

NEW HOMESearch ALLOCATIONS SCHEME

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Council is responsible for the allocation of Council and housing association accommodation in the District and is obliged to publish an allocation scheme.
- 1.2 This report sets out proposed changes in an updated version of the Homesearch allocations scheme. The suggested amendments to the scheme take advantage of greater local freedoms brought in by the Localism Act.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In 2001 the Council launched Homesearch, an innovative new scheme for the allocation of almost all permanent Council and housing association vacancies in the District. The policy was updated in 2004 and has operated with considerable success.
- 2.2 The key features of Homesearch are:
 - A single universal waiting list for the District as a whole, replacing multiple waiting lists held by all social landlords
 - A simple banding system for prioritising applicants on the waiting list, with significant emphasis on date-order within the bands
 - Advertising of vacancies
 - Applicants on the list apply only for the individual vacancies for which they wish to be considered
 - Allocations are then made to the eligible applicant in the highest priority band who has been waiting the longest
 - The priority band and waiting time of successful applicants is published so that applicants are aware of likely waiting times for all property types in all locations
- 2.3 The key aims of Homesearch are to:
 - Meet statutory requirements
 - Tackle housing need
 - Offer as much choice to applicants as possible
 - Help build sustainable communities
 - Allocate vacancies in as fair a way as possible
 - Allocate vacancies in a transparent way
- 2.4 The Localism Act has recently changed the law on allocations so that there is more local control for district councils on managing waiting lists and allocations. In particular, the Council now has greater control over who is eligible to appear on the Homesearch waiting list.

3. THE DRAFT NEW ALLOCATIONS SCHEME

- # 3.1 The draft of the updated Homesearch scheme is attached at Appendix Two and takes full account of the changed law on allocations.
- 3.2 The key changes to the policy are:
- (i) To remove applicants from the Homesearch waiting list if they do not have a connection to the New Forest District (unless the applicant is owed a housing duty under the homelessness legislation or is a member of the Armed Forces)
 - (ii) To remove applicants from the Homesearch waiting list who are not considered to be in housing need
 - (iii) To remove applicants from the Homesearch waiting list who are considered to be unsuitable to be a tenant because of a history of anti-social (or other) behaviour which makes them unsuitable to be a tenant
 - (iv) To change the residential connection requirement to the District from 1 year to 2 years (unless the applicant has lived in the District for 10 years or longer in the past)
 - (v) To set an annual quota of between 10 and 20% of vacancies of general needs housing where preference will be given to working households.
- 3.3 The proposals in (i) and (ii) above are intended to reduce the number of households on the Homesearch list so that the Council can focus its limited housing resources on local people in housing need. Prior to the Localism Act, almost all individuals had a legal right to appear on Council waiting lists. Consequently, waiting lists have included many people on them who have no realistic prospect of being re-housed. Being entered onto a waiting list raises expectations for applicants, even if there is no prospect of re-housing, and causes additional workload for the Council.
- 3.4 The Localism Act also introduced a new type of fixed term Council tenancy. As this type of tenancy expires after a period of time, there will be additional requirements for allocations officers to more regularly assess housing need and make decisions on whether tenancies should be renewed. The reduction in administration of the housing waiting list because of lower numbers on the list will allow officers enough time to carry out this additional work.
- 3.5 The proposal in (iii) above is to strengthen measures in the allocations scheme for tackling anti-social behaviour in the local community.
- 3.6 The proposal in (iv) above is to strengthen the local connection element of the allocations scheme so that applicants will require a longer connection before they are considered for re-housing.
- 3.7 The proposal in (v) above is to seek to reduce welfare dependency by providing an incentive to applicants who are economically active.
- 3.8 In addition to these major proposals for change, a number of minor amendments have been made to provide greater detail and guidance for allocations officers working under the Homesearch scheme who are required to make difficult decisions about individual cases. Furthermore, other allocation processes such as garage allocations have been brought within the terms of the scheme.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 When a major change in the allocation scheme is proposed, the Council is obliged to consult with its partner housing associations.
- 4.2 A copy of the draft policy was sent to all partner landlords. Three responses were received, all supportive of the policy. Some minor issues with the text were reported and one landlord expressed concern that more robust verification of applications may cause a longer void time.
- 4.3 A copy of the draft policy was also sent to all Members of the Council. A number of comments were received from Members which were supportive of the proposed changes.
- 4.4 In order to ensure the widest possible consultation, a copy of the draft policy was also made available on the Homesearch pages of the Council's website. Over 70 responses were received and the results of the consultation (with comments) are set out in Appendix One.

