally be placed in a priority band, a 'reduced preference' will apply until the two year connection is established.

2.6. Exception to the criteria: Armed and Reserve Forces

2.6.1. The council is committed to ensuring that service personnel and their families have access to appropriate accommodation when they leave the British armed forces. Under the terms of the Armed Forces Covenant, to which the council is signatory, the local connection criteria will not apply to the following:

Those who are currently serving in the regular forces or who have served in the regular forces.

- Bereaved spouses or civil partners of those serving in the armed and reserve forces where (i) the bereaved spouse or civil partner has recently ceased or will cease to be entitled to reside in Ministry of Defence accommodation following the death of their spouse or civil partner and (ii) the death was wholly or partly attributable to their service.
- Existing or former members of the reserve forces who are suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is wholly or partly attributable to their service.
- Divorced or separated spouses or civil partners of Service personnel who are required to move out of accommodation provided by the Ministry of Defence.

Under these terms, the council can ensure that current and former service personnel in urgent housing need are awarded preference in line with the priority need bands.

2.7. Those who will not qualify: need considerations

2.7.1. Home Options policy aims to manage expectations realistically and to focus resources on those in most need of them. Therefore, having considered the provisions made in the Localism Act 2011, the following applicants will not qualify:

2.7.1.1. Applicants who are tenants of scheme landlords who have made a ‘right to buy’ application on their property.

2.7.1.2. Applicants who are tenants of scheme landlords and are in the process of carrying out a mutual exchange or have completed a mutual exchange in the previous 12 months.

2.7.1.3. Applicants who have been housed through the scheme will not be able to reapply for Home Options 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.

2.7.1.4. Applicants who have been housed through the council's private sector leasing scheme (Let NCC) or through a loan from the council's homeless prevention fund will have their Home Options application cancelled and will not be able to reapply 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.

2.7.1.5. Clients who have been sponsored to enter the country in the last five years based on an undertaking given by a sponsor that accommodation was available (and where that sponsor is still alive)

2.7.1.6. Applicants who own or have an interest in a property as a freeholder, leaseholder, a part-owner through shared ownership, including part commercial/residential property, in the UK or abroad will not qualify unless there are extenuating circumstances, as determined by a review panel. Examples of extenuating circumstances could be someone who requires sheltered housing in Norwich or someone who has been accepted as statutorily homeless.

2.8. Those who will not qualify: behaviour considerations

2.8.1. The council, scheme landlords and Norwich residents have a right to expect certain standards of behaviour. Where an applicant or a member of their household has a history of behaviour which is evidenced to have caused a detrimental effect to others, the Council may decide that the applicant does not qualify to be accepted onto the Home Options scheme.

2.8.2. Some examples of the type of behaviour that could mean that an applicant does not qualify for the Home Options scheme are:

2.8.2.1. Serious rent arrears which, in the council's view, would entitle the landlord to a possession order.

2.8.2.2. Causing deliberate damage to a property.

2.8.2.3. Causing anti-social behaviour such as nuisance to neighbours, discriminatory behaviour or harassment, abuse, violence, or intimidation to the community or to council staff.

2.8.2.4. Conviction for using or allowing a property to be used for illegal or immoral purposes

2.8.2.5. Committing domestic abuse.

2.8.2.6. Conviction for violent crime or the supply, use or possession of drugs.

2.8.2.7. Conviction of a criminal offence in the property or in the locality of the property

2.8.2.8. Eviction from hostel or temporary accommodation

2.8.2.9. Being convicted of, issued with, or accepted a sanction for Benefit or Council Tax fraud within the last five years.

2.8.2.10. Making a false statement in order to obtain accommodation

2.8.2.11. Failing to provide relevant information that has been reasonably requested to verify an application for housing

2.8.2.12. Failing to allow contractors to enter the property to carry out maintenance.

2.8.2.13. Requesting or colluding with a landlord or family member to issue them with a Notice to Quit.

These are examples and this list is not exhaustive

2.8.3. The examples relate to both current and former tenancies and apply no matter who the landlord is, when they happened or what form of tenancy was held. Paragraphs 15.3 & 15.4, together with Appendix B, deal with

the way in which applicants may demonstrate that they have addressed past behaviour in order to requalify.

2.8.4. Decisions are made on a case-by-case basis, with each case judged on its own merits.

2.9. Public protection arrangements

2.9.1. Applicants subject to multi-agency public protection arrangements can only access the register with the consent of the Housing Options manager. Each case will be considered on its own merits in determining whether an application will be accepted.

2.10. Assessment of applications

2.11. Legal background

2.11.1. All applicants who are eligible and who qualify for Home Options will be placed in the appropriate banding based on an assessment of their housing needs. This is to ensure that the council allocates homes to those in the greatest assessed need and to ensure that its legal obligations are met.

2.11.2. The council is required by law to give reasonable preference in the scheme to people with high levels of assessed housing need:

2.11.2.1. People who need to move on welfare or medical grounds (including grounds relating to a disability),

2.11.2.2. People who need to move to a particular locality of the city to avoid hardship to themselves or others,

2.11.2.3. People living in unsanitary, unsatisfactory, or overcrowded housing, and

2.11.2.4. People who are homeless within the meaning of the Housing Act 1996, and people who are owed a particular statutory duty by any local housing authority under section 190(2), 193(2) or 195(2) (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).

2.11.2.5. Former and serving members of the armed or reserve forces who have an urgent housing need or need to move because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service

2.11.2.6. Bereaved spouses and civil partners of members of the armed forces leaving services family accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner

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

2.11.4. Applications are processed by the council's Home Options team, in accordance with this policy.

3. The housing need bands

3.1. Each application will be assessed to determine the level of housing need of the household and placed into one of five bands:

Emergency Band	Emergency priority
Gold Band	High priority
Silver Band	Medium priority
Bronze Band	Emergency/high/medium priority but with reduced preference
Standard Band	No priority

3.2. Banding will only be awarded where the applicant's circumstances have been verified. S

3.3. An applicant's circumstances and therefore their level of housing need and banding is subject to change. As such, an applicant's Home Options banding is kept under continuous review.

3.4. Every applicant is responsible for ensuring that they provide correct and up to date information.

3.5. The criteria for being placed in each band are as follows:

3.6. Emergency band

3.6.1. This band is intended to meet the needs of applicants in extreme circumstances and will only be issued in certain situations where an applicant needs urgent re-housing to ensure their well-being or safety.

3.6.2. An applicant in Emergency band is expected to place two bids per week with the guidance of their housing adviser and accept the first suitable available property which they successfully bid for. As examples, circumstances where emergency status may be awarded include:

3.6.2.1. An applicant has an extremely urgent medical need, as determined by a Housing Options team leader or manager or the council's assessment panel.

3.6.2.2. Those applicants requiring urgent hospital discharge where their current accommodation is totally unsuitable for their needs

3.6.2.3. 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

3.6.2.4. Other extreme circumstances as determined by the Housing Options manager or assessment panel.

3.7. Gold band

3.7.1. Homelessness and homeless prevention:

3.7.1.1. Applicants to whom the council has accepted a prevention of homelessness duty, where their circumstances have been confirmed and who are assessed by their housing adviser as likely to be in priority need. Applicants will have completed and kept to a personalised housing plan made with a housing adviser, will place, or have placed for them, two bids per week with the guidance of their adviser and will be entitled to one suitable offer of accommodation. In

such circumstances the need to prevent or relieve homelessness may supersede other housing considerations. Refusal of the offer or failure to engage with advice will mean the council's duty is ended and gold banding will be removed.

3.7.2. Severe medical need:

3.7.2.1. Critical medical needs directly relating to the applicant's accommodation or need for accommodation as determined by a Housing Options team leader or manager, or by the council's assessment panel.

3.7.2.2. Medical priority is only awarded where, in the assessment of the panel, an applicant needs urgent re-housing due to a strongly evidenced, serious and enduring medical condition or disability, which is severely and permanently affected by their current accommodation.

3.7.2.3. Examples of severe medical need determining the award of gold band:

3.7.2.3.1. The applicant is housebound through mobility issues and moving to alternative accommodation would alleviate this.

3.7.2.3.2. The applicant's life is at risk.

3.7.2.3.3. The applicant is unable to move around their current accommodation, and cannot access kitchen or bathing facilities

3.7.2.3.4. A member the household is severely disabled and needs substantial adaptations to help meet their needs but these cannot be carried out in their current accommodation

3.7.2.3.5. The applicant has a terminal illness and alternative accommodation would allow for suitable care to be provided

3.7.2.3.6. The applicant has a severe and enduring medical condition which is significantly exacerbated by poor housing conditions and the accommodation cannot be repaired and no other remedies are available.

3.7.2.3.7. Armed Forces members and veterans suffering from mental or physical ill health as a result of their service.

These are examples and this list is not exhaustive.

3.7.3. Welfare

3.7.3.1. Where the applicant or member of their household assessed by the panel as being grievously and adversely affected by their current accommodation and there is an urgent need to move for welfare reasons.

3.7.3.2. This may include situations such as:

3.7.3.2.1. Infirmity due to old age

3.7.3.2.2. The need to give or receive care

3.7.3.2.3. A vulnerable applicant is being exploited within their accommodation putting them at risk

3.7.3.2.4. To help avoid a residential placement where an applicant, with the necessary support mechanisms in place, is capable and best suited to independent living.

3.7.3.2.5. The applicant is participant is a witness protection programme

3.7.3.2.6. This list is not exhaustive and other exceptional circumstances will be considered.

3.7.3.3. Assessment will be subject to a thorough investigation of all the circumstances by the council's assessment panel and the degree of priority awarded will depend on the circumstances of the case.

3.7.4. Housing Conditions

3.7.4.1. Applicants have no access to a kitchen and/or bathroom.

Or

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

Or

3.7.4.3. An improvement notice has been served in relation to the applicant's dwelling by the private sector housing team and:

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

3.7.4.4. In such cases the award of priority banding is dependent upon individual circumstances, which will be considered on a case-by-case basis by a Housing Options team leader or manager.

3.7.5. Overcrowding

3.7.5.1. Applicants lack two or more bedrooms.

3.7.6. Under-occupation/council interest

3.7.6.1. Tenants of council or scheme landlord accommodation that are under occupying by two or more bedrooms and prepared to move to significantly smaller accommodation or are occupying a substantially adapted property that they no longer require that the housing options manager assesses would be in high demand from applicants in need of those adaptations.

3.7.7. Decommissioning

3.7.7.1. Where a cabinet decision has been made to decommission a council property, gold band will be awarded to any tenant having to move home as a result.

3.7.8. Violence/Harassment

3.7.8.1. Where there is significant evidence of serious ongoing harassment or violence toward a household, where a change of accommodation within Norwich could be reasonably expected to alleviate the problem and there is no other remedy. In such instances banding will be awarded by a housing advisor working with the client to prevent their homelessness or as the result of a of a submission to the assessment panel.

3.7.9. Care leavers

3.7.9.1. Where an applicant is leaving local authority care and is assessed as needing to move on (as determined by a Housing Options team leader or manager following the required evidence and risk assessment being submitted from Children's Services), where the applicant has completed a tenancy awareness course, support plan outcomes have been met and there is a suitable support package in place so that the council is satisfied that the applicant is able to successfully manage their own tenancy. Referrals can be accepted from four weeks before the applicant leaves care. Applicants will have completed and kept to a personalised housing plan made with a housing adviser, will place two bids per week with the guidance of their adviser and will be entitled to one suitable offer of accommodation. Refusal of the offer will mean that gold banding will be removed.

