

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – HOMESearch HOUSING ALLOCATION SCHEME








Summary of Purpose and Recommendations:

To propose amendments to the Council’s Housing Allocations Scheme

Cost to Council: £ Nil

Within existing budget? Yes

Contribution to Corporate Plan (Minor/Moderate/Major/Neutral):

	+		-		+		-
	Moderate			Priorities			
	Moderate			Clean Streets and Public Space		Neutral	
		Neutral		Crime and Disorder	Minor		
	Moderate			Housing	Moderate		
		Neutral		Managing our Finances		Neutral	

Comments on Impacts on Corporate Objectives and Priorities:

Choice Based Lettings has proven to be an innovative approach to allocating affordable housing which has led to greater use of information and communication technology, improvements in the Council’s customer service and partnership working arrangements and, in the long term, should help to build sustainable communities. The changes to the policy will assist the Council in tackling anti-social behaviour and ensuring priority for keyworkers, where appropriate.



Organisation of excellence



Working with public and partners



Economic well being



Social well being



Environmental well being

Appendix One

New Forest Home Search Allocation Scheme (draft)

1. Introduction and Statutory Background

- 1.1 The Council is required to establish an allocation scheme for determining priorities between people who apply for housing and the procedure to be followed when an allocation of housing accommodation is made.
- 1.2 An allocation takes place when any person is selected to be a secure or introductory tenant of a local authority or nominated to be an assured or assured shorthold tenant of a registered social landlord. This includes transfers of housing accommodation which have been made on the basis of a person's application.
- 1.3 Allocation from the waiting list to vacancies of permanent Council and partner Housing Association properties must be in accordance with the scheme.
- 1.4 Allocations can only be made to qualifying persons. A person will normally qualify to be considered for an allocation unless he or she is:
 - (i) subject to immigration control unless they are otherwise included by regulations
 - (ii) a person who the Secretary of State defines as falling into a non-qualifying category.
 - (iii) a person who the Council decides has been guilty of serious unacceptable behaviour
- 1.5 In establishing priorities for allocating accommodation, the Council is obligated to give reasonable preference under the scheme to:
 - (i) those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness
 - (ii) those in insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise in unsatisfactory conditions
 - (iii) those who need to move on welfare grounds
 - (iv) those who need to move to a particular locality in the district, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship to themselves or others
- 1.6 For the purpose of defining which groups of people would fall into the reasonable preference groups, statutory guidance is provided, but there is considerable local discretion as to which groups should be included.

- 1.7 Additional preference can be awarded to qualifying applicants who are in a reasonable preference group if their needs are serious or urgent.
- 1.8 The scheme must include a statement of the policy on offering applicants a choice of housing accommodation.

2. Aims of the Homesearch Allocation Scheme

- 2.1 The main aims of the scheme are as follows:
 - (i) To meet statutory requirements
 - (ii) To meet housing need
 - (iii) To give applicants as much choice as possible
 - (iv) To help build sustainable communities
 - (v) To make the best use of available housing resources
 - (vi) To allocate scarce housing resources in as fair a way as possible
 - (vii) To allocate housing in as open and transparent a manner as possible

3. The Allocation Scheme In Outline

Eligibility And Qualification

- 3.1 Applicants for housing or for transfers who are eligible for the list and are qualifying persons will be accepted onto the New Forest Home Search waiting list.

Getting Onto the Waiting List

- 3.2 Applicants and tenants wanting to be rehoused will complete a housing application form, which will give basic details of their housing circumstances. At this stage, a decision will be taken whether or not to place the applicant on the list and the applicant or tenant will be notified of how their application has been assessed under the scheme.

Determining the Priorities Between Qualifying People

- 3.3 Applicants and tenants who are on the list will be placed into one of three different categories, dependant upon the degree of preference. Applicants and tenants within the same category or group within a category will be prioritised by date order according to their application date. Special rules apply when prioritising applicants who want to live in a rural parish.

3.4 Once the person has been accepted onto the Register, the following decisions will be taken based on the information provided by the tenant or applicant:

- i) Which category the applicant should be placed in
- ii) Whether or not to seek further information from the applicant so that the case can be presented to the Social and Medical Rehousing Panel which will recommend which category the applicant should be placed in. Advice may also be sought from other relevant agencies

3.5 Once a decision has been reached on the appropriate category of the applicant or tenant, their details will be input onto the lettings IT system.

Placing Applications Into The Relevant Categories

3.6 There are three categories of housing need for tenants and applicants as set out below (the High Priority category is subdivided into two groups):

- i) (a) High Priority (with an urgent need to move)
(b) High Priority (without an urgent need to move)
- ii) Priority
- iii) No Priority

3.7 Applicants and tenants who show one or more indicator of being in a reasonable preference group as outlined below will normally be allocated into the **Priority** category.

3.8 Applicants and tenants will only be allocated into the **High Priority** category if they fall into one or more reasonable preference groups and there are factors which require that they be given additional preference.

Categories of Reasonable Preference

- 3.9 Applicants who fall into any one of the following categories will have a reasonable preference for rehousing
- i) The applicant is homeless under the meaning of Part VII of the Housing Act 1996
 - ii) The applicant's home is in serious disrepair
 - iii) The applicant is living in temporary or insecure accommodation
 - iv) The applicant's home is lacking essential facilities
 - v) The applicant needs to move on medical or welfare grounds
 - vi) The applicant is sharing essential facilities with other households.
 - vii) The applicant wishes to return to a designated parish where they have a local connection
 - viii) The applicant's household is split or separated because there is no suitable accommodation they can occupy together
 - ix) The applicant is eligible for and wishes to move into sheltered accommodation
 - x) The applicant has been referred for rehousing by the Agricultural Dwelling Housing Advisory Committee
 - xi) The applicant has been designated by the Council as a key worker and is unable to secure alternative settled housing
 - xii) The applicant's household is overcrowding their home
 - xiii) The applicant has a need to move to a particular locality within the district and failure to meet that need would cause hardship to themselves or others (for example, where an elderly person needs to move to get support from relatives.)

3.10 New Forest District Council tenants or tenants of partner RSL's who live within the district will have a reasonable preference for rehousing if they fall into one or more of the groups above and/or one or more of the additional groups below.

- i) The tenant's household is under-occupying their home
- ii) The tenant has dependant children and is living in a flat
- iii) The tenant is living in an isolated area and wishes to live in a less isolated area

Letting Vacant Properties

3.11 The process which will be followed in letting vacant properties, is as follows:

- i) The property is labelled
- ii) The property is advertised
- iii) Interested applicants and tenants respond to the advert
- iv) Applications are sorted and a successful applicant is identified
- v) The applicant's details are verified
- vi) The property is offered
- vii) Details of the letting are announced

4. The Allocation Scheme In Detail

Eligibility For Inclusion On The Waiting List

- 4.1 Applicants for housing will be accepted onto the New Forest Housing Waiting list if they are aged 16 years or over and are a qualifying person.