#

5. VIEWS OF THE COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

- 5.1 The Panel considered the scheme at their meeting 16 September 2012 and commends the new Homesearch Allocation Scheme, as set out in Appendix 1 to Report B to the Panel, for approval.

6. PORTFOLIO HOLDER COMMENTS

- 6.1 I strongly support the draft changes to the Homesearch allocations scheme. The proposals will reduce the numbers of people on the waiting list who have no prospect of being re-housed, put greater focus on housing local people and help to tackle anti-social behaviour and reduce welfare dependency.

7. CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 The Localism Act has reformed the law on housing allocations. The draft new allocations policy takes full account of the changes to legislation.
- 7.2 It is hoped that reductions in workload in certain functions of managing the Homesearch scheme will balance increases in workload in the area of tenancy management.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 That Cabinet approves the adoption of the new Homesearch allocations scheme.

For further information please contact:

Background Papers:

Greg Spawton
Housing Needs Manager
Tel: 02380285588
greg.spawton@nfdc.gov.uk

APPENDIX ONE

RESPONSE TO CUSTOMER CONSULTATION ON HOMESearch 2

Consultation question one

Do you agree with the proposal to remove applicants from the Homeseach waiting list if they do not have a connection to the New Forest district (unless the applicant is owed a housing duty under the homelessness legislation or is a member of the Armed Forces)?:

Yes: 64

No: 3

Comments

- 'i think this is a brilliant idea - even though it could upset families and so on. But i feel if this was to happen, then families that do have a right to live her can be housed quicker. And those families are that desperate to be housed due to over-crowding. I hope you go ahead with this one.'
- 'Definitely !!'
- 'It is not practical for us to look in other areas for housing, whereas those without a connection to the New Forest may be able to look at housing in other areas.'
- 'I also feel that this should be checked as I have previously been aware of people giving false information-ie saying they are living at there parents in the new forest when they are privately renting elsewhere.'

Consultation question two

Do you agree with the proposal to change the residential connection requirement to the district from 1 year to 2 years (unless the applicant has lived in the district for 10 years or longer in the past)?:

Yes: 48

No: 9

Comments

- 'I like this idea too, as i dont have a connection to new milton and ashley and so on even though i have lived there for 18 months. with an ex partner. i do like the area as well as my home town pennington.'
- 'Definitely, keeps the area fresh and stops the undersirables entering the area.'
- 'There has to be some way of reducing the waiting list for those who have been on it for a long time and this would seem a fair proposal.'
- 'This is a blatant attempt to "kick the can further down the road" and prevent people qualifying'

Consultation question three

Do you agree with the proposal to remove applicants from the Homesearch waiting list who are not considered to be in housing need?:

