

Report for Resolution

Report to Executive
12 November 2008
Report of Head of Neighbourhood and Strategic Housing Services
Subject Choice Based Lettings – Changes to Policy

5

Purpose

To make improvements and clarifications to the Greater Norwich Choice Based Lettings policy.

Recommendations

To agree the proposed changes as set out in Appendix A of the report.

Financial Consequences

There are no financial consequences to this report

Risk Assessment

There is no risk to the Council.

Strategic Priority and Outcome/Service Priorities

The report helps to meet the strategic priority “Safe and healthy neighbourhoods – working in partnership with residents to create neighbourhoods where people feel secure, where the streets are clean and well maintained, where there is good quality housing and local amenities and where there are active local communities” and the service plan priority of “maximising the use of our housing stock.”

Executive Member: Councillor Arthur - Housing and Adult Services

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Background Documents

Executive report of 7th March 2007 entitled Sub-Regional Choice Based Lettings – Home Options

Report

Introduction

1. The Greater Norwich Choice Based Lettings scheme, which has been in operation for a year, represents a new way in which people can apply for social housing. There are currently circa 13,500 active applicants across the sub-region, registered and eligible to bid on the system. One of the scheme's strengths is that it a common policy applies across Greater Norwich. The policy is referred to on a daily basis by applicants and staff. The proposed changes contained at appendix A are based on feedback from the three sub-regional Home Options teams and customers, as to what has worked well and what could be improved.

2. The changes are designed to clarify areas where there may previously have been confusion and to ensure that the schemes focus on fairness and transparency remains. These changes have been endorsed by the schemes Partnership Board, made up of representatives from partner Registered Social Landlords and senior officers and the Portfolio Holder for Housing from each of the three Local Authorities.

3. Proposed changes to the policy largely fall into 4 broad categories, these are:

- a. Increased priority to be given to single homeless individuals and childless couples
- b. Clarification that gold band status to those moving on from hostels will only be given to those with a local connection to the area and when it has been decided by the individual's support worker that they are ready to move-on
- c. Clarification on what constitutes over-crowding
- d. A series of changes to the property size table in order to make the policy much clearer to users of the system and their advocates.

APPENDIX A

Page Number in original policy	Reference	Action	Reason
17	Prior to 2.4.12 in Silver Band section	<p>Add:</p> <p>Homelessness: Applicants who are homeless and have lost their accommodation through no fault of their own or threatened with homelessness who are likely to lose their accommodation through no fault of their own, for which there is no legal redress, in the next 12 weeks, who are assessed by the particular scheme council as not likely to be in priority need and who are receiving housing advice from the particular scheme council to prevent homelessness (this would require a homelessness prevention referral from the particular scheme council's advice and homelessness service)</p>	Previously given lower priority than those who were intentionally homeless. Local Authorities have an advice and assistance duty to all homeless applicants.
17	2.4.9 Supported Housing/Hostels	<p>Add:</p> <p>Gold band will be awarded only by the scheme council where the applicant has a local connection, as defined by that particular council.</p>	Clarification change. To ensure that partners understand that the council where the applicant has a connection, before they go into the hostel, or established while they are in the hostel, will take the main responsibility for rehousing the applicant.

16	2.4.7 Overcrowding/s haring facilities	Add: Or Applicants lacking access to a kitchen and bathroom	Current policy only covers those who have to share facilities, not those who have no access to them in the first place.
18	2.4.15 Overcrowding/s haring facilities	Add: Or Applicants lacking access to a kitchen or bathroom	Current policy only covers those who have to share facilities, not those who have no access to them in the first place.
19	2.4.19 homelessness	Remove: Applicants who are homeless or threatened with homelessness who are assessed by the particular scheme council, as not to be in priority need	Result of addition to 2.4.12
21	2.5.8 Reduced Preference Criteria	Add a new bullet point: Are owed a full housing duty under the Housing Act 1996 and are assessed by their Support Worker and the Home Options team manager as not ready to move on	Clarification change. To ensure that people don't move into tenancies before they are ready.
21	2.5.8 Reduced Preference Criteria	Remove the word 'partner' from first two bullet points	Clarification change. Rent arrears should be considered from any previous Landlord.
25	2.9.1 Property Size Qualification	Add to paragraph above table: Once proof of pregnancy is provided (MATB1) the unborn child will be classed as a child for the purposes of property size eligibility only.	Clarification change. This is currently the case in practice but is not detailed in the policy.

Changes to Property Size table

The following changes to the Property Size Table have been proposed in order to make the table clearer to applicants, who have indicated that they find the current layout confusing. The changes help to present the information to applicants in a clearer and easier to understand way.

The following changes are proposed:

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

Please note:

- Assessment will be based on the suitability of the property for the size of the household.
- If you have access to a child or children for four or more nights a week they will be classed as living with you. We will require proof of this.