3.7.10. Let NCC

3.7.10.1. Where the applicant meets the criteria set out under the LetNCC tenant incentive scheme (Appendix C)

3.7.11. Multiple Needs

3.7.11.1. Applicants with a combination of medium needs.

3.8. Silver band

3.8.1. Homelessness and homeless prevention

3.8.1.1. Applicants to whom the council has accepted a prevention of homelessness or relief of homelessness duty, where their circumstances have been confirmed and who are assessed by the council's housing advice team as not likely to be in priority need. Applicants will have completed and kept to a personalised housing plan made with a housing adviser, will place or have placed for them two bids per week with the guidance of their adviser and will be entitled to one offer of accommodation. In such circumstances the need to prevent or relieve homelessness may supersede other housing considerations. Refusal of the offer or failure to engage with advice will mean the council's duty is ended and silver banding will be removed.

3.8.2. Medical

3.8.2.1. Significant medical needs directly relating to the applicant's accommodation or need for accommodation as determined by a Housing Options team leader, manager or by the council's assessment panel. For example:

3.8.2.1.1. Applicants with an evidenced, enduring, and significant medical or disability problem which seriously affects their ability to manage in their current accommodation, where a move would resolve the issue and no other remedy is available.

3.8.3. Welfare

3.8.3.1. Where, in the assessment of the panel, the applicant or member of their household is evidenced as being seriously and adversely affected by their current accommodation, the issue cannot be remedied and there is a significant need to move for welfare reasons.

3.8.3.2. Assessment will be subject to a thorough investigation of all the circumstances and the degree of priority awarded by the council's assessment panel will depend on the circumstances of the case.

3.8.4. Housing Conditions

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

3.8.4.1.1. The remedies that are needed to reduce the hazard will require the property to be vacated for a significant period; or

3.8.4.1.2. The cost of the remedies is beyond the means of the applicant (where applicable); or

3.8.4.1.3. The remedies will make the property unsuitable for occupation by the applicant

3.8.4.2. 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.

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

3.8.5. Overcrowding

3.8.5.1. Applicants lack one bedroom and those verified as 'sofa surfing'.

3.8.6. Under-occupation

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

3.8.7. Children in flats or maisonettes

3.8.7.1. Applicants with a child or children aged ten or under and living in a flat or maisonette that does not have its own garden or private outdoor space.

3.8.7.2. Where a household includes a child or children aged six or under and the applicant lives in a property on the third 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.

3.8.7.3. This category will not be awarded for those children who were born when the current accommodation was accepted.

3.8.8. Let NCC

3.8.8.1. Where the applicant meets the criteria set out under the LetNCC tenant incentive scheme (Appendix C)

3.8.9. Rough sleeping

3.8.9.1. This priority will be applied where it has been confirmed that an applicant is sleeping rough, meets the qualification criteria and it has been assessed that there is no other accommodation available to them. The council will carry out a needs-led assessment and use professional judgement to engage and support people sleeping rough in each case. Priority will not be awarded when the client does not engage with the council's support or where accommodation has been made available to the applicant which they have chosen not to accept. Any banding determination will be made in conjunction with the council's rough sleeping team. Applicants assessed as 'sleeping rough' will not be awarded additional priority on any other accommodation related factors.

3.9. Bronze band (reduced preference)

3.9.1. Reduced preference

3.9.1.1. 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 2.11. In such cases, any criteria applied to the original banding will apply equally once reduced preference has been applied.

3.10. Standard band

3.10.1. All other applicants to the scheme will be placed in the standard band:

3.10.2. Adequately housed

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

3.10.3. Supported Housing/Hostels

3.10.3.1. 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

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

3.10.4. Deliberate worsening of circumstances and becoming homeless intentionally

3.10.4.1. Applicants who are assessed by the council as having created or worsened their housing circumstances through their own actions or omissions, including those found to be intentionally homeless under

homelessness legislation. This includes applicants who would otherwise be in a priority band.

Examples:

3.10.4.1.1. An applicant giving up accommodation that was suitable or more suitable for them than the accommodation they have moved into and which it was reasonable to continue to occupy.

3.10.4.1.2. An applicant creating overcrowding by allowing family and/or friends to move into their home, which has worsened their housing situation.

3.10.4.1.3. An applicant moving into a property that was unsuitable for their needs from the outset.

3.10.4.1.4. An applicant being unable to continue to occupy accommodation due to their deliberate action or omission.

3.10.4.1.5. Homeowners who have transferred or gifted their property to another person

3.10.4.1.6. Applicants who have dispersed or deprived themselves of assets or capital which could have reasonably been used to secure housing.

3.10.4.1.7. Unreasonably failing to follow advice given by the council in order to prevent homelessness.

These are examples and this list is not exhaustive

There is no time limit on the imposition of standard band on these grounds.

4. Methods of assessment

4.1. Reduced preference

4.1.1. Section 166A(5) of the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002, allows allocation schemes to give reduced

preference where the behaviour of an applicant (or member of their household) affects their suitability to be a tenant.

4.1.2. In such circumstances, where tenancy conditions have been breached, an assessment will be made as to whether the applicant's behaviour merits their not qualifying for Home Options or whether an application can be taken and reduced preference applied.

4.1.3. An applicant will be given reduced preference if the council is satisfied they or a household member owes housing related debts or who has failed to maintain a rented property in a proper and reasonable condition.

4.1.4. Housing related debt includes but is not limited to:

4.1.4.1. Any current or former tenant rent arrears or charges for use and occupation owed to any local authority, registered provider or private sector landlord.

4.1.4.2. Unpaid sundry debts owing to any local authority, registered provider or private sector landlord, including rechargeable debts or court costs.

4.1.4.3. Any tenancy deposit or rent in advance loans provided by the council that remain unpaid; or tenancy deposit guarantees that have been honoured by the council and remain unpaid.

4.1.4.4. Outstanding council tax debts.

4.1.4.5. Outstanding re-chargeable repairs.

4.1.4.6. Current and former housing related service charge arrears.

4.1.4.7. Temporary accommodation charge arrears where that temporary accommodation was provided by the council.

4.1.4.8. Any court costs incurred by the council or a housing association associated with any of the above debts

4.1.5. In exceptional circumstances, applicants will be given additional preference despite meeting one of the criteria outlined above. Examples of where this may be appropriate are:

4.1.5.1. Where a scheme landlord seeks discretion as current rent arrears are caused by welfare reform due to under-occupation and the

applicant is seeking to downsize, is keeping to a repayment arrangement and is working with the landlord to address arrears.

4.1.5.2. Where a person is fleeing violence or domestic abuse and has rent arrears.

4.2. Significant financial resources:

4.2.1. Applicants that have sufficient income or savings which it would be reasonable for them to use to meet their housing need through other tenures whose circumstances determine that they would otherwise be in emergency, gold or silver band will have their priority downgraded to bronze band.

4.2.2. This assessment will be based on the following:

a. The total income of the applicant/household

b. Any capital available to the applicant/household

c. Average property prices and rents in the area for the type of accommodation needed by the household

d. The ability of the applicant/partner to rent a property in the private sector based on a realistic assessment of their financial position and commitments.

e. The ability of the applicant/partner to acquire a mortgage and maintain required repayments based on a realistic assessment of their financial position and commitments.

4.2.3. Excluded from the above financial assessment will be any member of the Armed Forces who may have received a lump sum as compensation for an injury or disability sustained on active service.

4.3. Assessment of overcrowding

4.3.1. The council will use the following guidelines to assess the level of overcrowding:

4.3.1.1. Assessments are made on the basis that the household is optimising the bedrooms available.

4.3.1.2. Couples, married couples and civil partners are expected to share a bedroom/bedspace.

4.3.1.3. A room intended as a bedroom but used for another purpose will still be classified as a bedroom.

4.3.1.4. Where a child has a home elsewhere but chooses to live with another adult, this will not be counted when assessing overcrowding.

4.3.1.5. A single person or couple can occupy one bedroom.

4.3.1.6. Two children of the same gender 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.

4.3.1.7. Two children of different gender are expected to share a bedroom until the oldest child is 10 years old, at which time the family is classed as lacking one bedroom.

4.3.1.8. Where adults aged 16 or over are sharing a room, but not living as a couple, they will be classed as lacking one bedroom.

4.3.1.9. An infant under 6 months can share a bedroom with their parents.

4.4. Assessment of multiple/cumulative need

4.4.1. Where a household's circumstances meet more than one assessed housing need, this will be considered by the council when prioritising the applicant. When a 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. Any assessment of cumulative need will not normally exceed gold band.

4.5. Assessment of medical needs

4.5.1. Priority will be awarded based on information supplied by the applicant

4.5.2. The role of the assessment panel is to assess the degree of medical need relating to an applicant's current accommodation and whether this merits additional priority to move to a more suitable property.

4.5.3. A Housing Options team leader, manager and/or assessment panel will assess each case on its merits to determine whether medical priority should be awarded.

4.5.4. Where an applicant's ill health is not directly related to their present housing, then medical priority will not be awarded.

4.5.5. Disabled applicants with specific accessibility needs receive priority over other applicants when bidding for adapted properties. Where the medical panel has assessed that an applicant or household member has a specific medical need for adaptations which are not and cannot be provided at their current home, their Home Options application will be given an accessibility rating, which gives additional preference over applicants who are not in need of adaptations when bidding for adapted properties.

4.5.6. Where adaptations to the applicant's home have been completed in the last 5 years in order to address a household medical need, no Home Options medical assessment will be considered unless there has been a significant change of circumstances.

4.5.7. Each household is restricted to submitting one Home Options medical assessment per annum unless there has been a significant change in circumstances such as a new diagnosis or significant deterioration in condition.

4.6. Assessment of welfare needs

4.6.1. This will be carried out by a Housing Options team leader or manager or an assessment panel.

4.6.2. Each case will be assessed on its merits to determine whether welfare priority should be awarded. The Home Options team leader or assessment panel will look at whether the situation is targeted, serious and enduring, whether it is directly affected by the applicant's present housing and whether it would improve if the applicant were re-housed.

4.6.3. In some instances, the assessment panel may award priority banding on a time limited basis and/or apply conditions to bidding.

4.7. Assessment of under-occupation

4.7.1. Priority for under-occupation will not be awarded where the applicant chose to move into a property which they would under-occupy and their circumstances have not changed.

4.8. Assessment of housing conditions

4.8.1. This will be carried out by the council's private sector housing team. Assessment will be carried out in line with the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System and priority awarded as set out in the bands above.

4.9. Assessment of homelessness

4.9.1. This will be carried out by the council's housing advice and homelessness service in line with the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and Homelessness Reduction Act 2018. Priority will be awarded as set out in the bands above.

4.10. Supported Housing/Hostels

4.10.1. Applicants in supported living or hostels participating in the hostel move-on scheme will be allocated properties in accordance with that scheme (Appendix A)

4.11. Assessments for applicants who are members of staff or elected members of the council

4.11.1. Applications from elected members or members of their family will be dealt with by the Housing Options manager. The award of a priority band and/or an allocation to elected members or to members of their family will need to be authorised by the Chief Executive Officer.