Yes: 38

No: 28

Comments

- 'Hopefully the severe shortage of homes will be dealt with if this was to happen to. brilliant idea.'
- 'Definately'
- 'There's a danger of the decision wether someone being in a need would be quite arbitrary. what would constitute being in need? who is to determine wether you are in need or not?'
- 'We are currently in a property with a severe damp problem and lack of adequate heating yet someone without these issues who has been on the list longer than us would receive a house before us.'
- 'There has to be some way of reducing the waiting list for hard working, honest, respectable tenants and this would seem an appropriate way.'
- 'just because you may be a single applicant with no children doesnt mean you are not in need of affordable housing .but if this proposal goes ahead no doubt we will be first off the list'
- 'However I hope this is not down to the number of properties you apply for. We are often not able to apply because either the two bed properties are for 3 maximum and the 3 bed for more than 4 (we are a family of 4) or else the exclusion is because of not local link to a particular village. Frustrating!'
- 'The definition of being in a housing need is the query. I am in a home that i am privetly renting and although we are currently housed adequately, it is not secure for our family and we feel that we need a home within social housing to be able to be finacially better and have more of a secure home for our children. we will never afford a mortgage and do not want to spend the next 10 years moving our children from pillar to post living in tempory rented homes.'
- 'This is too vague. What criteria are used to decide who is in housing need?'

Consultation question four

Do you agree with the proposal to remove applicants from the Homeseach waiting list who are considered to be unsuitable to be a tenant because of a history of anti-social behaviour or other behaviour which makes them unsuitable to be a tenant?

Yes: 67

No: 5

Comments

- 'YES i really hope this one happens as all the local residents and working families can relax at night and catch up with families rather than having to be disturbed every hour due to unreasonable behaviour! Dogs barking and not sorting the problems out, Children playing ball games on the entrance of flats and most of all teenagers shouting filth at 9pm at night on ground floor hallway and banging the doors because someone wont let them in. disturbing me and my neighbour at silly times in evening because they cant get in and out to see there friends! Parents dont seem to bother or care where or what there children are up to! My daughter who is 17 months old cant sleep at night due to entrance being slammed! It's been fixed 2 times but it's broke again!'
- 'Definitely'
- 'I think this is a very good idea as I have had two tenants living near me with antisocial behaviour issues.'
- 'being polish for a start ! how is it that im a british citizen an have lived in my district all my life and yet have been told it will be years on waiting list and yet these people are jumping the queue?'
- 'this would not work, they would end up homeless then they would end up going in to section1 homelessness and end up housed any way.'
- 'This will give too much power to private landlords and others who bear grudges to make complaints which have far reaching consequences for tenants. Bad housing may cause bad behaviour in the first place.'
- 'Where are they going to go?We can't just let them live under trees.They should be made to sign a tighter agreement: IE reduction of % of benefits per transgression. This would change behaviour.'
- 'too many people seem to be able to move from property to property despite being evicted, or not keeping their property u together.'

Consultation question five

Do you agree with the proposal to set an annual quota of between 10 and 20% of vacancies of general needs housing where preference will be given to working households?:

Yes: 57

No: 3

Comments

- 'i like this'
- 'Definitely, If this was the case, perhaps it would force out the lazy and reward the hard working like my Wife and I.'
- 'It should be a higher percentage than that.'
- 'We are a working family and cannot afford to buy or rent privately we have a young daughter and are living in a one bedroom flat. We welcome this idea'
- 'working household should definitely be given preference as they are able to contribute to the communities through council tax'
- 'We have friends who are on the council list and are living in private rental accommodation but receive full housing and council tax benefit so all their expenses are covered. We are in private rental accommodation and my husband works full time but living costs are very high and we struggle to pay our bills. However, at present, because they have been on the list longer than us they would receive priority.'
- 'providing priority is given to the elderly and those with mental health issues like it is now !!!'
- 'should be more 50% to 75%'
- 'we are a hard working family who are happy and a stable relationship, and us as a family unit get forgotten about because we are in a "partnership" instead of being single and out of work. Reward the people that live happy healthy lifestyles instead of it all being about the single parents who do not work.'
- 'Blaming unemployed people for their situation is unacceptable. There are almost 3M unemployed but fewer than half a million vacancies in this country.'
- 'Should be a higher percentage. Lots of people on the list have been working forever and been on the list. Just watching non workers take the properties over their heads with no effort made to better their lifestyles.'