Eligibility factors outside this table

Access to children (only if 4 + nights) – would be entered on application as if that child lives with household

Eligibility factors included in this table

Number of children
Age of children – 6, 16 - relevant for sharing - **where can share shown in blue / where can't share shown in green**
Gender of children – same gender/mixed gender – relevant for sharing
Age of children - relevant for type of accommodation – if all household **over 10** can have accommodation above ground floor – **shown in red**

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

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

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

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

	4 bed flat/maisonette 4 bed bungalow 4 bed house 5 + bed house
Applicant with 5 or more children	3 bed (2 receptions) ground floor flat/maisonette 3 bed (2 receptions) bungalows 3 bed (2 receptions) house 4 bed flat/maisonette 4 bed bungalow 4 bed house 5 + bed house

Greater Norwich Choice Based Lettings Allocations Scheme:



This document contains the Allocation Scheme of:

Broadland District Council
Norwich City Council
South Norfolk Council

Date Published: 10/10/2007

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1.1 Introduction:

- 1.1.1 This document contains the allocations scheme (as required by the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) for Broadland District Council, Norwich City Council and South Norfolk Council. It sets out the priorities and procedures that Broadland District Council, Norwich City Council and South Norfolk Council will follow in the letting of housing accommodation to applicants on their common housing registers.
- 1.1.2 In November 2007 Broadland District Council, Norwich City Council and South Norfolk Council, in partnership with housing associations and a range of private sector organisations, adopted a new approach to letting and promoting available housing. All available social rented housing within the scheme will now be let in the same way. A full range of other housing options including shared ownership properties, key worker housing, sub-market rent properties, private rented properties and private sale properties will also be promoted and accessed through the scheme.
- 1.1.3 The new approach called choice based lettings will give applicants far greater choice in selecting where and in what property type and tenure they wish to live. The scheme will also be much easier to understand and much more customer focused.
- 1.1.4 The new allocations scheme will be called **HOME OPTIONS**. This document sets out the approach for the **HOME OPTIONS Scheme**. Other key documents are:
- The scheme guide for applicants
 - The procedure manual for staff
- 1.1.5 The three local authorities are known throughout this document as the scheme councils. The 11 Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) are known throughout this document as the scheme landlords. Each scheme council and each scheme landlord will have a copy of this allocations policy available at its head office for inspection. A copy of this allocations policy is available free of charge from any scheme council or scheme landlord.
- 1.1.6 The Allocations Policy sets out:
- the objectives of the Allocations Scheme;
 - how the three housing register operates;

- who is eligible to be rehoused;
- how customers' housing needs are assessed;
- how social rented homes across the sub-region are let;
- how the HOME OPTIONS Allocations Scheme operates

1.1.7 The scheme councils are:

- Broadland District Council
- Norwich City Council
- South Norfolk Council

1.1.8 The scheme landlords are:

- Broadland Housing Association
- Orwell Housing Association
- Cotman Housing Association
- Orbit Housing Association
- Guinness Trust
- Wherry Housing Association
- Peddars Way Housing Association
- Saffron Housing Trust
- Hastoe Housing Association
- Places for People Housing Association
- Habinteg Housing Association

1.1.9 A further range of organisations have been involved in developing and assisting the operation of the scheme, these are:

- Norfolk County Council
- Norfolk Supporting People
- Norfolk Adult Social Services
- St Martins Housing Trust
- Norfolk YMCA
- Leeway Women's Aid
- St Martins Housing Trust
- Norfolk DAAT
- Julian Housing
- Shelter
- Norfolk Mental Health Care Trust
- Space East
- St Edmunds Society
- MAP

1.2 Background:

- 1.2.1 The government has made it clear that Local Authorities and Housing Associations must change the way they let their social rented housing. The aim is to give housing applicants far greater choice about where and in what property type and tenure they wish to live in. To achieve this aim the government came up with a new way of letting social housing and promoting other housing options to applicants called choice based lettings.
- 1.2.2 Under a choice based lettings system the landlords advertise their properties for rent and invites bids on each property from applicants who are registered with the scheme. The applicants are assessed and awarded a banding according to their need for a new, suitable home. The landlord offers the property to the applicant who falls into the highest banding of those who have applied and has been registered for the scheme the longest. A range of other housing options are also promoted, to applicants, through the scheme including shared ownership properties, mutual exchanges, private sale properties and private rented properties.
- 1.2.3 To help the introduction of choice based lettings the government has brought in a new statutory framework incorporated in the Homelessness Act 2002. The government has also set the target that 100% of local authorities are required to have choice based lettings schemes up and running by 2010.
- 1.2.4 In Greater Norwich the three scheme councils and the scheme landlords decided that an effective choice based lettings allocations scheme would bring considerable benefits to both applicants and landlords. Following this the three scheme councils successfully bid in late 2005 for government funding to develop and implement a choice based lettings allocation scheme across Greater Norwich.
- 1.2.5 Greater Norwich is an area of very high housing need and it must be remembered that the new choice based lettings system will not produce any more affordable housing but will provide a fairer, more efficient and transparent way of letting the current scarce social housing resources. The system will also promote to applicants a range of other available properties such as shared ownership properties, private rented properties, private sale properties and a range of other options to make these properties more accessible and affordable including rent deposit schemes, equity loans, mortgage calculators and financial advice etc.
- 1.2.6 The system we have developed is designed to be easy to use, provide the highest levels of customer service and allow clients to have a true understanding of their housing situation so they can make the best choice for their needs from the full range of housing options available to them.