Qualifying Persons

- 4.2 Applicants and tenants will be qualifying persons unless they fall into any of the following categories:
- i) Anyone who is subject to immigration control unless they are otherwise included by regulations
 - ii) Anyone who the Secretary of State defines as falling into a non-qualifying category.
 - iii) Anyone who the Council decides has been guilty of serious unacceptable behaviour
- 4.3 Applicants, tenants or their household members who have been guilty of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable to be tenants of the Council or partner landlords, and who in the circumstances at the time of their application are considered to be unsuitable to be tenants because of their unacceptable behaviour will not be qualifying persons.
- 4.4 Unacceptable behaviour is defined as behaviour which, if the person was either a secure tenant or a member of their household, would entitle a landlord to possession under grounds 1 to 7 of Schedule 2 of the Housing Act 1985 (see Appendix One). The Council will need to be satisfied in each individual case that the behaviour has been serious enough for a court to have granted a possession order if the applicant had been a tenant of the Council and that, at the time of application, the applicant is still unsuitable to be a tenant.

Determining the Priorities Between Qualifying Persons

4.5 Qualifying people will be placed into one of the following categories of housing need

- i) (a) High Priority (with an urgent need to move)
(b) High Priority (without an urgent need to move)
- ii) Priority
- iii) No Priority

4.6 Applicants and tenants who show one or more indicator of being in a reasonable preference group as detailed below will normally be placed into the **Priority** category.

Applicants and tenants will be placed in the **High Priority** category if they have one or more indicators of reasonable preference *and* one or more of the following factors applies:

- i) they have been recommended for additional priority by the Social and Medical Rehousing Panel
- ii) there is an urgent recommendation from the Agricultural Dwelling Housing Committee
- iii) the Council identifies that there is an urgent need for a keyworker to be rehoused to ensure the availability of an essential public service for the New Forest community
- iv) a tenant of a Council or partner RSL property in the district has died leaving a successor tenant or applicant underoccupying a property.

4.7 An applicant in the High Priority category will be further classified into those that have an urgent (ie immediate) need to move, where there may be serious or very significant consequences if an applicant is not given overriding priority, and those that have a high priority but do not need to move immediately as their situation does not require immediate rehousing.

4.8 Applicants and tenants who do not show any element of being in a reasonable preference group but who wish to move will be placed into the **No Priority** category. Applicants who qualify and have a reasonable preference may also be placed into this category if they have the resources to secure their own accommodation in the private sector or they have been guilty of serious unacceptable behaviour.

- 4.9 Applicants and tenants are prioritised according to the category they are placed in, with applicants or tenants in the High Priority category with an urgent need to move taking priority over those in the High Priority category without an urgent need to move and so forth. Where applicants or tenants are in the same category or group within a category they will be prioritised by date order according to their application date. Special rules apply when prioritising applicants who want to live in a rural parish (see below, page 10.)

Indicators Of Reasonable Preference

Housing and Transfer Applicants

- 4.10 i) Homelessness

Homeless applicants within the meaning of Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 will be in a reasonable preference group

- ii) Disrepair

Where an applicant's home is in disrepair and their housing conditions can best be resolved through re-housing, then the applicant will normally be in a reasonable preference group.

- iii) Temporary or insecure accommodation

Households living in non-secure accommodation will normally be in a reasonable preference group. Examples of non-secure accommodation arrangements are as follows:

- a) Assured shorthold tenancies
- b) Tenants/ licencees of hostels, refuges, b&b's etc.
- c) Separate households sharing with relatives or friends
- d) Tied accommodation where the applicant is close to retirement age
- e) Applicants with no fixed abode
- f) Occupants living in supported accommodation where the occupancy is not on a permanent basis
- g) Applicants who are not entitled to succeed to a tenancy and are living in use and occupation. Additional priority may be granted if the applicant is residing in a Council or Partner Landlord property within the district.

iv) Lack of Essential Facilities

Where the home is lacking essential facilities and housing conditions can best be improved through re-housing then households will normally be in a reasonable preference group. Essential facilities are defined as follows:

- a) Cooking facilities
- b) Bath or Shower
- c) Internal WC
- d) Piped water supply
- e) Hot water supply
- f) Electricity supply

v) Medical or Welfare Grounds

Where an applicant or household member has a significant medical or welfare problem which is caused or aggravated by the home circumstances and where this condition can best be alleviated or resolved by re-housing, the applicant will normally be in a reasonable preference group.

Where the effect of this medical or welfare problem may be to cause significant difficulties with housing circumstances and / or severe hardship to the applicant, or where the circumstances are such that the applicant falls into a number of reasonable preference groups and is in significant housing difficulties or suffering from severe hardship then the applicant may be awarded additional preference.

Advice on cases applying under this section will be given by the Social and Medical Rehousing Panel. However, cases may not be referred to the Panel if it is clear that the applicant would not have a reasonable or additional preference. Similarly, if a particular case has been considered previously by the Panel and there has not been a significant change in circumstance then the case may not be referred to the panel for further consideration.

vi) Shared facilities

Where an applicant is sharing essential facilities with other households, they will normally be in a reasonable preference group. Essential facilities are defined under this section as follows:

- a) Bathroom/shower
- b) WC
- c) Kitchen
- d) Living room

vii) Local Connection with Rural Parish

Where the applicant has a local connection with a rural parish, is not resident in that parish and wishes to return, they will normally be in a reasonable preference group.

The strength of an applicant's connection with a parish will be defined according to the following bands:

Band A Persons who live or have their workbase in the parish and have done so for longer than 10 years, or who have lived in the parish for longer than 10 years previously, or a designated keyworker performing an essential service for the village community where there is an established need for an applicant to be rehoused to maintain the service.

Band B Persons who live or have their workbase in the parish and have done so for longer than 5 years, or who have lived in the parish for longer than 5 years within the last 15 years, or whose parents, siblings or adult children live in the parish and have done so for 10 years or longer.

Band C Persons who live or have their workbase in the parish and have done so for longer than 2 years, or who have lived in the parish for longer than 2 years within the last 15 years, or whose parents, siblings or adult children live in the parish and have done so for 5 years or longer.