Additional comments

- 'I really like these ideas!'
- 'great ideas they really should be implemented my family have lived in this area for over 70years yet my own children have no chance at all of a permanent home here without some help.'
- 'I think NFDC needs to look at the whole of it's housing scheme. For an example, next door to me there are two adults living in a three bedroomed house and across the street there is one adult living in a two bedroomed house yet there are local families who's living area is overcrowded because they are sharing with 2 or 3 generations! It simply doesn't make sense. There are people abusing the system yet genuine cases are often over-looked.'
- 'I think the ideas are good its a local council looking after local people.'
- 'not a lot i can do as we av applied for over thirty bungalows in this village and still outside people are brought in with no connection to village and i have lived here for sixty five years and still overlooked.'
- 'Will the issue of under occupancy be addressed? There is a huge shortage of 3+ bedroom houses on the council list for Ringwood, however, we know of someone who is living in a 4 bedroom house with a 22 year old son.'
- 'Also, is there any type of points system that ensures those with a more urgent need are put in a higher position within their allocated category?'
- 'Removal of tenants which are undercrowding a property should be happening'
- 'I feel there is a huge issue when it comes to young aparently single mums needing housing,many,in fact have working partners which are NOT declared yet this is not declared and they often receive FULL benefits-eg housing benefit and council tax benefit plus partners undisclosed wages. If there was an easier and more anonymous way to advise of this sort of thing I could and would give a huge list of names.'
- 'how about start building some affordable homes. for hard working people who would appriecate them .'
- 'How will the applicants know if they are being removed from the list? How will you inform them? Also, if they've been accepted onto the waiting list. Surely they have a need of a home?'
- 'my big bug bear! is the fact that although I've lived in Totton which is in the new forest area! I can't apply for properties in villages just 2 miles from me!!! and then people push in the queue ! and they have not even been waiting as long as we have!! Not far someone should get a property only waiting 2 years for example when someone else has been waiting 7 years or more!!'
- 'it might be good to take tenents from private renting into social houseing then you may not need to pay out quite so much houesing benifits'

- 'I think its going in the right direction but you need to think more about the people in our community that work hard. Rewarding the people that try there damned hardest to raise happy children and hold down a job and look after the homes they are currently living in but the homes will never be there own. social housing has a stigma of being full of troublesome families and thats because half of the time they are the people that get given the homes instead of the decent people who would look after the propities and build a upstanding community within that neighbourhood.'
- 'i can see this as a good step forward, but with all the foreign nationals taking home's befor they even get on the market it wont shorten the list that much. This move in conjunction with foreign nationals going to the back of the list and look after the people that have lived and payed taxes in the area would be the best step forward.'
- 'Mostly a poor attempt to reduce the housing waiting list by kicking the problem into the future or into neighbouring areas. A truly NIMBY attitude.'
- 'I would like to see the argument/s used behind these draft proposals and the name/s of those who put them forward - more transparency, in other words.'
- 'Put a stop to young girls enlarging their families to get beigger properties. Yes it does happen all the time, I can give you list. If they want more kids they need to work to pay for the rent to get a larger property in the private sector not local council.'

APPENDIX TWO

New Forest Homesearch Allocation Scheme 2

1. Introduction and Statutory Background

1.1 The Council is required to establish an allocation scheme for determining the priorities between people who apply for housing and for setting out the procedure to be followed in allocating housing accommodation. The scheme must include all aspects of the allocation process including the responsibility for decisions. The scheme must also include a statement of New Forest District Council's policy on offering applicants a choice of, or the opportunity to express preferences for, housing accommodation.

1.2 An allocation under the Homesearch scheme takes place in the following circumstances:

- when a person is selected to be a secure or introductory tenant of New Forest District Council or nominated by the Council to be an assured tenant of a registered provider of social housing in the district
- when there is a transfer of housing accommodation where a Council or housing association tenant is in a reasonable preference group and where the transfer has been made on the basis of a person's housing application

Lettings of accommodation to transfer applicants not in a reasonable preference group or of temporary housing for homeless applicants will normally take place outside of this scheme.