1.3 Scheme objectives:

1.3.1 The key objectives of the allocations scheme are:

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

1.4 Statement on choice:

- 1.4.1 The scheme councils and scheme landlords are fully committed to enabling applicants to play a more active role in choosing where, and in what property type and tenure they live, whilst continuing to house those people in the greatest need and complying with all relevant legislation.
- 1.4.2 It is important to realise that the demand for accommodation is higher in some areas than in others. In making a decision about the choices available, applicants need to consider their housing need priority against the availability of properties in any given area.

1.5.1 Legal framework:

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

1.6 Consistency across Greater Norwich:

- 1.6.1 All elements of this allocations scheme will be applied consistently at the three scheme councils. The properties and housing options will all be accessible through the same methods. However, the three scheme councils will continue to run three separate common housing registers known as the HOME OPTIONS Common Housing Registers. This means an applicant can only apply for properties in the scheme council area in which they are registered on the HOME OPTIONS Common Housing Register.

1.7 How will the scheme work?

- 1.7.1 The HOME OPTIONS Allocations Scheme provides a new way of letting social housing and promoting shared ownership properties, private rented properties, private sale properties and other housing options to applicants in Greater Norwich. The scheme councils will no longer use the traditional method of 'matching' applicants to properties. Instead, applicants will choose the tenure, property and area in which they wish to live.
- 1.7.2 The scheme councils and scheme landlords will advertise their vacant social rented housing properties to those on the HOME OPTIONS Common Housing Registers. The adverts will include a detailed description of the property and state which applicants are able to apply. Applicants can then apply/bid for the property of their choice as long as they meet the qualifying criteria and are registered with the HOME OPTIONS Common Housing Register of the scheme council in which the property is situated.
- 1.7.3 The successful applicant will be selected from those who have bid for the property who meet the stated qualifying criteria. Selection will be based on the highest needs band, followed by the application date where there is more than one applicant from the same band.
- 1.7.4 Feedback will be provided through a range of methods on what kind of demand there was for vacant properties previously advertised. This will help applicants to make more informed choices including looking at the other housing options being promoted through the scheme

2.0 Application Procedure:

2.1 Who can apply?

2.1.1 To apply for a social housing property in Norwich an applicant must be registered with Norwich City Council's **HOME OPTIONS** Common Housing Register.

2.1.2 To apply for a social housing property in Broadland an applicant must be registered with Broadland District Council's **HOME OPTIONS** Common Housing Register.

2.1.3 To apply for a social housing property in South Norfolk an applicant must be registered with South Norfolk Council's **HOME OPTIONS** Common Housing Register.

2.1.4 The three HOME OPTIONS Common Housing Registers are open to anyone aged 16 or over, unless they are specifically ineligible (see section 2.2 Eligibility). However a tenancy will not usually be granted to a person who is under 18 unless:

- The applicant is found to be statutorily homeless

AND

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

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

2.1.6 Application forms can be filled in on the scheme website or using any of the public access terminals. **This is the fastest and easiest method of joining the HOME OPTIONS Common Housing Registers.**

2.1.7 Alternatively application packs are also available from the offices of all the scheme councils.

2.2 Eligibility:

Eligibility categories:

2.2.1 Anyone who is over 16 years of age can apply to the three HOME OPTIONS Common Housing registers if they are eligible to be re-

housed. However, this does not guarantee re-housing under the scheme. By law, there are defined groups of customers who cannot be re-housed through the scheme. There are also exceptions or restrictions to an application which may apply in certain cases.

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

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

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

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

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

2.2.6 Decisions and reviews

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

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

Who is eligible?

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

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

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

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

- Class A - a person who is recorded by the Secretary of State as a refugee within the definition in Article 1 of the Refugee Convention, and who has leave to enter or remain in the UK;
- Class B -
 - a person who has exceptional leave to enter or remain in the UK, granted outside the provisions of the immigration rules;
 - a person who is not subject to a consideration requiring them to maintain and accommodate themselves and any person dependent on them, without recourse to public funds;
- Class C - a person who is habitually resident in the CTA whose leave to enter or remain in the UK is not subject to any limitation or condition, **other** than the following groups:
 - a person who has been given leave to enter or remain in the UK upon an undertaking given by their sponsor;
 - a person whose sponsor is still alive;
 - a person who has been resident in the CTA for less than five years beginning on the date of entry or the date on which his sponsor gave the recommendation.
- Class D - a person who left the territory of Montserrat after 1st November 1995 because of the effect on that territory of a volcanic eruption.

Who is not eligible to be housed?

2.2.11 By law, the scheme councils are unable to accept onto the HOME OPTIONS Common Housing Registers anyone who is subject to

immigration control within the meaning of the *Asylum and Immigration Act 1996*, unless they fall within a class exempted from this restriction by Government regulations.