4.11.2. Applications from staff members will be dealt with by the Housing Options manager. The award of a priority banding and /or an allocation to

staff members will need to be authorised by the council's Director with responsibility for housing.

4.12. Determination of application date

4.12.1. All applications will be awarded an 'effective date' by the council. This is usually the date on which the Home Options application was made. The date will determine who is successful in being offered a property where two or more people from the same band bid on the same property.

4.13. Change in circumstances

4.13.1. If an applicant's circumstances change it is their responsibility to inform the council so that their application can be reassessed. Examples of a change 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 their effective date will be the date that the council was notified of, or provided with evidence of, their change of circumstances. Alternatively, if an applicant moves into a lower band then the effective date will revert to the original date they applied for Home Options.

4.13.2. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that their contact details are kept up to date.

4.14. Revision of applications

4.14.1. Every Home Options applicant 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 Home Options application will automatically be cancelled if the form is not returned.

4.15. Property size qualification

4.15.1. Each applicant will be assessed by the council, to determine what size of property they qualify for. It is expected that participating landlords will seek to maximise occupation of available properties. A general guide showing property size qualification for different household sizes is set out in a table at Appendix E however, 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.

4.16. Notification of applications

4.16.1. Once a Home Options application has been assessed the applicant will receive notification from the council confirming the band in which they have been placed.

4.17. Cancellation of applications

4.17.1. 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's circumstances change and they no longer qualify
- 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
- The applicant moves outside the Norwich boundary.
- The applicant has refused offers or failed to attend viewings on three occasions, where no other restrictions apply.

4.18. Refusals or failure to attend viewings

4.18.1. Where no other restrictions apply to the award of banding and an applicant has bid for three properties, which they have refused or where they have failed to attend the viewing without good cause, then their circumstances and banding will be reviewed. If these refusals are considered by a Housing Options team leader or manager to be unreasonable or without grounds, then the Home Options application will be cancelled and no new application will be accepted for a minimum twelve-month period.

4.19. Misrepresentation or withholding of information

4.19.1. It is a criminal offence for anyone to try and obtain accommodation from the council by knowingly giving a false statement or withholding information.

4.19.2. If we suspect that an applicant has given false information or withheld information, we will investigate. The Home Options application will be suspended while the investigation is carried out.

4.19.3. Failure by an applicant, or someone acting at their instigation, to inform the council of changes to their application, contrivance of circumstances or the deliberate withholding, or misrepresentation of information relevant to their housing circumstances, will mean that the applicant will not to qualify for Home Options and their application will be cancelled for an indefinite period and can be reviewed only after a minimum twelve- month period. Any such action may also result in criminal prosecution. If found guilty the applicant could be liable to a fine and/or imprisonment.

4.19.4. The scheme landlord may seek possession of a tenancy that was granted as a result of a false statement and may also attempt to recover any costs incurred.

5. Accessing the housing options

5.1. Finding a home

5.1.1. Once applicants are registered on Home Options they can start looking for a social housing property of their choice.

5.2. Advertising of vacant properties

5.2.1. Properties will be advertised on a weekly basis.

5.2.2. Properties will be advertised in two main categories. These will be:

- For all applicants.
- For existing (transfer) tenants of the council and scheme landlords only.
- By these means the council will seek to ensure that at least 20% of allocations made through Home Options are to existing tenants.

5.2.3. Properties will be advertised in the following ways:

- In a newsletter
- At the council's website

5.2.4. The Home Options bidding cycle runs for the seven days from Wednesday midnight each week.

5.3. Promotion of other housing options

5.3.1. Information will also be provided about the other housing options we will be promoting through the scheme including:

5.3.1.1. Help to stay in your current home (Disabled Facilities Grants, dementia grants and other discretionary loans etc.)

5.3.1.2. Rent Deposit Schemes

5.3.1.3. LetNCC scheme

5.3.1.4. Discretionary Housing Payments

5.3.1.5. Mutual exchanges

5.3.1.6. Help to access properties for shared ownership

5.4. Property descriptions

5.4.1. Properties advertised will, wherever possible, carry a photograph of the property or similar and will have a description of the property. This description will usually include the following information:

5.4.1.1. The type of property (house, flat etc.)

5.4.1.2. The tenure of the property (social rented housing, affordable rent, shared ownership etc.)

5.4.1.3. The number of bedrooms the property has

5.4.1.4. The location of the property

5.4.1.5. The level of accessibility the property has for people with mobility problems/wheelchair users

5.4.1.6. Any services provided to the property e.g. wardens, caretaker etc.

5.4.1.7. The heating type the property has

5.4.1.8. Any age restrictions on the property (sheltered etc.)

5.4.1.9. Whether pets are allowed

5.4.1.10. Availability of outside space (garden etc.)

5.4.1.11. The rent of the property and the service charges. Social rented properties can sometimes have two different rent levels of ‘social rent’ and ‘affordable rent’ and each landlord has their own criteria for which rent level applies to which type of property. This should be clearly explained on each advert, where this is relevant.

5.4.1.12. Special information (location of bus routes/ other amenities etc.)

5.4.1.13. Whether the property is available to all applicants or transfer applicants only

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

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

5.5. Bidding/application process

5.5.1. Provided the applicant meets the stated qualifying criteria they can bid for the property by the deadline given.

5.6. Deadlines for bids

5.6.1. Bidding closes at midnight every Wednesday. Bids received after the specified deadline will not be considered unless there are extenuating circumstances. Any such retrospective bids must be agreed by the Housing Options manager and a record kept of the reasons for acceptance of the retrospective bid held on record for audit purposes.

5.7. Bidding methods

5.7.1. Applicants can bid in the following ways:

- On the website, www.norwichhomeoptions.org.uk
- Over the telephone to the Home Options team.

5.8. Disqualified bids

5.8.1. Applicants are restricted to making two bids for social rented properties per week. Applicants will not be considered for any property for which they do not meet the qualifying criteria. For example, a single person would not be considered for a three-bedroom property.

5.8.2. Where an applicant who has been awarded a priority banding to reflect a specific housing need has bid for a property which does not meet this housing need, their bid will not be considered. For example, an applicant in a priority band based on a medical need for a ground floor property will not be considered if they have bid for a house or upper floor flat.

5.9. Selection of the successful bids

5.9.1. At the end of the advertising cycle a shortlist will be drawn up from all applicants that have applied for a property. At this point the banding and qualification of any shortlisted applicant will be reviewed for accuracy.

5.9.2. The offer of accommodation will be made to the person in the highest band that meets the qualifying criteria. If there is more than one applicant in the band, the offer will be made to any UK armed forces veteran within that band, followed by the applicant who has been waiting the longest within that band. If the applicant with the highest priority refuses the property it will be offered to the next highest bidder and so on.

5.9.3. In order to maximise use of adapted properties, where a property has had adaptations to improve accessibility, the scheme landlord has the right to allocate the property to the applicant that has bid who is in greatest need of those specific adaptations at that property. As such, an occupational therapist may be invited to viewings of adapted properties to advise on suitability.

5.9.4. A risk and support needs assessment may be carried out. As a result, restrictions may be placed on the area or property which the applicant will be considered for. Applicants will not be offered a property where a risk to themselves or others has been identified.

5.10. Making the offer

5.10.1. The successful applicant will be contacted by the landlord whose property they have applied for to arrange an accompanied viewing. More than one applicant may be invited to the viewing. Photographic identification from the applicant will be required at the viewing.

5.10.2. Applicants will usually be contacted within three working days of the advert 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 that all applicants ensure they are contactable or else they may lose out on a property they have applied for.

5.10.3. Applicants have 48 hours to decide whether to accept the offer of accommodation. If no response has been received after this time, the next person on the shortlist will be offered the property.

5.10.4. 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.

5.10.5. Scheme landlords reserve the right to carry out an assessment on applicants to ensure the particular property is appropriate. If the landlord deems the property not to be suitable for the applicant, the property would then be offered to the next applicant on the shortlist.

5.10.6. 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 not qualify (e.g. if they have accrued rent arrears that were not previously known about).

5.11. Hostel move-on

5.11.1. The Norwich hostel move on agreement (appendix D) sets out how applicants in participant hostels and supported accommodation who meet the criteria will be allocated social housing.

5.12. Properties excluded from the scheme

5.12.1. The council reserves the right to exclude certain properties and housing schemes from the allocations system. Examples of where this may occur are:

5.12.1.1. Where a property is needed urgently to deal with an emergency.

5.12.1.2. Specialist housing schemes, for example Housing with Care Schemes will also be let outside the allocations scheme.

5.13. Direct lets

5.13.1. In certain circumstances the council will allocate properties directly to applicants, outside of the usual process.

5.13.2. 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 an applicant has been referred as part of the witness protection scheme.
- Where the council or a scheme landlord has entered a special arrangement with a support agency in order to accommodate especially vulnerable or challenging clients. Any such arrangement will be governed by an agreement signed off by the Head of Housing.
- Where the tenant of a scheme landlord's home is being repaired and is not occupiable so that they need to be moved from the property on a temporary or permanent basis.
- Where a client has been accepted as statutorily homeless, they will be direct let the first suitable available property.
- As part of the council's 'hostel move-on' scheme (see Appendix D)

5.13.3. 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. non-secure tenants, or carers or family members with no succession rights.) In deciding whether to make an offer of a tenancy the landlord will consider whether the property is of a suitable size and type for the applicant's household and the conduct of the applicant in terms of rent arrears and tenancy conditions.

5.13.4. Decisions to allocate properties outside of Home Options will be authorised by the Housing Options manager and held on record.

5.14. Sensitive lets

5.14.1. Sensitive lets are used where a specific issue has been identified in a particular area or block, making a property unsuitable for allocation to some applicants. When considering a sensitive let, instead of allocating a property to the applicant at the top of the list, the landlord will consider the

suitability of each applicant who has bid for the vacancy. This will be based on information held about the applicant and on knowledge of the property, its location or neighbours.

5.14.2. The council will only use sensitive lets in exceptional circumstances. In order to ensure that all decisions on sensitive lets are accountable, transparent and monitored, all decisions must be agreed by the Housing Options manager and the respective manager of the scheme landlord and a record held on file.

5.15. Local lettings plans

5.15.1. Local lettings plans are used by landlords to develop policies and letting arrangements that:

- Respond to local housing need and demand
- Help to suitably match applicants to properties; and
- Help them to achieve a balanced housing mix within a particular area.

The main aim of a local lettings plan is to build a strong and sustainable community.

5.15.2. Local lettings plans are generally used when allocating new build housing for the first time. New build developments are unusual in terms of housing allocations because of the number of properties that are available for let in a short period of time in one area.

5.15.3. This makes sure that:

- new build programmes meet the widest possible range of needs; and
- the council avoids the creation of groups of vulnerable households in specific communities.

5.15.4. To make sure that all decisions on local lettings agreements are accountable, transparent and monitored, all decisions must be agreed by the Housing Options manager and the respective manager of the scheme landlord and a record held on file.

5.16. Sheltered Housing

5.16.1. Sheltered housing is accommodation designed specifically for older people. Residents may pay an additional charge for support services.

5.16.2. The minimum age for the landlord to consider an applicant for sheltered housing will be clearly stated when each property is advertised.

5.16.3. 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.