Tenancy-types allocated will include flexible and shorthold types and tenancies let on affordable rents.

1.3 Allocations under the Homesearch scheme can only be made to eligible persons. The Council cannot allocate housing accommodation under this scheme to:

- (i) a person from abroad who is subject to immigration control unless he is of a class prescribed by regulations made by the Secretary of State, or currently a tenant of the Council or a registered provider. No person excluded from entitlement to housing benefit shall be included in any class prescribed by the Secretary of State.

- (ii) two or more persons jointly if any of them falls under 1.3 (i) above.
 - (iii) other classes of persons from abroad specified by the Secretary of State in regulations.
- 1.4 Subject to section 1.3 above and any other relevant regulations made by the Secretary of State, the Council may decide what classes of people are to be treated as qualifying persons who are able to join the Homeseach list to be considered for housing accommodation. Applicants deemed not to be qualifying persons by the Council will not be able to be considered for housing and must be notified in writing.
- 1.5 In establishing the priorities of applicants for allocating accommodation, the Council is obligated to give reasonable preference under this scheme to eligible and qualifying:
 - (i) applicants who are homeless or threatened with homelessness (as defined by the homelessness legislation) or are owed a re-housing duty under the homelessness legislation
 - (ii) applicants occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise in unsatisfactory housing conditions
 - (iii) applicants who need to move on medical or welfare grounds (including grounds related to a disability)
 - (iv) applicants who need to move to a particular locality in the district, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship to themselves or others
 - (v) people specified by the Secretary of State by regulations,

unless the applicant only qualifies for reasonable preference by taking into account a restricted person.
- 1.6 Additional preference can be awarded to applicants who are in a reasonable preference group if their housing needs are serious or urgent.
- 1.7 Subject to 1.5 above, the Council may decide on what principles the scheme is to be framed. Case law has determined that applicants in the reasonable preference groups do not need to be given absolute priority over all other applicants and therefore local authorities have scope to meet local needs and priorities. The scheme may contain provision about the allocation of particular housing accommodation to a person who makes a specific application for that accommodation and to persons of a particular description whether or not they fall within 1.5 above.

- 1.8 The scheme may contain provisions for determining priorities between people in reasonable preference groups and can include factors such as:
- (i) the financial resources available to a person to meet his housing costs
 - (ii) the behaviour of a person (or a member of his household) which affects their suitability to be a tenant
 - (iii) the local connection of a person with the district
- 1.9 Registered providers of social housing have a duty under s170 of the Housing Act 1996 to cooperate with housing authorities to such extent as is reasonable in the circumstances in offering accommodation to people with priority under this scheme.

2. The Aims of the Homesearch Allocation Scheme

- 2.1 The main aims of the scheme are:
- (i) To meet statutory requirements
 - (ii) To meet housing need
 - (iii) To provide applicants with as much choice as possible
 - (iv) To help to create and maintain sustainable local communities
 - (v) To make the best use of available housing resources
 - (vi) To allocate scarce local housing resources in as fair a way as possible
 - (vii) To allocate housing in as open and transparent a manner as possible
 - (viii) To promote good standards of tenancy and financial management by tenants and prospective tenants and assist in tackling anti-social behaviour
 - (ix) To provide incentives for members of the public to undertake paid work and make a positive contribution to the local community

3. The Homesearch Allocation Scheme

3.1 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 Homesearch scheme housing applicants are normally 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.