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

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

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

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

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

Habitual residence:

2.2.16 Customers deemed habitually resident include:

- a) a worker;
- b) a self employed person;
- c) a person who is an accession state worker requiring registration and who is treated as a worker for the purpose of the definition of “qualified person” in regulation 6(1) of the EEA Regulations pursuant to regulation 5 of the accession Regulations;
- d) Family members of a-c;
- e) A person with a right to reside permanently in the United Kingdom by virtue of regulation 15 (c) (d) or (e) of the EEA Regulations;

¹

- f) A person who left the territory of Montserrat after 1st November 1995 because of the effect on that territory of a volcanic eruption; and
- g) A person who is in the United Kingdom as a result of their deportation, expulsion or other removal by compulsion of law from another country to the United Kingdom.

Ineligibility due to unacceptable behaviour:

2.2.17 The scheme councils will deem an applicant ineligible for housing if the:

Applicant's previous behaviour would (if they were a secure tenant of the particular scheme council) entitle the particular scheme council to a possession order under Section 84 of the Housing Act 1985 on any ground mentioned in Part 1 of Schedule 2 to that Act (other than ground 8); or

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

Notifying an ineligible customer:

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

2.2.20 Applicants found to be ineligible for one of the HOME OPTIONS Common Housing Register have a right to ask for this decision to be reviewed by the particular scheme council (see section 5, Reviews of decisions)

2.3 Assessment of applications:

Legal background:

2.3.1 All applicants who are eligible to join one or more of the three HOME OPTIONS Common Housing Registers will be placed in the appropriate housing needs band, by the particular scheme council, based on an assessment of their household's needs. This is to ensure that the scheme councils allocate homes to those in the greatest assessed need and to ensure that they meet their legal obligations as set out in the Housing Act (1996) as amended by the Homelessness Act (2002).

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

- (a) people who are homeless (within the meaning of Part 7);
- (b) people who are owed a duty by any local housing authority under section 190(2), 193(2), or 195(2) of the 1996 Act (or under section 65(2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985, or who are occupying accommodation secured by an such authority under section 192(3);
- (c) people occupying unsanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions;
- (d) people who need to move on medical or welfare grounds; and
- (e) people who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or others).

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

2.4 The housing need bands:

2.4.1 The scheme councils will assess all applicants to their HOME OPTIONS Common Housing Registers, who are eligible, according to the particular level of housing need of each applicant. All applications will be placed, by the scheme councils HOME OPTIONS staff, into one of five bands:

EMERGENCY STATUS:	Urgent Priority
GOLD:	High Priority
SILVER:	Medium Priority
BRONZE:	Urgent/High/Medium/Priority but with no local connection
LOW NEED:	Low or No Priority

The criteria for being placed in each band is:

EMERGENCY STATUS:

2.4.2 Emergency Status will only be issued in certain circumstances where an applicant needs an urgent move to ensure their well-being or safety. The award of Emergency Status will be determined by the particular scheme council's HOME OPTIONS Team Leader or in more complex cases by the particular scheme council's Assessment Panel and significant evidence will be required. This status will only be valid for 6 weeks. (This can be extended by the particular scheme council's Team Leader or in more complex cases by the particular scheme council's Assessment Panel where the status has not been used because no suitable vacancy has arisen during that period/ or because it is clear that the applicant has not understood the system and been unable to

access suitable assistance due to their vulnerability.) If the applicant has still not successfully applied for a suitable property within that time period they will be offered the next available property suitable to their needs. If they then refuse that offer of the property the particular scheme council will view any duty as having been discharged. Circumstances where emergency status could be awarded include:

- For those under threat of immediate and serious violence as determined by the Police and/or the particular scheme council's HOME OPTIONS Team Leader or in more complex cases by the particular scheme council's Assessment Panel
- Those required to move as determined by the Police for witness protection reasons
- Applicants accepted as unintentionally homeless or threatened with homelessness and in priority need by the particular scheme council and currently residing in temporary accommodation or homeless at home.
- The award of an extremely urgent and serious medical assessment (as determined by the particular scheme council's HOME OPTIONS Team Leader or in more complex cases by the particular scheme council's Assessment Panel)
- Those applicants requiring urgent hospital discharge where their current accommodation is totally unsuitable for their needs.
- Those applicants required to leave their homes as a result of an emergency prohibition order served in relation to the premises under the Housing Act 2004 or as the result of action taken by the Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service
- Applicants with either a combination of high needs or a combination of needs within the household such as being awarded high medical/welfare by the particular scheme council's HOME OPTIONS Team Leader or in more complex cases by the particular scheme council's Assessment Panel combined with being awarded high priority by the Private Sector Housing Team of the particular scheme council.
- Other very extreme circumstances as determined by the particular scheme council's HOME OPTIONS Team Leader or in more complex cases by the particular scheme council's Assessment Panel.

GOLD BAND:

2.4.3 Homelessness:

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

2.4.4 **Medical**

High medical needs as determined by the particular scheme council's **HOME OPTIONS** Team Leader or in more complex cases by the particular scheme council's Assessment Panel

2.4.5 **Welfare:**

High welfare needs as determined by the particular scheme council's **HOME OPTIONS** Team Leader or in more complex cases by the particular scheme council's Assessment Panel. This would include people who need to move to the district where failure to meet that need would cause extreme hardship to themselves or others.