6. Statement on equal access

6.1.1. The council and scheme landlords are committed to ensuring equality of opportunity in all elements of the scheme. This means that we seek to ensure that priority for housing is based on housing need and that housing policies are fair to all sections of the community regardless of age, disability, gender, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, or sexual orientation.

6.1.2. We want our services to be accessible to everyone who lives in Norwich. If you need extra help to be able to use our services, such as translation and interpretation services, large print or signing, please tell us.

6.1.3. All applicants for housing or rehousing may be asked to provide details of age, disability, gender, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, or sexual orientation. This is to allow us to assess the application properly as well as to monitor who is allocated housing, and to ensure that properties are being offered and allocated fairly.

6.2. Advice and assistance

6.2.1. 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.

6.3. Vulnerable groups

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

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

6.3.3. The council will also hold an ‘assisted applicants list’ for those who, due to their vulnerability, require additional help with the scheme. This additional help includes helping applicants bid for available homes or sending the property brochures directly to people who cannot access the internet.

6.3.4. The ‘assisted applicants list’ can be accessed by applicants or their support workers informing the council. This service will only be available for the most vulnerable clients as determined by the council.

6.3.5. 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.

7. Reviews of decisions

7.1. Notifying an ineligible or non-qualifying applicant:

7.1.1. The council will notify an applicant in writing of any decision that they:

7.1.1.1. Are ineligible for Home Options

7.1.1.2. Do not qualify to join Home Options.

In each instance, the council will give clear grounds for the decision.

7.1.2. An applicant can ask for a review of certain decisions made regarding Home Options. These are:

7.1.2.1. That they are not eligible or do not qualify

7.1.2.2. Their band and effective date

7.1.2.3. The type of property that they can bid/apply for

7.2. A request for a review of a decision must be made in writing within 21 days of receipt of the decision. The decision will be reviewed by a Housing Options team leader or manager or, in complex cases, an assessment panel. The role of the reviewer is to ensure that policy has been correctly applied. We aim to complete all review and medical assessments within 56 days of the request but in some circumstances this timeframe may be extended. The applicant will be notified in writing of the decision.

7.3. In requesting a review of their qualification for Home Options, the applicant will normally be expected to show that they have addressed issues which caused them not to qualify for the scheme over a minimum 12-month period, clearly demonstrating to the council's satisfaction that their behaviour has been addressed and they are able to independently maintain a tenancy. The applicant's individual circumstances will be fully considered as part of any review and each case will be treated on its merits.

7.4. Where an applicant does not qualify for Home Options through rent arrears, the council has set out in Appendix B the repayment arrangements and timeframes expected to be maintained in order for the applicant to demonstrate that the issue is being satisfactorily addressed.

7.5. An applicant does not have the right to ask for a further review.

7.6. Complaints procedure

7.6.1. If an applicant is dissatisfied with any aspect of the management of their Home Options application, other than where a review can be made, they

should follow the council's complaints procedure, details of which can be found at the website www.norwich.gov.uk.

7.6.2. The council will not accept a complaint for issues where there is or has already been a right of appeal, for example reviews of Home Options banding or qualification.

7.7. Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman

7.7.1. 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 & Social Care Ombudsman can be contacted at:

Tel: 0300 061 0614. Website: www.lgo.org.uk

8. Confidentiality statement

8.1. Norwich City Council is committed to protecting the rights of privacy and processing will be conducted fairly, lawfully and transparently in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (EU 2016/679) and all other applicable data protection law ('Data protection legislation').

8.2. We will ensure the personal information of all applicants (new, existing and former) is:

- Stored lawfully
- Processed in a fair and transparent manner
- Collected for a specific, explicit and legitimate purpose
- The data will be kept up to date and held until it is no longer required
- Shared only with other organisations for legitimate processing, the prevention of fraud or with the person's explicit consent. Our Privacy Notice can be located online at: www.norwich.gov.uk

8.3. When an application is made to Home Options, the applicant will be asked to give permission for information to be obtained from, or shared with, third parties, which would be required to enable the Home Options assessment or an allocation of housing to proceed.

8.4. If an applicant bids on a property advertised on Home Options, their data will be shared with the council or housing association that owns the property to enable the accurate and fair matching of people to properties to take place. Home Options partners and housing associations may also make enquires with council housing benefit departments and other agencies such as medical practitioners, DWP, support agencies, police and landlords to confirm the details provided by applicants.

9. Monitoring/changes to the scheme

9.1. Scheme monitoring

9.1.1. The scheme will be monitored directly by the Housing Options manager. The manager will, where necessary make recommendations for changes to the scheme, taking into consideration the following:

- Application and bidding data, property turnover and demand
- That the highest needs applicants and those who are vulnerable are using the scheme effectively
- The scheme's performance in meeting its agreed aims
- Feedback from applicants and stakeholders
- That the scheme continues to address local housing issues.

9.2. Changes to the scheme

9.2.1. 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, following consultation with scheme landlords.

Appendix B - Equality Impact Assessment

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

NORWICH City Council

What is being assessed	Norwich Home Options Allocation Policy	**Status**	Assessment of a statutory function update
Officer completing this form	Graduate Management Trainee		
Team	Home Options	**Directorate**	Communities and Housing
SLT sponsor	Executive director of communities and housing		
Date assessment commenced	28th October 2025	**Date of completion**	4th November 2025

Will the report this EqIA relates to go to Committee?
Scrutiny Committee (15th January 2025)

What are the main aims or purpose of the strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service which you are considering?

Part 4 of the Housing Act determines that local authorities must have an allocation scheme to determine priorities between applicants for Norwich City Council owned (social) housing and to set out the procedure to be followed when allocating social housing in their area. In Norwich, the allocation scheme is called Home Options.

The current Home Options allocations policy dates from October 2021 and needs updating to incorporate new legislation and statutory guidance. The update also presents the opportunity to ensure that policy reflects local needs and issues.

This EqIA covers the entire policy, highlighting specific proposed changes to the policy:

(a) local connection requirement increased from 6 months to 2 years

(b) reduction in permitted social housing refusals from 5 to 3

(c) prioritisation of armed forces veterans on housing shortlists within each band

How does it fit with other services and policies, and how does it support our corporate priorities?

Revisions to the Housing Allocations policy were developed in parallel with the development of the Norwich Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (2025–2030). These policy changes are closely aligned with the strategy and support the operational work of the homelessness prevention and relief teams.

The revised housing register eligibility and prioritisation criteria will promote social housing allocation to the most vulnerable local people who are engaged with home options, including those at risk of homelessness or who are currently homeless. These policy revisions will influence both who can join the register and how quickly they may be allocated housing.

The new housing allocation policy aligns to the “A Fairer Norwich” community-led plan priority: working to support local people and families so that they can face economic and social challenges. The policy aims to reduce inequality and the negative effects of poverty by prioritising social housing allocation for those who are the most in need within our city.

What is the reason for the proposal or change (financial, legal etc)?

The council has a statutory requirement to review and update their housing allocations policy in line with any significant changes to legislation, local priorities or local needs. In line with the update of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy (2025-2030), the allocations policy was reviewed and updated.

<table>
<tr><td>Who will be affected by this strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service?
(Please tick all that apply)</td><td>☒ Residents
☐ Visitors
☐ Council Staff
☐ Businesses
☐ Workers</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Please state any specific client group or groups
Specific groups impacted by this policy are:
Norwich City Council social housing tenants
Individuals applying for Norwich City Council home options
Individuals at risk of homelessness
Individuals experiencing homelessness</td></tr>
<tr><td>Which wards will be impacted by your proposal?

☒ ALL Norwich City Council wards
☐ Bowthorpe
☐ Catton Grove
☐ Crome
☐ Eaton
☐ Lakenham
☐ Mancroft
☐ Mile Cross
☐ Nelson
☐ Sewell
☐ Thorpe Hamlet
☐ Town Close
☐ University
☐ Wensum</td><td>Does your proposal impact any of the council’s Reducing Inequality Target Areas (RITAs)?

☒ Catton Grove
☒ Earlham
☒ Heartsease
☒ Mid Lakenham and Russell Street
☒ Mile Cross
☒ North City Centre
☒ Pilling Park
☒ Vauxhall Street
☒ West Pottergate</td></tr>
</table>

What outcomes do you want to achieve, why and for who?

Norwich has experienced significant population growth over the last decade and is the most densely populated district in Norfolk. Norwich, as with any city, faces some challenges including significant and entrenched inequality and deprivation: the latest data published by the End Child Poverty Coalition shows that between 2023-2024, 35.3% of children in Norwich were living in households below the poverty line.

As of October 2025, Norwich City Council owns a total of 14,211 properties, which includes 13,291 general needs homes and 920 sheltered homes. Despite this stock, the 2021 Greater Norwich Housing Needs Assessment projected a significant shortfall in social housing provision. Demand continues to outpace supply, particularly among Home Options applicants who are unable to access the increasingly unaffordable private rental sector.

The need for appropriate housing for vulnerable individuals and families is both urgent and well-evidenced. Homelessness is associated with significant health consequences for all experiencing it, including mental illness, infectious disease, heart disease, and early mortality (Crisis UK). Young people experiencing housing instability are more likely to be absent or excluded from school, while parents face heightened risks of depression and anxiety due to housing insecurity (Local Government Association, 2017). Older adults, particularly those over 60, are at increased risk of developing depression and dementia (Local Government Association, 2017). Temporary accommodation (TA) exacerbates these issues: two-thirds of TA residents report its negative impact on their mental and physical health (Shelter, 2023), and children residing in temporary housing for over a year are three times as likely to experience anxiety, depression, and infection compared to their housed peers (Shelter, 2006). Once within the social housing system, household changes can lead to overcrowding; a lack of available, larger homes prevents households from moving, thereby increasing their likelihood of mental illness, sleep disturbance, second-hand tobacco exposure, relationship breakdown, and poor educational attainment for children (WHO, 2018). A lack of stable housing additionally negatively impacts job and educational attainment, perpetuating the factors that entrap individuals in poverty and increase their need for social housing provision to prevent their homelessness (Crisis UK).

Certain groups are disproportionately affected by homelessness risk or its negative consequences, including families with children, those who are pregnant, army veterans, care leavers, refugees, those fleeing abuse, those experiencing severe mental illness, and those with complex, multiple needs (St Martin in the Fields UK).

To mitigate these harms and prevent homelessness among the most vulnerable through a very limited number of council-owned homes, the Home Options allocation policy must prioritise those in greatest need within Norwich. This prioritisation is primarily guided by statutory and legislative frameworks, supplemented by locally informed criteria that reflect emerging trends and community needs.

What evidence and data has been used for this assessment, including community engagement and consultation?

The new home options allocation policy will go through numerous stages of consultation and debate before sign-off.

The draft policy revisions, alongside its summary report and this EqIA, will be uploaded to Get Talking Norwich for the public to view, to allow engagement and comments from the community. The results of this consultation will be considered before the revised policy is assessed and debated within scrutiny committee. This EqIA will also be revised following public consultation. Amendments and suggestions from scrutiny committee will be implemented as appropriate before the final revised policy will go to the council's cabinet for sign off.

Who implements, carries out or delivers the policy, practice, service or function?

The home options, homelessness prevention, and homelessness relief teams.

Will anyone be disproportionately affected by what you are proposing, and/or will it create any benefits?