Applicants who do not fall into any of these bands will not have a local connection. Applicants placed by the Council in temporary accommodation in local connection parishes will not accrue a connection because of that placement. In these circumstances, the residence is not of choice.

viii) Household Separation

Where a household wishes to live together, has done so previously and there is no suitable accommodation for them to occupy together now, they will normally be in a reasonable preference group.

ix) Sheltered Accommodation

Where an elderly or disabled person is eligible for sheltered accommodation and wishes to move into sheltered accommodation they will normally be in a reasonable preference group.

x) ADHAC

Anyone who the Agricultural Dwelling Housing Advisory Committee recommends for re-housing will normally be in a reasonable preference group or be given additional preference if recommended by the Committee.

xi) Key Workers

Applicants who fall into a group designated by the Council as key workers and who are otherwise unable to secure alternative settled housing will normally be in a reasonable preference group. Where the employer and the Council identify and agree that there is an urgent need for a keyworker to be rehoused to ensure the availability of an essential public service for the New Forest community, then the keyworker may be awarded additional priority.

xii) Overcrowding

Households who overcrowd their accommodation will normally be in a reasonable preference group. For the purposes of defining overcrowding the following factors apply:

- a) Only one room will be classified as a living room, all others (except bathrooms and kitchens) as bedrooms provided they are suitable for sleeping in.
- b) Rooms less than 50 square feet are not suitable for sleeping accommodation.
- c) Depending on the size of the room, one bedroom may be suitable for a single person, a couple, or one or two children of the same sex and same generation.

xiii) Need For a Move to a Particular Locality

Where applicants have a need to move to a particular locality within the district and failure to meet that need would cause hardship to themselves or others then they will normally be in a reasonable preference group. Advice on applications under this

section may be given by the Social and Medical Rehousing Panel if appropriate.

Transfer Applicants Only

4.11 Applications under the following grounds apply only to transfer requests from tenants of New Forest District Council or tenants of partner landlords who live within the district.

i) Underoccupation

Tenants with one or more bedrooms than they require will be in a reasonable preference group. Where a tenant is a successor tenant who is under-occupying a property, they may be awarded additional priority.

ii) Living in a Flat

Tenants with dependent and resident children under the age of 16 living in a flat will be in a reasonable preference group.

iii) Isolated Accommodation

Tenants living in a local connection area or in an isolated area and who wish to move to a less isolated area will be in a reasonable preference group

Exceptions To Indications Of Reasonable Preference

4.12 In certain circumstances, applicants or tenants may have an indication of being in a reasonable preference group and would normally be placed in the Priority or High Priority category. However, where their individual circumstances make it clear that they have the ability to resolve their own housing situation in the private sector or that they are guilty of serious unacceptable behaviour their application may be given a lower priority or no priority at all.

4.13 Most commonly this will be where applicants or tenants have the income and/or assets to purchase a property to put right any problems there are with their current home. Cases will need to be dealt with on their own merits with regard to the individual circumstances of the applicant or tenant and conditions in the housing market.

4.14 Where it is clear that an applicant or tenant can resolve their own housing problem they will be allowed onto the waiting list but will be placed into the No Priority category even if they would otherwise have a reasonable preference for rehousing. Where they would otherwise have an additional preference and be in the High Priority category, then they will be placed in the Priority category.

- 4.15 Where an applicant or tenant is guilty of serious unacceptable behaviour and they have not been declared to be a non-qualifying person, their application will be placed in to the No Priority category even if they would otherwise have a reasonable or additional preference for housing.

The Letting Process

- 4.16 All vacancies will be let under the following process unless there is a specific reason to exclude them.

Labelling of Properties

- 4.17 The labelling of vacancies is an essential part of the lettings process as legislation allows the Council to set parameters on which type of households can apply for vacancies and whether any particular types of households will be given preference over others when being considered for individual vacancies (S167 (2E)(b) Housing Act 1996).
- 4.18 When labelling properties, there should be a balance between the need to make the best use of stock, the requirement to house those in the greatest need and the aim of giving applicants as much choice as possible to help create sustainable communities. Labelling should generally be as inclusive as possible to maximise choice whilst allowing preference to be given to certain household types to make the best use of stock.
- 4.19 As part of the labelling process, full details of each vacancy will be gathered including, for example, street location, rent, landlord, property dimensions etc. to assist in labelling the property. At a minimum, the labelling will set an appropriate occupancy level for vacancies and the criteria below will normally apply.

<u>Type of Vacancy</u>	<u>Suitable For</u>
Sheltered studio flat	Single elderly or single disabled person who has need of and is suitable for sheltered housing
Sheltered 1 bedroom	Elderly single person or couple or disabled single person or couple with need of and suitability for sheltered housing
Sheltered 2 bedroom	Elderly or disabled couple preferably with a 2 bedroom need and with need of and suitability for sheltered housing

1 bedroom flat	Single or couple
2 bedroom flat/maisonette	Household with 2 bedroom need
1 bedroom bungalow	Elderly or disabled single or couple
2 bedroom bungalow	Elderly or disabled couple preferably with a 2 bedroom need, or single elderly or disabled or general 2 bedroom need
3 Bedroom bungalow	Disabled household with 3 bedroom requirement, disabled household with 2 bedroom requirement or general 3 bedroom need
1 Bedroom house	Single or couple
2 Bedroom House	Household with 2 bedroom need
3 bedroom house	Household with 3 bedroom need
3 bedroom parlour house	Household with 4 bedroom need, or household with 3 bedroom need
4 bedroom house	Household with 4 bedroom need, or household with 3 bedroom need
4 bedroom parlour house	Household with 5 bedroom need, or household with 4 bedroom need
5 bedroom house	Household with 5 bedroom need

In all cases, the size of bedrooms may dictate the number of people in a household who can apply to be allocated a property.

Special Labelling of Properties

- 4.20 In addition to the general labelling criteria, set out in the occupancy levels above, other circumstances may apply which require particular labelling of properties or estates. The examples below are for illustrative purposes and are not exhaustive. Other factors may arise which could affect the labelling of properties.
- 4.21 In most circumstances, properties will normally be labelled so that preference is given to applicants with a connection with the New Forest district.