2.4.6 **Housing Conditions:**

A prohibition order or demolition order has been served, or is about to be served in relation to the applicant's dwelling by the Private Sector Housing Team of the particular scheme council. This indicates that the property contains one or more category 1 hazards that probably cannot be remedied. Examples include severe instability, extreme dilapidation (both very rare) and lack of natural light to a flat or bed sit (more common)

An improvement notice has been, or is about to be, served in relation to the applicant's dwelling by the Private Sector Housing Team of the particular scheme council and

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

2.4.7 **Overcrowding/shared facilities:**

Applicants lack two or more bedrooms,

Or

Applicants require two plus bedrooms, live in bed sit-type accommodation and share kitchen and bathroom facilities with non-family members.

2.4.8 **Under occupation:**

Tenants of scheme council or scheme landlord accommodation under occupying by two or more bedrooms and prepared to move in to

significantly smaller accommodation, or occupying a substantially adapted property that they no longer require.

2.4.9 Supported Housing/Hostels:

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

2.4.10 Violence/Harassment:

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

2.4.11 Multiple Needs:

Applicants with either a combination of medium needs or a combination of needs within the household such as being awarded medium medical/welfare by the particular scheme council's **HOME OPTIONS** Team Leader or in more complex cases by the particular scheme council's Assessment Panel combined with being awarded medium priority by the Private Sector Housing Team of the particular scheme council.

SILVER BAND:

2.4.12 Medical:

Significant medical needs as determined by the particular scheme council's **HOME OPTIONS** Team Leader or in more complex cases by the particular scheme council's Assessment Panel.

2.4.13 Welfare:

Significant welfare needs as determined by the particular scheme council's **HOME OPTIONS** Team Leader or in more complex cases by the particular scheme council's Assessment Panel.

2.4.14 Housing Conditions:

A hazard awareness notice has been served by the Private Sector Housing Team of the particular scheme council. In relation to a category 1 or 2 hazard at the applicant's dwelling and

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

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

2.4.15 Overcrowding/shared facilities:

Applicants lack one bedroom (this will include applicants with legally determined regular access children, 3 nights or more a week, who do not permanently live with them, and require an extra bedroom for their overnight stays)

Or

Applicants living in long term bed sit-type accommodation sharing kitchen **and** bathroom facilities with non-family members.

2.4.16 Under occupation:

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

2.4.17 Children in flats or maisonettes:

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

2.4.18 Multiple Needs:

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

BRONZE BAND:

2.4.18 Priority but no local connection:

Applicants with one of the assessed needs as detailed in emergency, gold or silver band but they do not have a local connection to the

particular scheme council area. Please see section 2.5 for how local connection will be assessed.

2.4.19 Homelessness:

Applicants who are homeless or threatened with homelessness who are assessed by the particular scheme council, as not to be in priority need

Or

Applicants who following a homelessness application have been deemed by the particular scheme council to be in priority need but intentionally homeless.

2.4.20 Reduced preference:

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

LOW NEED BAND:

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

2.4.22 Adequately housed:

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

2.4.23 Housing Condition:

A suspended prohibition order or improvement notice has been or will be served by the Private Sector Housing Team of the particular scheme council in relation to the applicant's dwelling but the criteria leading to it becoming active are not met by the applicant

A hazard awareness notice or improvement notice has been or will be served by the Private Sector Housing Team of the particular scheme council in relation to the applicant's dwelling but the specified remedies are low cost and straight-forward to achieve

2.4.24 Supported Housing/Hostels:

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

Or

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

2.4.25 Significant Financial Resources:

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

2.5 How the criteria for each band will be assessed by the scheme councils:

Assessment of local connection:

- 2.5.1 An applicant will be deemed by the particular scheme council as having a local connection under the following conditions:
- 2.5.2 Broadland District Council - If the applicant is resident in the Broadland District Council Boundary and has been living in Broadland for a minimum of 6 months immediately prior to the date of their application in Broadland (this includes people of no fixed abode)
- 2.5.3 South Norfolk Council - If the applicant is resident in the South Norfolk Council Boundary and has been living in South Norfolk for a minimum of 6 months immediately prior to the date of their application in South Norfolk (this includes people of no fixed abode)
- 2.5.4 Norwich City Council - If the applicant is resident in the Norwich City Council boundary and has been living in Norwich for a minimum of 2 years immediately prior to the date of their application in Norwich (this includes people of no fixed abode)
- 2.5.5 An applicant with no local connection but who due to their needs would otherwise be in emergency status, gold or silver band will have their preference downgraded by the particular scheme council to bronze band unless one of the following exceptions apply:
 - If the applicant needs to move to the particular scheme council where failure to meet that need would cause extreme hardship to themselves or others.
 - Homeless applicants (whereby the local connection criteria as laid down in the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the homelessness Act 2002 would apply)

Assessment of reduced preference:

- 2.5.6 In certain circumstances, applicants will be accepted onto one or more of the HOME OPTIONS Common Housing Registers, but their

application will be placed, by the particular scheme council, in bronze band under the criteria: Reduced Preference.