Qualification for Inclusion on the Homesearch waiting list

3.2 New Forest District Council will consider all applications to join the waiting list for social housing in accordance with this scheme. Applicants will be accepted onto the New Forest Homesearch waiting list so that they can be considered for housing accommodation provided:

- (i) they are aged 16 years or over *and*
- (ii) they are eligible to be considered for housing accommodation *and*
- (ii) they are a qualifying person

Applicants who are not qualifying persons

3.3 Applicants will not normally be qualifying persons if they:

- i) do not have a local connection to the New Forest district unless, at the time of their application:
 - they are owed a re-housing duty by New Forest District Council under the homelessness legislation *or*
 - they are a member of the Armed Forces *or*
 - they were a member of the Armed Forces within the previous 5 years *or*
 - they are in a class of people prescribed by regulation who cannot be deemed non-qualifying persons due to a lack of connection with the district
- ii) are not in housing need, unless they are of a household type which could be considered for housing which is normally hard-to-let and they wish to be considered for housing which is hard-to-let

- iii) are unsuitable to be a tenant because of behavioural issues, including anti-social behaviour or poor tenancy or household management, unless at the time of their application, they are owed a re-housing duty by the Council under the homelessness legislation, or can demonstrate that they would be able to manage their tenancy with support which is available and they are prepared to engage with the support agency, or the applicant needs to be considered for housing to assist in protecting the public from harm.
 - iv) are considered to have the means to resolve their own housing problems.
- 3.4 Applicants who do not qualify or are not eligible for the list will be advised in writing and will be informed of their right to a review of the decision that they do not qualify for the list. In order to ensure that the Council does not unduly fetter its discretion, there may be rare exceptional circumstances where it is necessary to disapply the criteria for qualifying persons set out in section 3.3.

Determining priorities of applicants on the Homesearch list

- 3.5 When applicants are accepted onto the list, their housing need will be assessed and they will be placed into one of the following categories of housing need:
- ii) Priority
 - iii) No Priority
- 3.6 A further category of housing need (High Priority) is reserved for exceptional cases.
- 3.7 Applicants who are assessed as being in one or more of the housing need groups as detailed in 3.12 below will normally be placed into the Priority category as they are considered to have a need for housing. These groups include the statutory reasonable preference categories and further categories which the Council considers should also give applicants preference under the scheme.
- 3.8 Applicants who are assessed as not showing any indication of being in a housing need group but are of a household type which could be considered for hard-to-let housing and who wish to be considered for hard-to-let housing will be placed into the No Priority category.
- 3.9 Where there is reason to believe that an applicant faces serious housing problems which may require more urgent consideration for accommodation, their application will be given further consideration to assess whether they should be placed in the High Priority category.

- 3.10 Applications placed in the High Priority category will be further classified into two different groups: 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 into the next suitable available property as their situation does not require immediate re-housing.
- 3.11 Applicants are prioritised on the list according to the category they are placed in, with applicants 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 on. Where applicants 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 are being considered for housing in a rural parish.

Applicants with a need for accommodation under the Homesearch scheme

- 3.12 i) Homelessness
- Homeless people within the meaning of Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 unless they have the means to resolve their own housing situation.
- ii) Disrepair
- Where an applicant's home is in significant disrepair and their housing conditions can best be resolved through re-housing, unless they have the means to resolve their own housing situation.
- iii) Temporary or insecure accommodation
- Households living in non-secure accommodation unless they have the means to resolve their own housing situation. Examples of non-secure accommodation arrangements are as follows:
- a) Assured shorthold tenancies in the private sector
 - b) Tenants/ licensees of hostels, refuges, b&b's etc.
 - c) Households sharing with relatives or friends
 - d) Tied or Armed Forces accommodation where the applicant is close to retirement or end of service
 - 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 housing association property within the district.

Fixed term secure tenancies or housing association assured shorthold tenancies in stock which is owned by the housing association will not normally be considered to be temporary housing arrangements.

- iv) Lack of essential facilities

Where the home is lacking essential facilities and housing conditions can best be improved through re-housing unless the applicant has the means to resolve their own housing situation. 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, social or welfare grounds

Where an applicant or household member has a significant medical, social or welfare problem which is caused or substantially worsened by the home circumstances and where this condition can best be alleviated or resolved by re-housing, or where an applicant has a need to move to a particular locality in the district where failure to meet that need would cause significant hardship to themselves or others, unless they (or other people to which hardship may be caused) have the means to resolve their own housing situation.