Due to additions to revised policy:

Populations impacted positively:

- Armed Forces Veterans

Populations with extra support in place to mitigate impact:

- Refugees
- Ex-offenders

Affected group	**Key findings from analysis of data and evidence.** Identify any gaps in data here	**Level & type of impact:**		**Actions to mitigate impacts, maximise benefits or address identified gaps in data**	**By when** dd/mm/yy
A group defined by age *(60+)*	No specific impact identified	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Those with physical access or mobility needs	**Positive Impact:** ***(In line with current Home Options Allocation Policy)*** Gold priority banding will be awarded to those in severe medical need who need urgent re-housing due to a strongly evidenced, serious and enduring medical condition or disability, which is severely and permanently affected by their current accommodation. This includes those who are housebound through mobility issues and moving to alternative accommodation would alleviate this, and those who have a terminal illness, where alternative accommodation would allow for suitable care to be provided.	☒ Positive impact ☐ Adverse impact	☐ Low impact ☐ Medium impact ☒ High impact	N/A – Allocation priority outlined in policy.	Ongoing

Those that identify as disabled	**Extra support in place to mitigate impact:** ***(In line with current Home Options Allocation Policy)*** People with learning disabilities or neurodivergence may face barriers in navigating the application process or understanding eligibility criteria.	☐ Positive impact ☒ Adverse impact	☐ Low impact ☒ Medium impact ☐ High impact	**Extra support for this group:** The council's Home Options team will continue to support all residents who need help with their housing needs, including those who require information in more accessible formats. We are committed to ensuring that everyone can access housing information in a way that meets their individual communication needs. The Home Options team hold a assisted applicants list for relevant applicants that require further support from the team to ensure they are not disadvantaged by the relative complexity of the Home Options application processes.	Ongoing
Gender reassignment	No specific impact identified	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Marriage and civil partnership	No specific impact identified	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Pregnancy and maternity	No specific impact identified	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Race/ethnicity	No specific impact identified	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Religion and belief	No specific impact identified	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Sex	No specific impact identified	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Sexual orientation	No specific impact identified	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Socio-economic hardship	**Positive Impact:** ***(In line with current Home Options Allocation Policy)*** Norwich has high levels of deprivation, with over a third of children living below the poverty line. Many residents face barriers to accessing private rental housing due to affordability, insecure employment, or benefit restrictions. These groups are disproportionately represented among Home Options applicants. As such, the Home Options team hold an assisted applicants list for relevant applicants that require further support from the team to ensure they are not disadvantaged by the relative complexity of the Home Options application processes.	☒ Positive impact ☐ Adverse impact	☐ Low impact ☒ Medium impact ☐ High impact	Overall, the policy aligns with anti-poverty objectives in the council's community-led plan. Its prioritisation of applicants in greatest housing need supports those experiencing poverty.	Ongoing
Refugees and Migrants	**Extra support in place to mitigate impact on this population:** ***(Due to addition to revised policy: (a) local connection requirement***	☐ Positive impact ☒	☐ Low impact ☒ Medium	**Extra support for this group:** Norwich City Council has formed a specialist refugee housing team that uses targeted grants to help individuals	Ongoing

	increased from 6 months to 2 years) Many asylum seekers are housed in Norwich-based accommodation while awaiting the outcome of their applications. If granted refugee status, they have 28 days to secure permanent housing. Although their residence in Norwich begins upon placement within asylum accommodation, the refugee-application process typically lasts significantly less than the two years required to qualify for the housing register, limiting their options for permanent accommodation upon exit.	Adverse impact	impact ☐ High impact	leaving asylum dispersal accommodation access private rental sector, thereby bypassing the continuous residence requirement for social housing. The council aims to continue to enable the success. provided by the refugee housing specialists.	
Armed Forces *(includes those who have served or continue to serve in our Armed Forces)*	**Positive Impact:** ***(In line with current Home Options Allocation Policy)*** As Norwich City Council has signed the Armed Forces Covenant, people with particular connections to the military don't need to meet local connection rules when applying for home options. This includes people currently serving or who have served in the regular Armed Forces; bereaved spouses or civil partners who must leave military housing after their partner dies, if the	☒ Positive impact ☐ Adverse impact	☐ Low impact ☐ Medium impact ☒ High impact	N/A – Allocation priority outlined in policy.	Ongoing.

	death was related to their service; former reserve force members with serious health issues caused by their service; and divorced or separated spouses or civil partners who are required to leave Ministry of Defence accommodation. Armed forces members and veterans are at a significantly risk of developing illness because of their service, resulting in their increased vulnerability. As such, gold priority banding will be awarded to Armed Forces members and veterans suffering from mental or physical ill health as a result of their service (where this is strongly evidenced, serious and enduring, and is severely and permanently affected by their current accommodation). ***(Due to addition to revised policy: (c) prioritisation of Armed Forces veterans on shortlists)*** UK Armed Forces veterans will also have the highest priority within any band they are placed in. On property shortlisting, where there is more than one applicant in the band, the offer will be made to any				

	UK Armed Forces veteran within that band, followed by the applicant who has been waiting the longest within that band.				
Other groups – **Ex Offenders**	**Extra support in place to mitigate impact on this population:** ***(Due to addition to revised policy: local connection requirement increased from 6 months to 2 years)*** Housing ex-offenders upon their release from prison, alongside providing holistic support services, has been shown to reduce re-offending rates by 50% (Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2023). It is important to note, however, that there is insufficient evidence to show that housing alone produces this effect (Ministry of Justice Analytical Series, 2025). Home Options eligibility requirements restrict ex-offenders from accessing social housing in two ways. Under the Home Options allocations policy, individuals detained in Norwich-	☐ Positive impact ☒ Adverse impact	☐ Low impact ☒ Medium impact ☐ High impact	**Extra support for this group:** A homelessness prevention referral can be made to the council by the probation service 8 weeks before an individual is released from prison, where work can begin to prevent their homelessness upon release. This mitigates the need for the applicant to present to the council themselves. Several housing alternatives are available to ex-offenders, including supported accommodation and private rentals. Norwich City Council has developed a specialist ex-offender housing team that utilises the Accommodation for Ex-Offenders (AfEO) fund (a central government fund that helps local authorities provide stable housing and support for individuals leaving prison,	Ongoing.

	based prisons, bail hostels, or approved premises do not gain a local connection to the area through residing in these premises. Ex-offenders additionally face exclusion from Home Options based on behaviour-based criteria including histories of anti-social behaviour, domestic violence, and convictions for violent crime.			thereby reducing homelessness and connected reoffending rates) to help them secure residence within the private rented sector. Since 2023, 91 ex-offenders have been housed through this approach. AfEO funding will end in April 2026, but the council aims to continue the success provided by the ex-offender housing specialists. Applicants excluded from Home Options if based on behaviour-based criteria may re-gain access if they can demonstrate that they have addressed these issues, as outlined in sections 5.0.4 and 5.0.5 of the policy.	
Other groups – **Care Leavers**	**Positive impact:** ***(In line with current Home Options Allocation Policy)*** Care leavers aged 18-21 years (or up to 25 years old if they are pursuing a programme of education agreed in their pathway plan) that are assessed as 'needing to move on' bypass the local connection requirements and are awarded gold priority banding, subject to	☒ Positive impact ☐ Adverse impact	☐ Low impact ☐ Medium impact ☒ High	N/A – Allocation priority outlined in policy.	Ongoing

	criteria.		impact		
Other groups – those fleeing domestic abuse	**Positive impact:** ***(In line with current Home Options Allocation Policy)*** Policy provides local connection exceptions and gold priority banding when safety needs are verified.	☒ Positive impact ☐ Adverse impact	☐ Low impact ☐ Medium impact ☒ High impact	N/A – Allocation priority outlined in policy.	Ongoing
Other groups – those living in overcrowded accommodation	**Positive impact:** ***(In line with current Home Options Allocation Policy)*** Gold priority banding will be awarded to applicants lacking two or more bedrooms. Silver priority banding will be awarded to applicants lacking one bedroom and those verified as 'sofa surfing'.	☒ Positive impact ☐ Adverse impact	☐ Low impact ☐ Medium impact ☒ High impact	N/A – Allocation priority outlined in policy.	
Other groups – those at risk of homelessness, those who are homeless, and those	**Positive Impact:** ***(In line with current Home Options Allocation Policy)***	☒ Positive impact	☐ Low impact	N/A – Allocation priority outlined in policy.	

who are rough sleeping	Where the council has accepted a homelessness prevention or relief duty for an applicant who does not hold a priority need, such applicants will be awarded a silver priority banding, subject to criteria. Applicants who are verified to be sleeping rough will be awarded silver priority banding, subject to criteria.	☐ Adverse impact	☒ Medium impact ☐ High impact		
Other groups – families with young children	**Positive Impact:** ***(In line with current Home Options Allocation Policy)*** Applicants with dependent children under the age of 10 who live in a flat or maisonette that does not have its own private outdoor space are awarded silver priority banding. Households that include children aged six or under, who live in a property on the third floor or above where there is no lift access, will move up one further priority band.	☒ Positive impact ☐ Adverse impact	☐ Low impact ☒ Medium impact ☐ High impact	N/A – Allocation priority outlined in policy.	

Are there any negative impacts that cannot reasonably be avoided?

Increasing the local connection requirement to two years will impact recent arrivals, refugees, and people placed in prison who return to Norwich. The change is a government guideline-based decision that prioritises limited social housing for long-term local residents. Targeted

mitigations will be provided, such as continued refugee private rental support, ex-offender private rental support, and exception routes and enhanced priority banding for care leavers, domestic abuse victims and army veterans.

How has the equality impact assessment informed or changed the proposal?

This EqIA has highlighted the key groups likely to be affected by the policy and reinforced the need for the continuation of the services which work to mitigate these impacts. These include the specialist rental support teams for refugees and ex-offenders.

What actions have been identified going forward?

Moving forward, the council will:

- Continue to fund and support the Refugee Housing Team to help refugees leaving asylum accommodation access private rented housing.
- Aim to sustain the positive outcomes achieved by Accommodation for Ex-Offenders (AfEO) team within the Home Options team beyond April 2026 when AfEO central government funding ends.
- Maintain the assisted applicants list and carry out regular outreach to ensure vulnerable residents receive appropriate support.

How will the impact of your proposal and actions be measured moving forward?