- 4.22 Where the Council is able to create vacancies within the affordable stock in the district which could increase the number of available homes, then properties may be labelled so that preference is given to transfer applicants.
- 4.23 Where a property is adapted for disabled use or where it has been provided for a specific purpose, such as supported accommodation, it will be labelled to give preference to the appropriate client group.
- 4.24 If there is a Section 106 agreement for a scheme, vacancies in that scheme will be labelled according to the 106 criteria. Similarly, if a scheme has been developed for a specific client group then the labelling will reflect that.
- 4.25 Where the vacancy is in a local connection area, the labelling will normally require a local connection and that the applicant must be in a reasonable preference group.
- 4.26 If there is an established need for designated keyworkers to be rehoused to ensure the availability of an essential public service within the district and the Council agrees that the keyworker issue takes priority over other housing issues, then vacancies can be labelled so that preference is given to keyworkers who would be able to provide the service
- 4.27 If there are no eligible applicants for a vacancy, then a vacancy may be labelled so as to increase the number of people who will be eligible. This could include, for example, being more flexible about bedroom requirements
- 4.28 If it is known that there are a large number of people with urgent or specific need for a vacancy, the labelling of the property may reflect that.

Lettings Plans

- 4.29 Where there are issues such as shortage of keyworkers, difficult-to-let schemes or estates, problems with nuisance, crime and disorder, population density, sustainability or social exclusion and it is believed that lettings may have an impact, an individual lettings plan for a specific estate or scheme may be appropriate. The lettings plan will determine special labelling of vacancies over a defined scheme or estate and for a specific period of time.
- 4.30 If a lettings plan is to be considered, regard must be had to the level of housing need and the possible impact on specific client groups such as the homeless, vulnerable people or ethnic minorities.

Advertising of Properties

- 4.31 All properties, unless excluded, will be advertised widely to provide home seekers with the best possible chance of exercising their ability to exercise choice. The advert will include the full description and labelling of the property. Where a property is for a specific client group who may need support in seeking accommodation, contact will be made with the client or client's carer to ensure they are able to apply for vacancies.

Response to advert

- 4.32 Interested applicants will respond to the adverts via e-mail or coupon, within the prescribed time limit.

Supporting Vulnerable Home Seekers

- 4.33 Some vulnerable applicants will need assistance in responding to advertised vacancies. The Housing needs Team will seek to identify vulnerable home seekers at application stage and help them to manage their application for housing by identifying possible vacancies, assisting with completing the coupon, making referrals to other agencies as appropriate and considering other housing options.

Managing Choice for Homeless Applicants

- 4.34 To ensure that there is a turnover in the supply of temporary accommodation, applicants who have been accepted as homeless will have their applications managed by the Housing Needs Team.
- 4.35 Homeless applicants will be obliged to go onto the Housing Register to ensure that they can be considered for settled housing.
- 4.36 Homeless applicants will then have the same degree of choice as other applicants but their level and choice of applications will be monitored. If they are not applying for suitable properties for which they would have a reasonable chance of success then they will be contacted to encourage them to apply. If they continue to exhibit a low level of application for suitable properties then they will be advised that a coupon will be completed and submitted on their behalf for suitable vacancies.

Sorting Applications

- 4.37 As soon as the time limit for applications has expired, the responses from homeseekers will be sorted. Those applicants who do not meet the advertised labelling criteria will be excluded. Those that meet the criteria will be prioritised for the vacancy in the following order:
- 1/ Applicants with a High Priority and an urgent need to move, in date order by waiting list application date.
 - 2/ Applicants with a High Priority but without an urgent need to move, in date order by waiting list application date.
 - 3/ Applicants in Priority, in date order by waiting list application date.
 - 4/ Applicants with No Priority status, in date order, by waiting list application date.
- 4.38 Where the vacancy is in a rural parish, prioritising for the vacancy will take place in the following order:
- 1/ Applicants or tenants in local connection Band A with a High Priority and an urgent need to move, then in waiting list application date order if more than one applicant is in the urgent group of the High Priority category.
 - 2/ Applicants or tenants in local connection Band A with a High Priority but without an urgent need to move, then in waiting list application date order if more than one applicant is in the non-urgent group of the High Priority category.
 - 3/ Applicants or tenants in local connection Band A with Priority status, then in waiting list application date order if more than one applicant is in the Priority category.
 - 4/ Applicants or tenants in local connection Band B with a High Priority and an urgent need to move, then in waiting list application date order if more than one applicant is in the urgent group of the High Priority category.
 - 5/ Applicants or tenants in local connection Band B with a High Priority but without an urgent need to move, then in waiting list application date order if more than one applicant is in the non-urgent group of the High Priority category.
 - 6/ Applicants or tenants in local connection Band B with Priority status, then in waiting list application date order if more than one applicant is in the Priority category.

- 7/ Applicants or tenants in local connection Band C with a High Priority and an urgent need to move, then in waiting list application date order if more than one applicant is in the urgent group of the High Priority category.
- 8/ Applicants or tenants in local connection Band C with a High Priority but without an urgent need to move, then in waiting list application date order if more than one applicant is in the non-urgent group of the High Priority category.
- 9/ Applicants or tenants in local connection Band C with Priority status, then in waiting list application date order if more than one applicant is in the Priority category.
- 10/ Applicants or tenants in local connection Band A in the No Priority category in waiting list application date order.
- 11/ Applicants or tenants in local connection Band B in the No Priority category in waiting list application date order.
- 12/ Applicants or tenants in local connection Band C in the No Priority category in waiting list application date order.
- 13/ Other possible applicant groups (see 4.50)

Verification of Details

- 4.39 Before any offer of accommodation is made, the applicant or tenant who is first in line for the vacancy will be contacted for verification of all relevant information on their housing application. This will include, for example, family details, housing circumstances etc. If the tenant or former tenant of a Council or RSL is found to be in rent arrears or to owe former tenant rent arrears, repair costs, damage deposit or rent in advance costs, or if an applicant owes damage deposit or rent in advance costs, then the tenant or applicant will not normally be offered rehousing unless a suitable arrangement is made to clear the debt or where serious hardship would result.
- 4.40 For sheltered housing vacancies, a meeting with the Sheltered Housing Manager will be arranged to ensure that the applicant is suitable for sheltered accommodation.
- 4.41 For all vacancies in rural parishes, the local ward member will be consulted prior to allocation to check on the strength of the local connection.

- 4.42 If it is not possible to obtain verification of the application within a reasonable time period, the applicant will be overlooked and the home-seeker next in line will be contacted.

The Tenancy is Offered

- 4.43 The landlord makes an offer of the vacancy to the successful applicant.

Details of the Letting Are Announced

- 4.44 Details of the letting will be published alongside the next advert for vacancies. Whilst the successful applicant's name will not be published, their application category and the length of time waiting will be announced. Feedback on lettings is essential to ensure that customers have enough information to exercise choice and to fulfill the statutory requirement to advise applicants on whether they are likely to be rehoused.

Exceptions To The Letting Process

- 4.45 Whilst the vast majority of lettings will be managed through the process outlined above, there will be some circumstances when it will be necessary to exclude vacancies from the process.