Where the effect of this medical, social or welfare problem or need to move to a particular locality may be to cause very significant difficulties with housing circumstances and / or severe hardship to the applicant or others, then the applicant may be awarded additional preference unless they (or other people to which hardship may be caused) have the means to resolve their own housing situation.

The award of a High Priority needs to be considered alongside the needs of other applicants who may be waiting a long time for re-housing.

Members of the Armed Forces with urgent housing needs may also be awarded additional priority. Members of the Armed Forces who are homeless or threatened with homelessness will not normally be considered to be in urgent housing need as they may be eligible for immediate assistance under the homelessness legislation.

Homeless applicants will not normally be awarded additional priority for secure or assured tenancies because of their homelessness. Whilst homelessness can be a serious housing issue, the problem is usually temporary in nature and housing assistance may be available under the homelessness legislation.

Transfer applicants who have significant housing problems and have been accepted as needing a management move will normally be awarded additional priority.

Decisions on cases applying under this section will be made by a panel of allocations officers (the Homeseach Panel.) However, cases may not be referred to the panel if it is clear that the applicant would not have grounds for being considered for 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 unless they have the means to resolve their own housing situation. Essential facilities are defined under this section as follows:

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

vii) Local connection with a rural parish

Where the applicant has a local connection with a rural parish, is not resident in that parish and wishes to return to reside in the parish unless they have the means to resolve their own housing situation.

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 work-base 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 key-worker performing an essential service for the village community where there is an established need for an applicant to be re-housed to maintain the service.

Band B Persons who live or have their work-base 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 work-base 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 normally accrue a connection because of that placement. However, if the applicant has established a longstanding connection with the parish during their occupation and has made a significant contribution to the local community, then they may be considered to have a local connection.

viii) Household separation

Where members of a potential household wish to live together, have done so previously and there is no suitable accommodation for them to occupy together, provided the Council considers that it is reasonable for the household to live together and they do not have the means to resolve their own housing situation. In assessing whether it is reasonable for a potential household to live together, the Council will particularly consider the availability of other accommodation for potential household members and the impact on local housing resources.

In situations where parents or carers would like children to live in two households at different times, the starting point for an assessment of need will be that, in most cases, children have an identifiable principle home (even when living arrangements are intended to be split on a 50/50 basis).

The Council will determine the principle home or what should reasonably be the principle home. Issues to be taken into consideration in this determination are:

- Access of the children to other suitable accommodation
- Previous living arrangements
- Actual living arrangements
- Preferred living arrangements
- Child benefit claims
- Schooling
- Special circumstances
- The impact on scarce housing resources of providing two family homes

ix) Older persons' housing

Where an elderly or disabled person is eligible for older persons' accommodation and wishes to move into older persons' accommodation unless they have the means to resolve their own housing situation.

x) ADHAC

Anyone who the Agricultural Dwelling Housing Advisory Committee recommends for re-housing unless they have the means to resolve their own housing situation. Applicants may 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. Where the employer and the Council identify and agree that there is an urgent need for a key-worker to be rehoused to ensure the availability of an essential public service for the New Forest community, then the key-worker may be awarded additional priority.

xii) Over-occupation

Households who over-occupy their accommodation unless they have the means to resolve their own housing situation. 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) will be classified as bedrooms provided they are suitable for sleeping accommodation.
- b) Rooms less than 50 square feet are not normally 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 siblings of the same sex and same generation.