Review of allocation policy impact 1 year from implementation (February 2027)

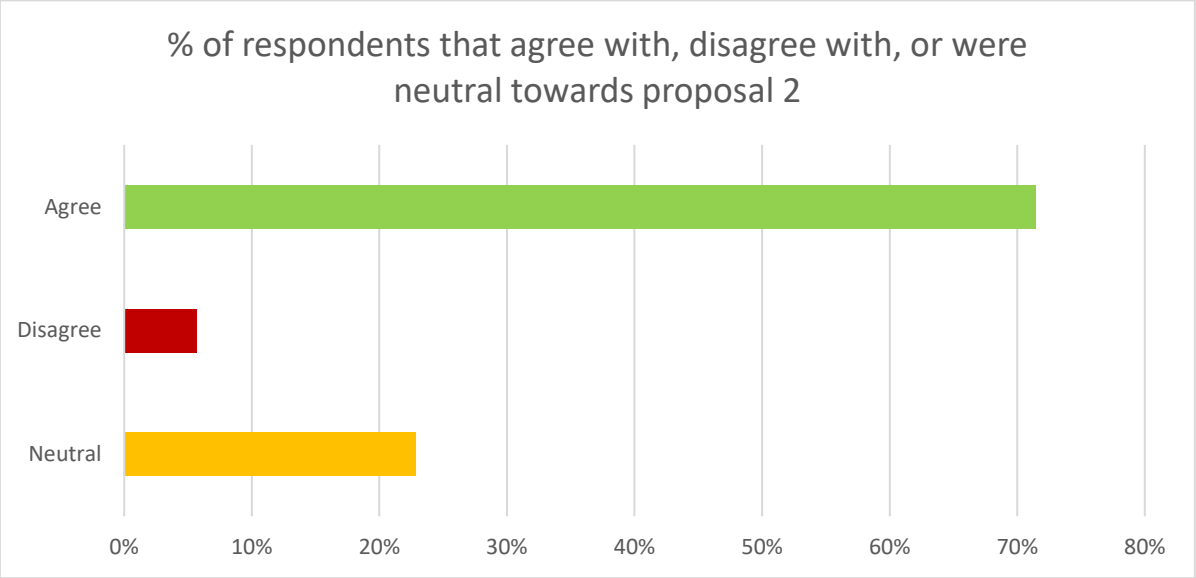
Negative outcomes action plan:				
Actions identified from EqIA	**Target completion date** (dd/mm/yy)	**Responsible Officer** (role)	**Comments**	**Action complete**
Continue and resource Refugee Housing Team Private Rental Sector grants to house refugees leaving asylum accommodation.	Ongoing	Home Options Manager		☐
Aim to sustain the positive outcomes achieved by Accommodation for Ex-Offenders (AfEO) team within the Home Options team beyond April 2026 when AfEO central government funding ends.	01/04/2026	Home Options Manager		☐
Maintain assisted applicants list and regular outreach to vulnerable applicants.	Ongoing	Home Options Manager		☐

Officer completing assessment	**Date**	04/11/2025
Senior leadership team sponsor	**Date**	05/11/2025
Equality lead (strategy team)	**Date**	04/11/2025

Appendix C – Consultation Response Data

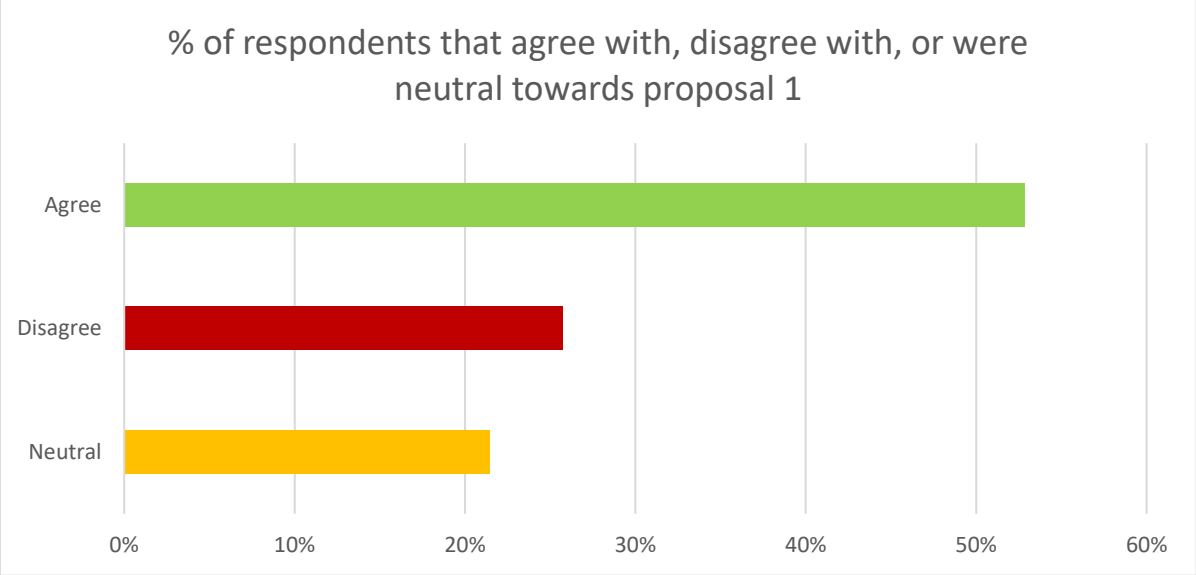
1) Advising non-priority-need applicants that they are unlikely to gain a home through Home Options, and to advise them regarding other routes to accommodation

71% of respondents agreed with, 6% disagreed with, and 23% were neutral



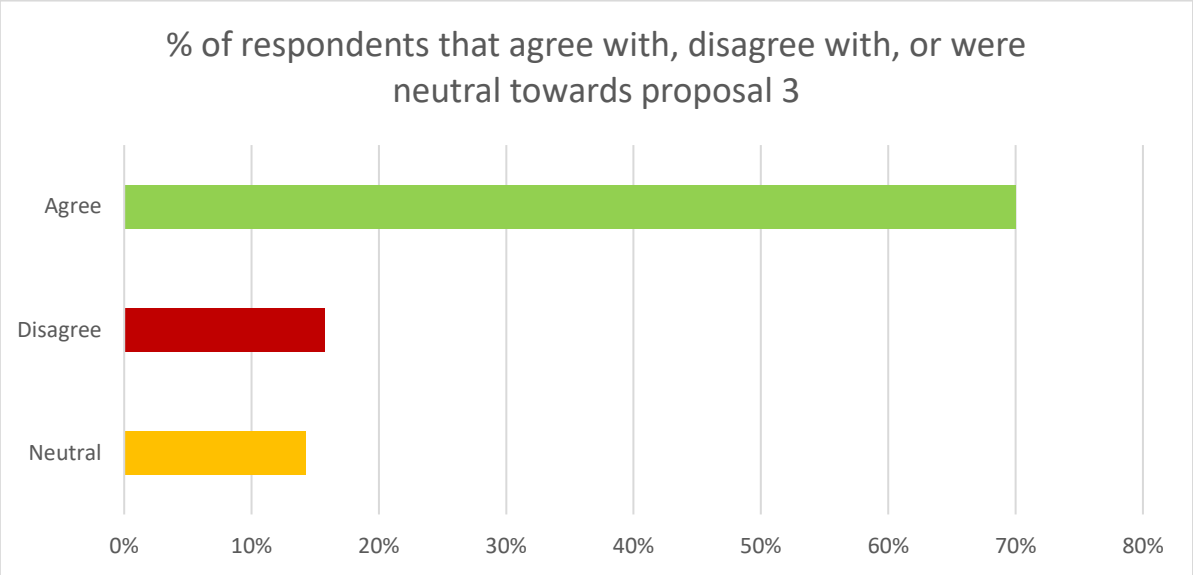
2) An increase in the local connection requirement from 6 months to 2 years, for an individual to be able to join the social housing register

53% of respondents agreed with, 26% disagreed with, and 21% were neutral



3) A decrease in the permitted number of property refusals from 5 to 3, before an individuals' application to Home Options is reviewed

70% of respondents agreed with, 16% disagreed with, and 14% were neutral



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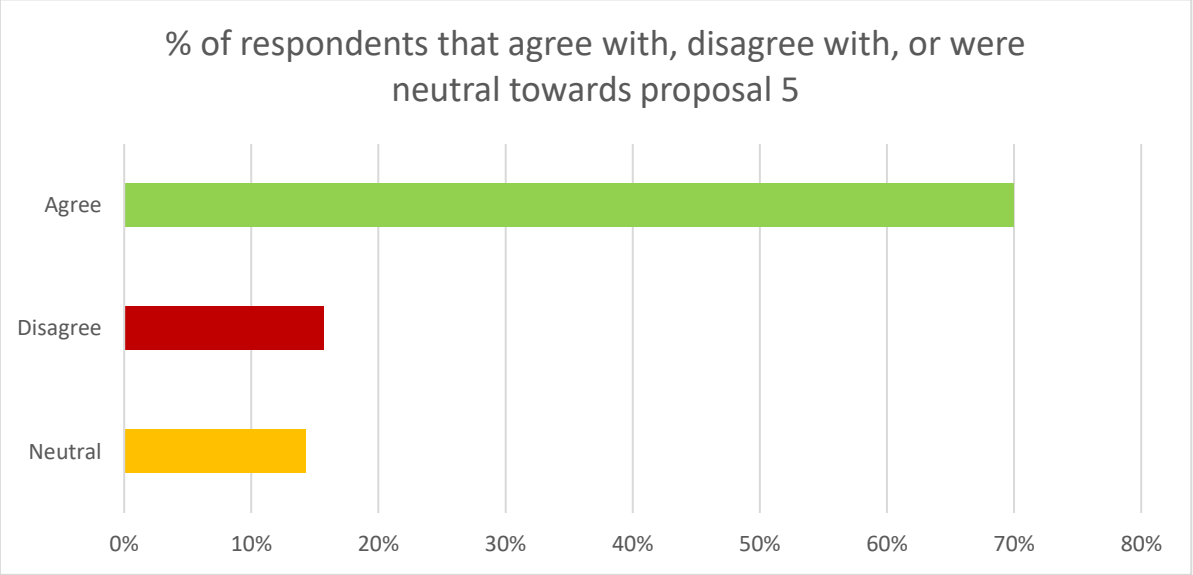
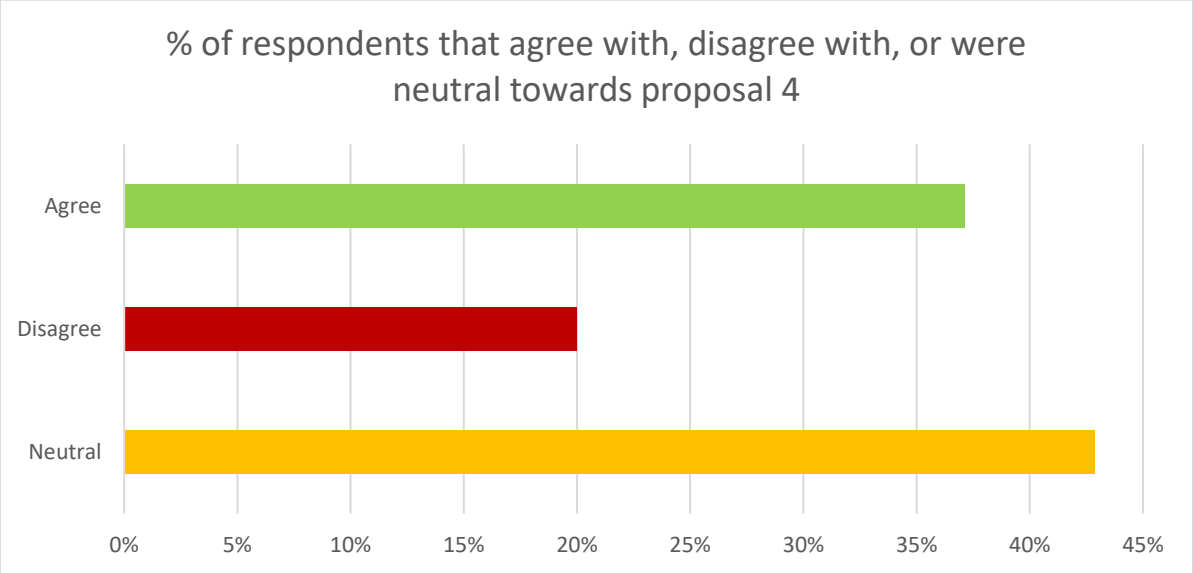
4) The creation of a rough-sleeping category within silver priority banding, whereby an individual who is verified as sleeping rough will be placed in silver band. Priority banding will be removed if the individual does not accept help or refuses suitable hostel accommodation.