- 4.46 Examples of lettings which may be excluded are as follows:

- a) Management Transfers
- b) Decants
- c) Vacancy being let as temporary accommodation for homeless households
- d) Accommodation for New Forest District Council wardens who are retiring and who have an offer of re-housing as part of their employment terms and conditions.
- e) Where community safety may be an issue, for example, re-housing under the Multi Agency Protection Panel Arrangements or the Witness Protection Scheme.
- f) Where supported housing is being allocated
- g) Where a homeless applicant is occupying a Council tenancy on a non-secure basis and they have reached a point in time when they are likely to be rehoused, would be normally eligible for the type of property they occupy if it was to become vacant and wish to remain in the property.

- 4.47 To ensure that the letting system is open and transparent, vacancies excluded from the process should be kept to a minimum.

Administration

Responsibility for Decisions Made Under the Scheme

- 4.48 The following decisions will be the responsibility of named positions within New Forest District Council or its partner landlords:

<u>Decision</u>	<u>Responsible Positions</u>
Eligibility of applicants	Lettings Officer (LO)
Qualifying Persons	Housing Needs Manager (HNM)/ Assistant HNM
Category of applicants and tenants	Housing Assistant (HA), LO with advice from Social/ Medical Panel if appropriate
Labelling of properties	LO / LO with RSL Officer
Whether to refer case to Social/Medical Panel	LO / HA
Local Connection Band	HA / LO
Designation of keyworkers and of established need for keyworkers to be awarded priority or additional local connection status or to be rehoused to maintain a public service	Assistant Director of Housing in consultation with Portfolio Holder for Housing and Housing Development Manager
Reducing the category of applicants or tenants	HNM / AHNM or LO
Lettings Plans	Assistant Director of Housing
Sorting and selecting successful applications	LO or HA
Non verification	HA, LO or RSL Officer

Properties excluded from letting process LO or HNM,
AHNM or RSL Officer

Deferrals HNM or AHNM

Reviews (Appeals) HNM or AHNM

Areas of Choice

- 4.49 For administration and information purposes, home-seekers will be asked to stipulate which areas they would like to be housed in. The following areas can be indicated freely by any home-seeker:

Ashley
Blackfield and Langley
Calmore
Calshot
Dibden and Dibden Purlieu
Eling
Fawley
Fordingbridge
Holbury and Hardley
Hythe
Lymington
Marchwood
New Milton
Pennington
Ringwood
Totton
Walkford

The following areas are designated local connection areas for which only applicants with a local connection will normally be considered.

Ashurst/Colbury
Beaulieu
Boldre/Pilley/Norley Wood
Bransgore
Breamore
Brockenhurst
Brook/ Bramshaw
Burley
Copythorne/ Bartley
Damerham
Denny Lodge
East Boldre/ East End
Ellingham/ Harbridge/ Ibsley
Exbury/ Lepe
Godshill

Hale
Hordle
Hyde
Lyndhurst
Martin
Milford
Minstead
Netley Marsh/ Woodlands
Rockbourne
Sandleheath
Sopley
Sway
Whitsbury
Woodgreen

- 4.50 If a vacancy cannot be filled because there are no eligible homeseekers with a local connection for one of these parish areas, the property may be re-labelled to broaden the categories of people that may be eligible (for example, by under or over-occupying a property.) If the vacancy still cannot be filled, then applicants with a connection with adjacent parishes will be considered and then applicants from the wider New Forest district.

Suspensions From the Register

- 4.51 Applicants or tenants who have deliberately worsened their circumstances to obtain advantage on the Register may have their applications suspended for one year.
- 4.52 Applicants or tenants who refuse an offer of a property may have their applications deferred for a period of one year.

Rolling Review

- 4.53 A rolling review of housing applications will take place so that the Register is kept up to date. Each case will be reviewed at least every 12 months. If the applicant does not respond to the review process, their application will be removed from the waiting list. Any future applications will commence with a new application date unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Right of Review

- 4.54 Where the Council decides that an applicant is ineligible or will have a reduced level of preference due to unacceptable behaviour, the applicant will be notified in writing of the decision, the reasons for the decision and of their right to a review of the decision.

- 4.55 The review process will be the same as the statutory process used for reviewing homelessness cases and/or will be structured to follow guidance from the Secretary of State.

Advice, Information and Confidentiality

- 4.56 Applicants and tenants have the right to information on any decisions made about the facts of their case which will be taken into account in considering whether to allocate accommodation, information on how their application has been processed and information on the likelihood of being rehoused.
- 4.57 Advice and information about the right to make an application and assistance for those who need it will be provided free of charge by the Council as required by the legislation.
- 4.58 The fact that an applicant or tenant has applied for rehousing will not be disclosed to any other member of the public without their consent being given.
- 4.59 Information recorded on the lettings computer system and on an applicant's or tenant's file will be shared with partner landlords as necessary. Consent from the applicant for information sharing with partner landlords and other partner agencies will be sought in all cases.

Isolated Areas

- 4.60 Isolated areas within the New Forest will normally include all of the local connection areas above and Calshot. However, other areas may be designated as isolated depending on the individual needs of the applicant.

Composition of Social and Medical Rehousing Panel

- 4.61 The panel will meet on at least a fortnightly basis. The panel will be quorate with three or more members present.
- 4.62 The panel will consist of:

A Lettings Officer
A Homelessness and Housing Advice Officer
A Council Estate Management Officer
A representative from each partner RSL
A representative from Social Services
A representative from the Locality Mental Health Teams
An Occupational Therapist

Fair Housing Policy

- 4.63 The Council and its partner landlords are committed to providing equality of opportunity to all individuals who apply for rehousing. Monitoring of applications and lettings will take place to ensure that everyone is being treated fairly.

Definition of Local Connection with New Forest District

- 4.64 The following criteria will establish a local connection:
- i) Residence of applicant in the New Forest district for the 12 months immediately prior to application or for 10 years or more in the past.
 - ii) Workbase of applicant in the District for 5 years or more.
 - iii) Designated key worker, working in the District.

Other definitions

- 4.65 References to ‘applicants’ and ‘tenants’ throughout the policy also refer to members of the household.
- 4.66 Throughout the policy, ‘tenants’ means tenants of New Forest District Council or tenants of partner RSL’s where they live within the district unless otherwise specified.
- 4.67 A ‘workbase’ is defined as the main office or business establishment at which a person is based or from where their work is managed.
- 4.68 The date of application will normally be the date at which the applicant joined the list. However, if the application has been re-assessed into a higher category, then the application date will be changed to the date on which they were placed in the higher category. Should an applicant change address, the application date will remain the same unless there has been a significant change in their housing situation in which case the date will change to the date the applicant moved to the alternative address.
- 4.69 With regard to definition of bedroom needs, it will normally be assumed that a couple require one bedroom unless there is a need (agreed by the Social and Medical Rehousing Panel) for separate rooms. Two children of the same sex and same generation will normally be expected to share a bedroom (provided it is of appropriate size) unless there is a need for separate rooms agreed by the Panel.