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

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

Reduced preference criteria:

2.5.8 A applicant will be given reduced preference if the particular scheme council is satisfied they:

- are a tenant of one of the partner landlords with current arrears
- are a former tenant of one of the partner landlords with arrears on the rent. Debts with other local authorities, registered social landlords and private landlords could also be taken into account. Although this may not necessarily result in reduced preference criteria if it can be demonstrated that the applicant has entered into and maintained effective arrangements for repaying this debt
- have (or members of their prospective household) committed acts causing or likely to cause a nuisance or annoyance to their neighbours or others in the locality of where they live or where they have previously live
- have failed to maintain a rented property in a proper and reasonable condition
- have deliberately damaged a property
- have committed acts of anti-social behaviour
- are under 18 (unless they are pregnant or have primary responsibility for a child)

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

Informing customers of their status:

2.5.10 Applicants who have reduced preference will be notified in writing by the particular scheme council. They have the right to a review of the decision. Applicants will be informed in writing, by the particular scheme council, of what action they should take for their application to be moved from bronze band into another band. Decisions will be reviewed each year.

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

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

Assessment of overcrowding:

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

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

Assessment of multiple/cumulative need:

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

Assessment of medical needs:

2.5.15 Priority will be awarded based on information supplied by the applicant and/or a specialist professional (medical practitioner/occupational therapist/private sector housing officer etc)

2.5.16 The medical assessment will be carried out, in most cases, by the particular scheme council's HOME OPTIONS Team Leader. They have been specifically trained to carry out this role. However, in complex, non-standard cases they may refer the case to the particular scheme council's HOME OPTIONS Assessment Panel. They in turn, where it is necessary, may request a report from a medical specialist or occupational therapist to help them make the assessment.

2.5.17 Each case will be assessed on its merits to determine whether medical priority should be awarded. The particular scheme councils team leader and/or assessment panel will look at whether the medical condition is serious and enduring and whether it is directly affected by the applicant's present housing and whether it would improve if rehoused.

Assessment of welfare needs:

2.5.18 The welfare assessment will be carried out, in most cases, by the particular scheme council's HOME OPTIONS Team Leader. They have been specifically trained to carry out this role. However, in complex, non-standard cases they may refer the case to the particular scheme council's HOME OPTIONS Assessment Panel.

2.5.19 Each case will be assessed on its merits to determine whether welfare priority should be awarded. The particular scheme councils team leader and/or assessment panel will look at whether the situation is serious and enduring and whether it is directly affected by the applicant's present housing and whether it would improve if rehoused. An example of where welfare priority would be awarded would be people who need to move to a particular district where failure to meet that need would cause extreme hardship to themselves or others.

Assessment of housing conditions

2.5.20 This would be carried out by the Private Sector Housing Team of the particular scheme council. Assessment would be carried out in line with the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System and priority awarded as set out in the bands above.

Assessment of homelessness:

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

Assessments made by the scheme council's HOME OPTIONS Team Leaders:

- 2.5.22 Please note that where this document states that an assessment can be made by the particular scheme council's HOME OPTIONS Team Leader this means them or their trained equivalent.

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

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

- 2.5.24 Applications from staff members will be dealt with by a relevant manager of the particular scheme council. The award of a housing need band (priority) under the scheme to staff members will need to be authorised by the particular scheme council's Director with the responsibility for housing.

2.6 Determination of application date:

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

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

2.7 Change in circumstances:

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

2.8 Revision of applications:

2.8.1 Every applicant on the three HOME OPTIONS Housing Registers is sent a revision form on the anniversary of their application to ensure that their circumstances are kept up to date. They are required to update, sign and return the form to confirm they wish to remain on the HOME OPTIONS Common Housing Register. The application will automatically be cancelled, by the particular scheme council, if not returned after a reminder has been sent.

2.9 Property size qualification:

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

Size of property	Type of property	Household size preferred/considered
Bedsit	Bedsit	Single
1 Bedroom accommodation	Flats/Houses	Single or couples
1 Bedroom accommodation	Bungalows	Single or couples often with medical/mobility needs
2 Bedroom accommodation	Ground Floor Flats	Couples often with medical/mobility needs or A couple/single parent with 1 child (under 10) or A couple/single parent with 2 children of the same gender or or single person with medical priority with a need for a resident/overnight carer.
2 Bedroom accommodation	Flats/maisonettes above ground floor	Single or couples or A couple/single parent with 1 child or 2 children of same gender (over 10)

		A parent with access to a child
2 Bedroom accommodation	Bungalows	<p>A couple/single parent with 1 child or</p> <p>A couple with medical /mobility need or</p> <p>A single person with medical need and requires resident/overnight carer.</p>
2 Bedroom accommodation	House/maisonette	A couple/single parent with 1 child or 2 children (of the same gender)
3 Bedroom accommodation	Houses/ground floor flats	A couple/single parent with 2 or more children
3 Bedroom accommodation	Flats above ground floor	A couple/single parent with 1 or more children over the age of 10
3 Bedroom accommodation	Bungalows	A couple/single parent with 2 or more children
3 Bedroom accommodation with two reception rooms	Houses/ground floor flats	A couple/single parent with 3 or more children
4 Bedroom accommodation	Houses	A couple/single parent with 4 or more children
4 Bedroom Accommodation	Bungalows	A couple/single parent with 3 or 4 children often with a mobility need.
5 Bedroom Accommodation	Houses	A couple/single parent with 4 or more children