70% of respondents agreed with, 16% disagreed with, and 14% were neutral



5) The automatic prioritisation of UK armed forces veterans within any band

37% of respondents agreed with, 20% disagreed with, and 43% were neutral.



Audit Committee Item 6

16:30 to 19:41 **Tuesday, 13 May 2025**

Present: Councillors Price (Chair), Driver (Vice Chair), Bolton, Carrington, Hoechner, Sands (M), Wright and David Harwood (Independent Person)

Apologies: None

In attendance: Councillor Kendrick, Cabinet Member for Modern and Open Council

Louise Rawsthorne, Chief Executive

Emily Yule, Executive Director of Resources

Davina Howes, Executive Director of Communities and Housing

Jan Robinson, Head of Legal and Governance (Monitoring Officer)

Alistair Rush, Interim Chief Finance Officer (s151 Officer)

Robert Mayes, Head of Finance

Teresa Sharman, Head of Internal Audit

David Riglar, Partner, Ernst & Young

Robert Carmichael, Democratic Services Manager

Dawn Bradshaw, Head of HR and Organisational Development

Clive Morgan, Infrastructure, Security & Support Manager

7. Internal Audit Plan 2025-26, Charter and Mandate

7.1 The Head of Internal Audit introduced the report. She explained the new approach to planning in 2025-26, which would move away from cyclical audits, increase focus on the Council's risks and priorities and improve connections. The plan would be more dynamic and flexible and would be reviewed every quarter. This new model was agreed with the Assurance Board and a workshop session was held with them to develop the plan.

7.2 The Head of Internal Audit highlighted the audit and risk universe. The risk universe was the Council's corporate risks and any high operational risks, and

the Audit universe was the Council's corporate priorities and its business services, processes, programmes and systems. The Head of Internal Audit also drew Members' attention to the Charter and Mandate, which identified the purpose of internal audit, the scope of work and the Committee's role.

7.3 Discussion ensued. A Member questioned whether the cost of interim staff and recruitment was captured anywhere and noted that local government reorganisation posed a challenge for recruitment. The Executive Director of Resources stated that there were risks on the Corporate and Directorate Risk Registers regarding recruitment, however, they needed to be refreshed in the context of Local Government Reorganisation. Members agreed that they would like to see rationale for the inclusion or exclusion of a recruitment risk linked with Local Government Reorganisation in future Risk Register reports that come to the Committee.

7.4 In response to a Member's question on the Financial Inclusion and Equalities audit area, the Executive Director of Communities and Housing explained that this was on a monitored list going forward.

7.5 In response to a Member's question about CIVICA's system and implementation, the Head of Internal Audit agreed that this would be discussed at the next quarterly Assurance Board meeting.

7.6 Members noted that they were pleased to see the Environmental audit included.

7.7 Discussion ensued on the Housing Delivery audit area. One Member noted the Corporate risk, CORP18 Failure to address Natural England advice on Nutrient Neutrality (NN). The Member asked officers what actions were being taken to address this. The Chair agreed that he would like assurance that this was under regular review and suggested that this be a point of discussion when the Risk Register report was presented to the Committee in future. The Executive Director of Resources explained that the Council had joined the NEC limited and was developing its own scheme to be able to have credits to build its own houses. Although this remained a challenging environment, the Council was supporting developers with navigating this. Members queried whether Scrutiny Committee had looked at the concerns surrounding Nutrient Neutrality and agreed to request that they consider doing so if not.

7.8 The Independent Member sought clarity on the dynamic plan and asked why it was not a 6-monthly plan. The Head of Internal Audit explained that it was a journey to reach a fully dynamic and flexible plan and it was helpful to have a long-term plan.

7.9 The Independent Member questioned why the report stated that 320 Right to Buy applications were received each week and felt that the figure was high. The Executive Director of Communities and Housing explained that the Government had announced changes to Right to Buy in the October 2024 Budget, which led to an increase in applications over a concentrated period of time. At the Independent Member's request, the Executive Director of

Communities and Housing agreed to provide details on what an average number of Right to Buy applications was in one year.

7.10 (Councillor Bolton left the meeting)

7.11 The Committee asked when the new Global Internal Audit Standards would come to the Committee. The Independent Member stated that the Committee should have sight of this before signing off on the charter and sought further explanation on the CIPFA application note, which contained the amendments to the Standards in relation to the Public Sector. The Head of Internal Audit advised that the amendments for the application note were minor and the Charter and Mandate could be approved and updated at a later point if needed. The Head of Internal Audit advised that she was completing a self-assessment against the Standards, but could not give an exact date for completion. However, she assured the Committee that this was a work in progress. She told Members that she had looked at the new standards and did not see the Committee as non-compliant, although there may be areas to improve. The Head of Internal Audit told Members that an Internal Audit Strategy was also needed and there was a template for this.

7.12 **RESOLVED:**

1) To approve the Internal Audit Plan 2025/26 and Internal Audit Charter and Mandate.

2) To request that Scrutiny Committee considers reviewing the current position around Nutrient Neutrality and the mitigations.

3) To note the following actions:

a. To include a rationale for the inclusion or exclusion of a recruitment risk in the context of Local Government Reorganisation in future Risk Register reports that come to the Audit Committee.

b. To request that risks surrounding CIVICA are considered and discussed at the next quarterly Assurance Board.

c. To ask the Executive Director of Communities and Housing to provide details on what an average number of Right to Buy applications is in a year.

Scrutiny Scoping Document

Good governance and scrutiny helps reduce risk, increases resilience, improves decision making and delivers value for money. The information you give on this form will help shape the scrutiny work programme for the civic year 2025-26.

Please tell us what item you would like considered on the work programme and provide a detailed scope. Please also consult the guidance on selecting suitable topics for Scrutiny from the Local Government Association which is listed below the form.

Your item will be considered for inclusion on the work programme on the following criteria and reviewed by senior officers. **Please give as much information as possible for each criteria below.**

Topic Title	
Key Lines of Enquiry (Focus of the review)	
Links to Corporate Plan and Aims	
How would Scrutiny add value?	
Indicators of success	
Are there specific individuals or organisations who could provide evidence and/or be witnesses?	

Is there a specific deadline for the piece of work?	

Please return your form to Democratic Services (democraticservices@norwich.gov.uk). Thank you.

Officer Comment (timescales, resource)	

Appendix –Criteria for Selecting Scrutiny Topics from Local Government Association, 'A Councillor Workbook on Scrutiny' (2023)

Guidance
Criteria for selecting scrutiny topics

The following criteria provide a useful guide for prioritising and selecting which topics are suitable for scrutiny to review.

Topics **are** suitable for scrutiny when:

- scrutiny could have an impact and add value
- the topic is of high local importance and reflects the concerns of local people
- the resources are available that would be required to conduct the review, in terms of manpower and budget
- it avoids work duplication elsewhere
- the issue is one that the committee can realistically influence
- the issue is related to an area where the council, or one of its partners, is not performing well
- the issue is relevant to all or large parts of the local area
- the review would be in the council's interests.

Topics **are not** suitable for scrutiny when:

- the issue is already being addressed elsewhere and change is imminent
- the topic would be better addressed elsewhere (and will be referred there)
- scrutiny involvement would have limited or no impact upon outcomes
- the topic may be sub-judice or prejudicial to the council's interest
- the topic is too broad to make a review realistic
- new legislation or guidance relating to the topic is expected within the next year
- the topic area is currently subject to inspection or has recently undergone substantial change.

Defining scrutiny topics

For every item on the work programme/new referral, it should be clear:

- What is the issue/activity/project under consideration?
- What is scrutiny being asked to do?
- What are the reasons for/expected benefits of involving scrutiny in the matter?
- Is there a specific deadline for the piece of work?

NORWICH City Council

Item 7

Committee name: Scrutiny

Committee date: 15/01/2026

Report title: Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2025-26

Portfolio: Councillor Padda, Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Justice

Report from: Head of legal and governance

Wards: All wards

OPEN PUBLIC ITEM

Purpose

To assist scrutiny committee members to review the scrutiny committee work programme 25/26.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that that the Scrutiny Committee reviews and agrees the proposed work programme for the 25/26.

Policy framework

The Council has five corporate priorities, which are:

- An open and modern Council.
- A prosperous Norwich.
- A fairer Norwich.
- A climate responsive Norwich.
- A future-proof Norwich.

This report meets the “open and modern council” corporate priority.

Report details

1. The Scrutiny Committee had an informal session on 5 June 2025 outlining the principles of good scrutiny and setting a work programme.

2. There are certain items that are considered by the Scrutiny Committee on a regular basis. These are the Committee work programme (each meeting of the Committee), Equality Information Report (December each year) and pre-scrutiny of the proposed budget (January-February each year).

3. Updates are also received from the Council's representatives on the Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (NHOSC).

Consultation

4. Scrutiny committee members took part in an informal session and the work programme will be a standing item at each meeting of the scrutiny committee.

Implications

Financial and resources

5. Any decision to reduce or increase resources or alternatively increase income must be made within the context of the council's stated priorities, as set out in its community-led plan "We are Norwich" and budget.

6. There are no proposals in this report that would reduce or increase resources.

Legal

7. There are no specific legal implications of this report.

Statutory considerations

Consideration	**Details of any implications and proposed measures to address:**
Equality and diversity	None
Reducing Inequality Target Areas (RITAs)	None
Health, social and economic impact	None
Crime and disorder	None
Children and adults safeguarding	None
Environmental impact	None

Risk management

Risk	**Consequence**	**Controls required**
None		

Other options considered

8. There have been no other options considered for this report.

Reasons for the decision/recommendation

9. This report will allow scrutiny to review the work programme for scrutiny for 2024-25.

Background papers: None

Appendices:

Appendix A: Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

Appendix B: Forward Agenda

Appendix C:

Contact officer:

Name: Alexandra Cosme, Senior Committee Officer

Telephone number: 01603 987697

Email address: alexandracosme@norwich.gov.uk

IN TRAN communication for all	If you would like this agenda in an alternative format, such as a larger or smaller font, audio or Braille, or in a different language, please contact the committee officer above.