Applications for a property when more than one applicant has identical preference

- 4.70 Where two or more eligible applicants apply for a property, are within the same preference category and have the same date on the waiting list, the Council will consider which household has the best 'fit' for the property with regard to household size. If a decision still cannot be made, then the length of residential connection with the district shall be considered, with the household with the longest residential connection getting priority.

False Statements

- 4.71 If an applicant or tenant knowingly or recklessly makes a statement which is false in a material particular, or knowingly withholds information which the Council has reasonably required, an offence is committed. In all such cases, the Council will consider the appropriate action which should be taken, including prosecution, eviction, removing the qualifying person status and reducing the level of priority on the list.

Allocations of Low Cost Home Ownership Properties

- 4.72 To qualify for Low Cost Home Ownership (LCHO), applicants need to be existing Partner Housing Association or NFDC tenants or applicants for housing and be registered on the Home Search waiting list and be unable to purchase a house outright. All nominations will be made by NFDC.
- 4.73 Priority is given to tenants as this will mean another family can be housed if their property is vacated. Applicants are then prioritised in order of the criteria below.
- i) Transfer applicant in a High Priority category
 - ii) Transfer applicant in the Priority category
 - iii) Applicant in a High Priority category who has been accepted under the homelessness legislation
 - iv) Applicant in the Priority category who has been accepted under the homelessness legislation
 - v) Applicant in a High Priority category
 - vi) Applicant in the Priority category
 - VII) Applicant in the No Priority category.

- 4.74 When an allocation of money is available for LCHO, a new scheme is developed for LCHO or a re-sale property becomes available, an advertisement will be placed through the Homesearch scheme. Once vouchers are received from interested applicants, they will be prioritised as set out above. Those at the top of the list will then be contacted by telephone or letter to advise that they may be able to go ahead with LCHO. This will depend on their circumstances, i.e. if they have sufficient household income to obtain the necessary mortgage, etc and verification.
- 4.75 If a successful applicant is able to be put forward for LCHO, their details are passed on to the Housing Association (usually Swaythling Housing Society) who will then proceed with their application.
- 4.76 If an applicant has been claiming Housing Benefit in the last year or are in rent arrears, they are not eligible for the LCHO scheme.

Appendix One

Outline of Discretionary Grounds for Possession (Housing Act 1985)

- Ground 1 Rent arrears or breach of tenancy
- Ground 2 Behaviour which is a nuisance or annoyance to those in the locality of the dwelling or conviction for using the dwelling for immoral or illegal purposes or committing an arrestable offence in the locality of the dwelling house.
- Ground 2a Domestic violence causing a partner or other family member to leave the property.
- Ground 3 Deterioration of the dwelling house due to waste, neglect or default.
- Ground 4 Deterioration of furniture provided by the landlord due to ill-treatment.
- Ground 5 Tenancy induced by a false statement.
- Ground 6 Premium received or paid in connection with a mutual exchange.
- Ground 7 Eviction from a dwelling within the curtilage of a building held for non-housing purposes due to conduct such that given the nature of the building it would not be right for occupation to continue.

Appendix Two

Statement of choice

The Council and its partner landlords are committed to giving applicants for housing as much choice over where they wish to live as possible. Under the Home Search scheme, housing applicants are able to apply for vacancies of individual properties which are advertised each week. Applicants are therefore able to express a choice of the type and location of the properties for which they would like to be considered.

HOMESearch HOUSING ALLOCATION SCHEME

1 Introduction

The purpose of this report is to propose amendments to the Council's housing allocation scheme.

2 Background

- 2.1 In 2001, New Forest District Council was chosen by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) as one of 27 pilot schemes to operate a new approach to allocating vacancies of affordable housing, known as choice based lettings. The Council's Homesearch scheme became operational in October 2001 and since then the Government has set a target that all local authorities will be operating choice based lettings by 2010.
- 2.2 The funding for the pilot scheme ran out in 2003 but in view of the success of the pilot and the Government's target the Council has continued to operate the scheme within existing resources.
- 2.4 Whilst results from the pilot scheme indicate that the Homesearch system has met and is meeting its objectives, and is popular with customers, there is a need to update and improve the policy drawing on the lessons learnt from the first few years of operation.
- 2.5 Following scrutiny of the Homesearch scheme at the Housing Review Panel, Officers, Members and tenants formed a working group to propose improvements and amendments to the policy. This report and the draft new lettings policy at Appendix One is the result of that work.
- 2.6 For a basic introduction to how the Homesearch scheme operates, Members may wish to refer to the text of the draft leaflets on the allocation scheme at Appendices Two and Three.

3 How the Homesearch Choice based Lettings Scheme Operates

- 3.1 Under the Homesearch system, the complex points scheme has been abandoned in favour of a much broader approach to assessing housing need. Applicants are allocated into one of three different categories of housing need: an urgent band, a needing to move band and a wanting to move band. Only about 2% of applicants are allocated into the urgent band and access to the urgent band is determined by a rehousing panel.
- 3.2 The vast majority of customers are placed into the other two bands - for those who have a need to move, and those who simply want to move, but have no particular need. The priority of applicants within the same band is decided according to the length of time on the list.

3.3 As well as changes in the way applicants are prioritised, there have been significant changes in the way that properties are let. Under the Council's previous policy, when a property became available, an Officer would allocate the property and advise the successful applicant. Under the Homeseach system, the following approach is taken when a property is ready for letting:

(a) The Property Is Labelled

In the simplest terms, for most vacancies, this means labelling the property as, for example, a three bedroom house suitable for a family with 2 or 3 children. However, the property may have disabled adaptations, or it may be more suitable for elderly people, in which case the vacancy is labelled accordingly. There is also scope for lettings plans for specific estates, for example to reduce child density or to help resolve other issues.

(b) The Property Is Advertised

Full details of the location/ type/ rent levels/ etc. of the property are published so that applicants are fully aware of what vacancies are available. Properties are advertised on noticeboards in all Council offices, on the internet and via a telephone call answering system.

(c) Interested Applicants Respond

Applicants who want to be considered for a specific vacancy make an active choice to put their names forward for individual properties by submitting a voucher or sending an e-mail via the Council's web site.