2.10 Notification of applications:

2.10.1 Once an application has been assessed and entered on to one of three HOME OPTIONS Common Housing Registers, the applicant will receive notification, from the particular scheme council, confirming the following:

- The band(s) in which they have been placed.
- The size of property they qualify for
- A guide on how to use the HOME OPTIONS scheme

2.11 Cancellation of applications:

2.11.1 Applications will be cancelled by the scheme councils for one or more of the following reasons:

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

2.12 False information:

2.12.1 Any applicant who deliberately attempts to deceive or defraud the scheme councils will be dealt with very severely. If an applicant knowingly gives false information in order to secure a home to which they are not entitled it is likely that they will lose that home. It is also likely that they will be prosecuted and if found guilty could be liable to a fine and/or imprisonment.

3.0 Accessing the housing options:

3.1 Finding a home:

3.1.1 Once applicants are registered on to one of the three HOME OPTIONS Common Housing Registers they can start looking for a social housing property of their choice in that scheme council area. Applicants do not need to be registered on any of the three HOME OPTIONS housing registers to access some of the other housing options available through the scheme including private rented and private sale properties which will be provided by the scheme private organisations.

3.2 Advertising of vacant properties:

3.2.1 Social rented properties will be advertised on a weekly basis. Private rented properties, private sale properties, shared ownership properties and other housing options will be advertised at all times.

3.2.2 Social rented properties will be advertised in two main categories. These will be:

- For all applicants (this will account for 80% of available social rented properties)
- For existing (transfer) tenants of scheme council and scheme landlords only (this will account for 20% of available social rented properties)

3.2.3 Properties will be advertised in the following ways:

- In a newsletter
- On the website

- On Digital TV
- On the public access terminal

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

3.3 Promotion of other housing options:

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

- Help to stay in their current home (Renewal Grants/Loans etc)
- Rent Deposit Schemes
- Mutual exchanges
- Help to access the private sale properties
- Shared ownership

3.4 Property descriptions:

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

- The type of property (House, Flat etc)
- The tenure of the property (social rented housing, private rented, shared ownership, private sale etc)
- The number of bedrooms the property has
- The location of the property
- The local authority the applicant will need to be registered with
- The level of accessibility the property has for people with mobility problems/wheelchair users
- Any services provided to the property e.g wardens, caretaker etc.
- The heating type the property has
- Any age restrictions on the property (sheltered etc)
- Indication of the estimated demand for the property (high/medium/low)
- Whether pets are allowed
- Availability of outside space (garden etc)
- Availability of parking
- The rent of the property and the service charges (split weekly/monthly)
- Special information (location of bus routes/ other amenities etc)
- Property size qualification
- Whether the property is available to all applicants or transfer applicants only

- 3.4.2 Applicants must qualify for the size of property. Applicants will have been informed of the size of property they qualify for, by the particular scheme council, when they registered.

3.5 Bidding/application process:

- 3.5.1 Social rented properties- Provided the applicant meets the stated qualifying criteria and are registered on the HOME OPTIONS Common Housing Register in the area in which the property is situated they can bid for the property by the deadline given. Applicants can bid for a maximum of two social housing properties, each week, in any scheme council area they are registered. Applicants will only require their register number and date of birth to bid for properties through any of the bidding methods.
- 3.5.2 Other housing options- Each property/housing options will specify how an applicant can apply for it. There is no limit on the number of these properties/housing options an applicant can apply for.

3.6 Deadlines for bids:

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

3.7 Bidding/application methods:

- 3.7.1 Applicants can bid/apply in the following ways:

- By phone
- By text message
- On the website
- On Digital TV
- On a public access terminal

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

3.8 Non-qualifying bids:

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

3.9 Selection of the successful bids:

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

3.10 Making the offer:

- 3.10.1 The successful applicant will be contacted by the housing officer of the scheme council or scheme landlord whose property they have applied for to arrange for an accompanied viewing. They will then be offered the property. As part of this process they may request photographic identification from the applicant.
- 3.10.2 Applicants will usually be contacted within three working days of the shortlist for the property closing. If an applicant cannot be contacted following multiple attempts the next person on the shortlist will be contacted. It is, therefore, important all applicants ensure they are contactable or else they may lose out on a property they have applied for.
- 3.10.3 Applicants have up to two working days to decide whether to accept the offer of accommodation. If no response has been received after two days, the next person on the shortlist will be offered the property.
- 3.11.4 If an applicant refuses the offer, the property will be offered to the next on the shortlist, and so on until the property is let.
- 3.11.5 Scheme landlords reserve the right to carry out an assessment on applicants to ensure the particular property is appropriate for their needs before contacting them or making an offer. If following such an assessment the scheme landlords deem the property not to be suitable for the applicant the property would then be offered to the next applicant on the shortlist.
- 3.11.6 Offers of accommodation may be withdrawn if it is found that the information supplied by the applicant was incorrect or if they are deemed due to their behaviour to be unsuitable to be a tenant (e.g they have accrued rent arrears that were not previously known about).