Appendix A – Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2025/26

Topic	Purpose	Cabinet Member	Lead Officer
5th June 2025			
Informal Work Programming Session			
19th June 2025			
Participatory Democracy Scope			
NCSL Business Plan		Cllr Harper, Cabinet Member for Finance and Major Projects	ELT / NCSL
Report from the Making Norwich a truly accessibly city Task and Finish Group	To summarise the discussions of the group and propose recommendations for both Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee.	Cllr Padda, Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Justice	Executive Director of Communities and Housing
Work Programme	To review and update the committee's work programme.	N/A	Head of Legal and Governance
17th July 2025			
Provision for rough sleepers with a focus on health and wellbeing		Cllr Jones, Cabinet Member for Housing	Executive Director of Communities and Housing
Update from Cllr Jones	To receive an update from the Cabinet Member on homelessness and refugees.	Cllr Jones, Cabinet Member for Housing	Executive Director of Communities and Housing
Scrutiny Committee 2024-25 Annual Report	To review the work and progress that has been made by the Scrutiny Committee for the period 2024-25.	N/A	Head of Legal and Governance
Work Programme	To review and update the	N/A	Head of Legal and

	committee's work programme		Governance
18th September 2025			
HR Processes		Cllr Padda, Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Justice	Executive Director of Resources
Updates from Norfolk Health Overview Select Committee	To receive updates from the Council's representatives on this body.	N/A	Head of Legal and Governance
Work Programme	To review and update the committee's work programme.	N/A	Head of Legal and Governance
16th October 2025			
Sport and Physical Activity Strategy Review	To consider the value of partnership working in sport and physical activity at a community and formal provision level.	Cllr Kidman, Cabinet Member for Culture and Wellbeing	Executive Director of Housing and Communities
Pre-Scrutiny Norwich City Hall Reimagined Cabinet Report	To provide an opportunity to pre-scrutinise the report going to Cabinet in November 2025.	Cllr Harper, Cabinet Member for Finance and Major Projects	Interim Executive Director of Major Projects
Lion Homes Information Bulletin	To provide an update on Lion Homes.	Cllr Harper, Cabinet Member for Finance and Major Projects	Chief Executive
Work Programme	To review and update the committee's work programme.	N/A	Head of Legal and Governance
27th November 2025			
Community Safety Partnership (Safer Norwich Board)	To report on the progress of the council's Community Safety service and Safer Norwich Board during 2024-25 and provide an update on priorities for 2025-26.	Cllr Jones, Cabinet Members for Housing	Executive Director of Housing and Communities
Good Neighbourhood Management Policy	To provide an update on the development of a Good	Cllr Jones, Cabinet Member for Housing	Executive Director of Housing and Communities

	Neighbourhood Management Policy.		
Updates from Norfolk Health Overview Select Committee	To receive updates from the Council's representatives on this body.	N/A	Head of Legal and Governance
Work Programme	To review and update the committee's work programme	N/A	Head of Legal and Governance
18th December 2025			
Call In of IT Infrastructure Refresh Decision taken at the meeting of the Cabinet on 3 December 2025	To consider the call in request.	Cllr Padda, Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Justice	Executive Director of Resources
Pre-Scrutiny of Anglia Square Business Plans	To pre-scrutinise the plans.	Cllr Jones, Cabinet Member for Housing	Executive Director of Major Projects
Equality Information Report	To consider the Equality Information Report.	Cllr Padda, Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Justice	Strategy Manager and Strategy Officer (Equalities)
Update on HR Process Actions and Recommendations	To provide an update on the actions and recommendations from HR Processes.	Cllr Padda, Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Justice	Executive Director of Resources
Work Programme	To review and update the committee's work programme.	N/A	Head of Legal and Governance
15th January 2026			
Housing Development at Mile Cross Depot Site		Cllr Jones, Cabinet Member for Housing	Executive Director of Communities and Housing
Revisions to the Home Options Policy	To provide an update on proposed changes to the Council's social housing allocations policy.	Cllr Jones, Cabinet Member for Housing	Executive Director of Communities and Housing
Work Programme	To review and update the committee's work programme.	N/A	Head of Legal and Governance

5th February 2026			
Budget Scrutiny			
19th March 2026			
Anti-Social Parking			
Nutrient Neutrality			
Updates from Norfolk Health Overview Select Committee	To receive updates from the Council's representatives on this body.	N/A	Head of Legal and Governance
Work Programme	To review and update the committee's work programme.	N/A	Head of Legal and Governance

TBC

Website Redesign and Customer Journeys

Information bulletin on ethical and sustainable management of cash balances and investments (as reviewed by Audit Committee and Treasury Management Committee)

Information bulletin on tenant-facing version of Good Neighbourhood Management Policy

Appendix B – Forward Agenda

Meeting	Date	Report	Purpose	Head of Service	Director	Portfolio Holder	Key Decision	Exempt?
Cabinet	14/01/2026	Anglia Square Investment Partnership business plans review and approval	To review and approve the Investment Partnership overarching business plan, as well as the detailed Plot B and C business plans	Neville Murton	Davina Howes	Harper	Yes	Yes (Para 3)
Cabinet	14/01/2026	Planning Enforcement Policy	Adoption of a planning enforcement policy	Sarah Ashurst	Nick Austin	Giles	Yes	No
Cabinet	14/01/2026	Pavement Licensing	To request authority to go out to consultation on a revised pavement licensing policy and fees	Sarah Ashurst	Nick Austin	Giles	No	No
Cabinet	14/01/2026	HMO Licensing Policy Revisions	To agree to adopt the new HMO Licensing Policy	Sarah Ashurst	Nick Austin	Jones	Yes	No
Cabinet	14/01/2026	HRA Compliance Contract	To consider the award of a long-term partnering contract	Tony Wiggins	Davina Howes	Jones	Yes	No
Cabinet	14/01/2026	HRA Compliance Contract - Exempt Appendix	To consider the exempt appendix to the report	Tony Wiggins	Davina Howes	Jones	No	Yes (Para 3)
Cabinet	14/01/2026	Equality Information Report	To consider the Equality Information Report 2026	Helen Chamberlin	Davina Howes	Padda	No	No
Cabinet	14/01/2026	Climate Responsive Norwich Programme 2025-2035	To adopt the Climate Responsive Norwich Programme 2025-2035		Nick Austin	Hampton	Yes	No
Cabinet	14/01/2026	Anglia Square - Acquisition of affordable housing in Block C	To consider the Council acquiring Block C of the Anglia Square development for Council housing	Mark Brown	Davina Howes	Jones	Yes	Yes (Para 3)

Cabinet	14/01/2026	Gambling Statement of Principles	To agree to consult on the draft Gambling Statement of Principles	Sarah Ashurst	Nick Austin	Giles	No	No
Cabinet	14/01/2026	Outcome of the Scrutiny Call-In of the IT Infrastructure Refresh	To consider the outcome of the Call-in of the IT Infrastructure Refresh decision	Julia Medler	Emily Yule	Padda	No	No
Council	27/01/2026	Polling District Review	To agree the revised Polling Scheme	Jan Robinson	Emily Yule	Padda	No	No
Council	27/01/2026	Treasury Management Mid-Year Review Report - 2025-2026	This report sets out the Council's Treasury Management performance for the first six months of the financial year to 30 September 2025.	Robert Mayes	Isabel Brittain	Harper	No	No
Council	27/01/2026	Adjustments to the Capital programme 2025-2030	To seek approval to adjust the 2025-2030 Capital Programme	Mark Brown	Davina Howes	Jones	No	No
Cabinet	11/02/2026	Disposal of Assets (Housing) 1	To consider the disposal of land as detailed in the report	Tony Wiggins	Davina Howes	Jones	No	Yes (Para 3)
Cabinet	11/02/2026	Disposal of assets (Housing) 2	To consider the disposal of the asset as detailed in the report	Tony Wiggins	Davina Howes	Jones	No	Yes (Para 3)
Cabinet	11/02/2026	HRA Heating Servicing and Repairs Contract					Yes	Yes (Para 3)
Cabinet	11/02/2026	Disposal of Assets (Housing)	To consider the disposal outlined in the report.		Davina Howes	Jones	No	Yes (Para 3)
Cabinet	11/02/2026	Airport Surface Access Strategy	To endorse/adopt the Norwich Airport Surface Access Strategy	Sarah Ashurst	Nick Austin	Giles	Yes	No
Cabinet	11/02/2026	Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy	To consider the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy		Davina Howes	Jones	No	No

Cabinet	11/02/2026	Home Options Allocation policy	To agree an update to the Home Options allocation policy		Davina Howes	Jones	No	No
Cabinet	11/02/2026	The Council's 2026-2027 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy	To recommend to Council the Council's 2026-2027 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy	Robert Mayes	Isabel Brittain	Harper	No	No
Cabinet	11/02/2026	Corporate Performance Report 2025-26 - Quarter 3	To consider the Corporate Performance Report for Quarter Three of 2025-2026	Helen Chamberlin	Davina Howes	Stonard	No	No
Cabinet	11/02/2026	Budget Monitoring Report 2025-2026 - Quarter Three	To provide an update on the Council's overall financial position at Quarter Three of 2025-2026	Robert Mayes	Isabel Brittain	Harper	No	No
Cabinet	11/02/2026	Corporate Risk Register 2025-2026 - Quarter Three	To provide an update to the Council's corporate risk register based on the position for Quarter Three	Robert Mayes	Isabel Brittain	Harper	No	No
Cabinet	11/02/2026	Corporate Risk Register 2025-2026 - Quarter Three - Exempt Appendix	To consider the exempt appendix to the report.	Robert Mayes	Isabel Brittain	Harper	No	Yes (Para 3)
Cabinet	11/02/2026	Greater Norwich Five Year Infrastructure Investment Plan	To adopt the Greater Norwich Five Year Infrastructure Investment Plan	Sarah Ashurst	Nick Austin	Stonard	Yes	No
Cabinet	11/03/2026	Greater Norwich Green Infrastructure Strategy Supplementary Planning Document	To adopt the Greater Norwich Green Infrastructure Strategy Supplementary Planning Document	Sarah Ashurst	Nick Austin	Giles	No	No
Cabinet	11/03/2026	Greater Norwich Local Plan Policy 2	To adopt the Greater Norwich Local Plan Policy 2 Supplementary	Sarah Ashurst	Nick Austin	Giles	No	No

		Supplementary Planning Document	Planning Document					
Cabinet	11/03/2026	Biodiversity Duty Reporting	To consider the reporting on the policies and actions that have been carried out to comply with the Council's Biodiversity Duty under the Environment Act 2021		Nick Austin	Hampton	No	No
Council	17/03/2026	Greater Norwich Local Plan Policy 2 Supplementary Planning Document	To adopt the Greater Norwich Local Plan Policy 2 Supplementary Planning Document	Sarah Ashurst	Nick Austin	Giles	No	No
Council	17/03/2026	Greater Norwich Green Infrastructure Strategy Supplementary Planning Document	To adopt the Greater Norwich Green Infrastructure Strategy Supplementary Planning Document	Sarah Ashurst	Nick Austin	Giles	No	No
Cabinet	TBC	Taxi and Private Hire vehicle conditions - VEHICLE conditions ONLY for consultation	To request authority to go out to consultation on revised conditions and standards (required to meet DfT enhanced standard and take into account new legislation)	Sarah Ashurst	Nick Austin	Giles	No	No
Cabinet	TBC	Greater Norwich Local Plan Policy 5 (Affordable Housing) Supplementary Planning Document	To agree to go out to consultation on a Supplementary Planning Document on Policy 5 (Affordable Housing) of the Greater Norwich Local Plan	Sarah Ashurst	Nick Austin	Giles	No	No
Cabinet	TBC	Procurement of Retrofit Engagement Service	To seek delegated authority to procure a retrofit engagement service to support the delivery of retrofit grant schemes		Nick Austin	Hampton	Yes	No

Cabinet	TBC	Approval of award of a contract for Nutrient Neutrality Works	To consider the approval of an award of a contract for Nutrient Neutrality Works		Davina Howes	Jones	Yes	Yes (Para 3)