(d) Successful Applicants Are Selected

The requests for consideration are sorted to eliminate any applicants who do not meet the labelling criteria. The property is then let to the applicant with the highest level of priority. For example, if there was an applicant in the urgent band the property would be let to them. If the top applicant is in the middle band then they would be successful, and so on. In practice, there are nearly always a number of applicants from the same band competing for the vacancy and in that case, the determinant is the length of time that the applicant has been waiting. As part of the selection process, a detailed verification of the successful applicant's circumstances is also carried out.

(e) The Property is Offered

The tenancy commences for the successful applicant.

(f) Details of the Allocation are Announced

Alongside the next set of adverts for vacancies, the results of previous letting processes are published. Whilst the new tenant's name is not announced, the level of priority and the time they have been waiting is published. This feedback allows applicants to modify their choices according to their priority and the popularity of particular types of property. For example, if applicants want to move more quickly, they may wish to consider less popular estates or property types.

4. The Proposed Changes to Policy

4.1 In this section of the report, the main changes proposed to the lettings policy are set out.

New Introduction and Aims of Scheme

4.2 Sections 1 and 2 of the draft policy (see Appendix One) are new sections, setting out the statutory background and the overall aims of the scheme. These aims were detailed in the original report introducing the Homeseach pilot scheme. As the Council is obliged to publish the allocation scheme, it was felt that this information should be incorporated within the scheme.

An Additional Category of Need Added

4.3 At sections 4.6 to 4.9, the categories of need are changed and renamed. As stated above, applicants are placed in one of three categories of need. Within the categories, priority is based on application date order. This approach to assessing the priorities of applicants replaced the points scheme which was used previously and which is no longer seen to be good practice by the ODPM .

4.4 The use of broad categories of need has the benefit of being a simple and easy to understand way of prioritising applicants for housing. More emphasis is placed on a date order queueing system which is arguably a fairer way of allocating a scarce resource, provided there is protection for applicants with urgent needs. The problem of 'points chasing', where applicants sought to increase the amount of points they were awarded to improve their position on the list has been greatly lessened by the category approach, although there is still a degree of 'category chasing.' The other benefit of this approach is that more mixed communities are created, as the Council rehuses a broader range of applicants than just those in the greatest need, which is how a points system operates.

- 4.5 The main weakness of the category approach is that the scheme may not be flexible enough to take account of applicants who have extra needs but which would not normally be classified as urgent. The experience of the Social and Medical Rehousing Panel suggests that the scheme would benefit from a fourth category being added to give additional scope to reflect people's needs.
- 4.6 There is a significant danger in adding an additional category of causing a higher degree of category chasing and returning to a position where only applicants with greater needs are rehoused, thus causing problems with creating sustainable communities. For this reason it is proposed that the fourth category is incorporated within the existing high priority band rather than being a stand-alone category. This gives flexibility to the Social and Medical Rehousing Panel to recognise greater needs whilst lessening the potential impact of creating an additional separate category.

Greater Flexibility to Assist Keyworkers

- 4.7 At 4.6 and 4.10 xi) of the new policy, a keyworker can now be placed in the High Priority band if the Council and employer agrees that there is an urgent need for a designated keyworker to be rehoused to ensure the availability of an essential public service for the New Forest community.
- 4.8 At 4.10 vii) there is a proposed modification of the village area local connection bands which allows a designated keyworker to be awarded a Band A local connection if they are performing an essential service to the village community and where there is an established need for an applicant to be rehoused to maintain the service
- 4.9 The designation of a keyworker, the awarding of additional priority or additional local connection status can only be allocated by the Assistant Director of Housing following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing having considered the views of the Housing Development Manager and the employer if appropriate. This section of the policy gives the Council the flexibility to respond speedily to keyworker issues where appropriate. This could apply, for example, when there was a specific lack of a keyworker to carry out a particular essential activity within the district.

Changes to the policy on local connection areas

- 4.10 At 4.10 vii) of the draft policy it is proposed that the Band C connection with a village be changed so that applicants would need to have lived in a village for more than two years before they establish the lowest level of connection, as opposed to the current one year. This change is proposed because the group working on the policy felt that one year was too short a period of time to establish a meaningful connection with a village. The Housing, Health and Social Inclusion Review Panel have commented on this section of the draft policy and have expressed a view that the lowest level of connection should only be established after a three year period.

A Greater Focus on Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour

- 4.11 The Homelessness Act 2002 gave local authorities new powers to exclude applicants believed by the authority to be unsuitable to be tenants from being considered for affordable housing or alternatively to reduce their priority on the waiting list. Whilst these powers were incorporated within the previous policy, the new draft policy is more explicit in defining these powers (see sections 4.3, 4.4, 4.8 of Appendix One.)

Allocations of Low Cost Home Ownership Incorporated Within the Scheme

- 4.12 Previously, allocations of Low Cost Home Ownership have been made according to a separate policy. This policy has now been incorporated into the allocations scheme at 4.72.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the amended draft lettings policy.

7. Environmental Considerations

- 7.1 There are no environmental implications arising from the amended draft lettings policy.

8. Crime and Disorder Implications

- 8.1 The strengthening of the sections on anti-social behaviour within the draft policy will assist the Council in using the appropriate measures to tackle nuisance.

9. Portfolio Holder Comments

- 9.1 'The proposed amendments to the lettings policy give the Council more flexibility in responding to the needs of keyworkers and tackling the problem of anti-social behaviour.'

10. Recommendations

- 10.1 It is recommended that the amended allocation scheme is adopted with effect from January 1st 2005.

For further information contact:

Gregory Spawton
Housing Needs Manager

Tel: 023 80285190
E-mail: greg.spawton@nfdc.gov.uk

Appendix Two

Draft Leaflet on the Allocation of Affordable Housing in the New Forest

This leaflet explains how the Council allocates vacancies of Council or Housing Association accommodation in the New Forest district.

Applicants who want to be rehoused apply to join the Council's housing waiting list and are then placed in one of three different categories according to how serious the Council believes the applicant's housing problems are:

1/ High Priority Category
(for people with very serious housing problems, where severe hardship is likely to result unless rehousing is offered as soon as possible)

2/ Priority Category
(for people with housing problems which are less serious but which could be improved by offering rehousing)

3/ No Priority Category
(for people without housing problems who would like to move)

When a vacancy arises, the vacancy is advertised by the Council and the advert states which type of applicant can apply for the individual vacancy. For example, if there is a vacancy of a three bedroom house then only families with a three bedroom need will be invited to apply.

Applicants who want to apply for a vacancy have one week in which to complete a voucher and send it to the Council stating they want to be considered for the property.