3.11 Feedback:

- 3.11.1 On each advert, the scheme councils give feedback as to the results of the social rented properties that have previously been advertised.
- 3.11.2 The information provided for each property will be:

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

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

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

3.12 Properties excluded from the scheme:

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

3.12.2 However, the vast majority of vacant social housing properties in Greater Norwich will be let through the HOME OPTIONS Scheme.

3.13 Direct lets:

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

3.13.2 Illustrative examples of direct lets are as follows:

- where an allocation is required to ensure protection of the public, for example, following a decision made by a Multi-Agency Public Protection Panel meeting, or where a customer has been referred as part of the witness protection scheme;
- where a sensitive let is required for a particular property, because of issues such as drug dealing, violence, public protection, or ASB;
- where a customer's home is being repaired and they need to be moved from the property on a temporary or permanent basis.

3.13.3 A tenancy may also be allocated by the particular scheme council or scheme landlord, regardless of other priorities, where the applicant has enjoyed an established occupancy of the property, has a reasonable expectation of a property of that type and would be a suitable tenant

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

3.14 Sheltered housing

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

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

3.14.3 Scheme councils and scheme landlords may carry out a needs and risk assessment for customers who bid for sheltered housing properties, to ensure the services provided are appropriate to their needs. This will be done as part of the offer process.

4.0 Equal access:

4.1 Statement on equal access:

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

4.2 Advice and assistance:

- 4.2.1 The scheme councils will ensure that everybody in Greater 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. At the scheme council's three main offices staff will be available throughout office hours to provide advice and assistance on the full range of housing options available through the scheme. At a range of the other locations staff will be available at pre-advertised times of the week to provide that same level of detailed advice and assistance. The table included in the scheme user guide, which all scheme applicants receive, shows all the locations and times when advice and assistance is available.

4.3 Vulnerable groups:

- 4.3.1 Due to the nature of CBL, particularly the need for clients to be proactive in the process, the scheme councils realise it is essential that vulnerable and excluded people can access and participate effectively in the HOME OPTIONS scheme. The scheme councils will, therefore, ensure all relevant staff are well trained so they can assist vulnerable clients to access and use the scheme. Similarly, staff from all other related statutory and voluntary agencies will be well trained on the scheme. How to access this assistance will be on scheme literature etc.
- 4.3.2 All literature will be available in a large font and written in plain and unambiguous language. The HOME OPTIONS website and public access terminals are also compatible with screen readers and have browse aloud capability.
- 4.3.3 Each of the three scheme councils will also hold an 'assisted applicants list'. This is for applicants who due to their vulnerability require additional help with the scheme. This additional help could be, for example, helping customers bid for available homes or sending the property brochures directly to people who cannot access the information in any other way. The 'assisted applicants list' can be accessed by applicants or their support workers informing the particular scheme council. They will need to explain why they require this option e.g. if they are housebound etc. However, this service will only be available for the most vulnerable clients as determined by the particular scheme council.
- 4.3.4 To ensure vulnerable groups are not being disadvantaged under the scheme, the scheme councils have put in place a full monitoring system to ensure all groups are using the scheme successfully. This is particularly important for those in the highest bands where, if they are not bidding for properties, it will be flagged up by the system and the

HOME OPTIONS staff of the particular scheme council will then contact them to ascertain why and offer help where necessary.

5.0 Reviews of decisions:

5.1 Statutory reviews of decisions

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

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

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

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

5.2 Homelessness reviews

5.2.1 Homeless applicants have the right to request a review of certain decisions. This includes the decision to discharge duty through a reasonable offer of accommodation via the particular Common Housing Register for those accepted as statutorily homeless. Applicants are generally advised to accept the property and continue with their request for a review. If the review goes in their favour alternative accommodation will be provided as soon as possible, however, if the scheme council's decision remains the same no further accommodation will be provided in relation to their homeless application. The review request must be made within 21 days of

notification of a decision, although a late review request can be accepted under exceptional circumstances at the discretion of the authority. The scheme council to whom the homeless application was made will provide details of their review procedure.

5.3 Complaints procedure

- 5.3.1 If an applicant is dissatisfied with any aspect of the management of their application, other than where a review can be made, they should contact the HOME OPTIONS Partnership Manager.

5.4 The Local Government Ombudsman

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

The Local Government Ombudsman can be contacted at:

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

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

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

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

6.0 Monitoring/changes to the scheme

6.1 Scheme monitoring:

6.6.1 The scheme will be monitored directly by the **HOME OPTIONS** Partnership Manager. The Partnership Manager will regularly submit performance reports and, where necessary, recommendations for changes to the scheme to the **HOMEOPTIONS** Partnership Board. They will look at a range of issues including the following:

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

6.2 Changes to the scheme:

6.2.1 The three scheme councils reserve 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 Home Options Partnership Manager to the **HOMEOPTIONS** Partnership Board.