In order to decide who is allocated the property the Council will sort through the vouchers received from applicants. Vouchers from applicants who are not of the right family size for the vacancy are excluded (for example a family with a one bedroom need would not be considered for a three bedroom house.)

Once all the ineligible applicants are excluded, the Council then creates a short list of people who may be offered the vacancy.

The short list is sorted according to the priority category of each applicant and then the date of application. The best way to explain this is by using an example:

A vacancy of a two bedroom house is advertised in Hythe. Applicants who want to be considered for the property respond by sending or e-mailing a voucher to the Council.

The Council sorts the vouchers and excludes vouchers where the applicant's family would be too large or small for the property.

The Council now considers the housing needs of the remaining applicants and is left with a list of ten applicants who are eligible and want to be considered for the vacancy. None of the applicants are in the High Priority category, eight are in the Priority category and two are in the No Priority category.

As there are no applicants in the High Priority category to consider, the property would be allocated to the applicant in the Priority category who had been waiting the longest on the list.

In practice, some vacancies can attract many applicants but the process of choosing the successful applicant is the same.

Once a successful applicant has been chosen, the Council carries out a verification of the applicant's circumstances. This is to make sure the applicant has given the Council the correct information about their housing situation and is not trying to fraudulently obtain a vacancy.

Some Frequently Asked Questions

How do applicants get onto the waiting list for rehousing?

Anyone who wishes to be considered for affordable housing needs to complete an application form which is available from the Council.

How do applicants obtain vouchers to apply for vacancies?

All applicants on the waiting list are sent vouchers to apply for properties.

Where are vacancies advertised?

Vacancies are advertised in three ways. There is a noticeboard in each of the Council offices in the district and adverts are placed on the noticeboards. Vacancies are also advertised via an ansaphone system (02380 285100) and on the internet (www.nfdc.gov.uk/homesearch)

Are all vacancies advertised?

Almost all vacancies of Council and partner Housing Association properties in the district are advertised.

What if no-one applies for a vacancy?

In most cases there is a long waiting list for vacancies. However, from time to time, the Council finds that some vacancies can be difficult to let. In those circumstances, the property is normally re-advertised allowing applicants with smaller households or to apply. If the property is still difficult to let, then applicants outside the district would be able to apply.

What about vacancies in village areas?

In village areas, the strength of an applicant's local connection with the village is also considered when vacancies are allocated. See the Council's separate leaflet Allocation of Affordable Housing in Rural Parishes for details.

Further Questions?

Please contact:

Housing Needs
New Forest District Council
Appletree Court
Lyndhurst
Hants
SO43 7PA
02380285234
housing.needs@nfdc.gov.uk

Appendix Three

Draft Leaflet on the Allocation of Affordable Housing In Rural Parishes

This leaflet explains how the Council allocates vacancies of Council or Housing Association accommodation in rural parishes of the New Forest district.

Applicants who want to be rehoused apply to join the Council's housing waiting list and are then placed in one of three different categories according to how serious the Council believes the applicant's housing problems are:

1/ High Priority Category
(for people with very serious housing problems, where severe hardship is likely to result unless rehousing is offered as soon as possible)

2/ Priority Category
(for people with housing problems which are less serious but which could be improved by offering rehousing)

3/ No Priority Category
(for people without housing problems who would like to move)

If an applicant wants to be offered housing in a village area in the district, they will need to show that they have a local connection with the village. To demonstrate that an applicant has a local connection, they would need to fall into one of the following bands:

Band A Persons who live or have their workbase in a parish and have done so for 10 years or more, or who have lived in the parish for 10 years previously or a designated keyworker performing an essential service for the village community where there is an established need for an applicant to be rehoused to maintain the service.

Band B Persons who live or have their workbase in the parish and have done so for between 5 and 10 years, or who have lived in the parish for between 5 and 10 years within the last 15 years, or whose parents, siblings or adult children live in the parish and have done so for 10 years or more.

Band C Persons who live or have their workbase in the parish and have done so for between 2 and 5 years, or who have lived in the parish for between 2 and 5 years within the last 15 years, or whose parents, siblings or adult children live in the parish and have done so for 5 years or more.

When a vacancy arises in a rural area, the vacancy is advertised by the Council and the advert states which type of applicant can apply for the individual vacancy. For example, if there is a vacancy of a three bedroom house then only families with a three bedroom need will be invited to apply.

Applicants who want to apply for a vacancy have one week in which to complete a voucher and send it to the Council stating they want to be considered for the property.

In order to decide who is allocated the property the Council will sort through the vouchers received from applicants. Vouchers from applicants who do not have a local connection with the village or who are not of the right family size for the vacancy are excluded (for example a family with a one bedroom need would not be considered for a three bedroom house.)

Once all the ineligible applicants are excluded, the Council then creates a short list of people who may be offered the vacancy. **The most important criteria for vacancies in villages is the strength of the local connection with the village. After that, the Council considers the level of housing need the applicant has and the length of time they have been on the waiting list.**

The short list is sorted according to the strength of the local connection with the parish. Therefore, applicants who have a Band A connection are placed at the top of the list and then Band B applicants and so on. If there are a number of applicants within the same local connection band, then the applicants are further sorted according to which category they have been placed in on the waiting list.

The best way of explaining the process is to use an example:

The Council has a vacancy of a two bedroom house in a village. The property is advertised stating that only applicants with a connection with the village and a two bedroom requirement can apply.

Seven applicants send vouchers to the Council stating they want to be considered for the vacancy. On checking the vouchers, one applicant does not have a local connection and one applicant only has a need for a one bedroom property. Both of these applicants are excluded from consideration.

Of the five vouchers remaining, three are from applicants with a Band A local connection with the village, one is from an applicant with a Band B connection and one from an applicant with a Band C connection. The three applicants with a Band A connection are placed at the top of the list.

The Council then looks at the level of housing need of the three applicants with a Band A connection. One of the applicants is in the High Priority category and the other two are in the Priority category. The list now looks like this:

1 st place	Applicant One (has a Band A connection and is in the High Priority category)
2 nd place	Applicants Two and Three (both with a Band A connection and both in the Priority category)

The successful applicant will therefore be Applicant One.

In practice, some vacancies can attract many applicants and it is often the case that there is more than one applicant in the same local connection band and in the same category of housing need. In these circumstances, the length of time the applicants have been on the waiting list will be taken into consideration.

Once a successful applicant has been chosen, the Council carries out a verification of the applicant's circumstances. This is to make sure the applicant has given the Council the correct information about their housing situation and is not trying to fraudulently obtain a vacancy. As part of the verification process, the Council normally contacts the local district Councillor to check on the applicant's connection with the village.

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Housing Needs
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