Where a prospective foster carer or adopter indicates that they need an additional bedroom, the Council will, when assessing housing need, consider the risk that the application to foster or adopt may be unsuccessful against the wider benefits which would be realised if a placement was successful.

xiii) Extra-care housing

Applicants with housing and assessed care needs who cannot resolve their own housing situation and need to be considered for vacancies of extra-care housing.

xiv) Transfer applicants under-occupying their tenancy

Council or housing association tenants with their tenancy in the New Forest district who have one or more bedrooms than they require. Where a tenant is a successor tenant who is under-occupying a property or where a tenant is suffering severe financial hardship because of reduced welfare payments due to under-occupation, they may be awarded additional priority

- xv) Transfer applicants with children living in a flat

Council or housing association tenants with their tenancy in the New Forest district who have dependent and resident children under the age of 16 living in a flat.

- xvi) Transfer applicants living in isolated accommodation

Council or housing association tenants with their tenancy in the New Forest district who are living in a local connection area or in an isolated area who need to move to a less isolated area.

Applicants without a need for accommodation under the Homesearch scheme

- 3.13 Qualifying applicants who are not considered to have a need for housing will normally be placed in the No Priority category.
- 3.14 In certain circumstances, applicants may otherwise be considered to have a need for housing 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 unsuitable to be tenants because of behaviour which may affect their suitability to be a tenant, or they have unreasonably refused an offer of suitable accommodation, their application may be given a lower priority or no priority at all.
- 3.15 Most commonly this situation will arise when applicants have the income and/or assets to purchase or rent a property on a long-term basis or 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.
- 3.16 Where an applicant or member of the applicant's household has demonstrated anti-social or other behaviour which may make them unsuitable to be a tenant including behaviour:
- (i) where they have deliberately or recklessly worsened their circumstances *or*
 - (ii) have unreasonably refused offer(s) of accommodation *or*
 - (iii) have knowingly or recklessly made a statement to the Council which is false in a material particular *or*
 - (i) have knowingly withheld information which the Council has reasonably required *or*
 - (v) have been abusive or threatening to Council staff or Members or housing association staff

they may be placed into the No Priority category even if they would otherwise be considered to have a need for housing.

- 3.17 Where a qualifying applicant has been nominated for or offered accommodation under the Homeseach scheme, their application will be placed into the No Priority category.
- 3.18 Applicants who unreasonably refuse a suitable offer of housing may have their application placed into the No Priority category.
- 3.19 If applicants are no longer considered to have a need for housing, their application may be re-assessed to decide whether they qualify to remain on the waiting list.

The choice based allocation process

- 3.20 All vacancies will normally be let under the following choice-based allocation process (set out in sections 3.21 to 3.56) unless there is a specific reason to exclude them from the process.

Labeling of properties

- 3.21 The labeling of vacancies is an essential part of the allocations process as the Council is able 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 specific vacancies. This allows the Council to act flexibly to meet local needs and local priorities in addition to the statutory reasonable preference criteria. Labeling for each vacancy will be decided by a panel of allocations officers which will normally meet on a weekly basis.
- 3.22 When labeling properties, regard should be had to the aims of the Homeseach scheme including 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. Labeling 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, meet local priorities and to ensure good management of housing.
- 3.23 As part of the labeling process, full details of each vacancy will be obtained including, for example, street location, rent, landlord, etc. to assist in labeling the property. Some landlords may have specific requirements for particular types or locations of property. At a minimum, the labeling will set an appropriate occupancy level for vacancies and the occupancy criteria in 3.24 below will normally apply.

Occupancy of properties

3.24 <u>Type of Vacancy</u>	<u>Suitable For</u>
Older person's bedsit	Single elderly person of the appropriate age for the scheme
Older people's 1 bedroom	Elderly single person or couple of the appropriate age for the scheme
Older people's 2 bedroom	Elderly or disabled couple preferably with a 2 bedroom need and with need of and suitability for older persons' housing
Bedsit	Single person
1 bedroom flat	Single person or couple
2 bedroom flat/maisonette	Household with 2 bedroom need
1 bedroom bungalow	Elderly or disabled single person 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 or flat	Household with 3 bedroom need or 4 bedroom need
3 bedroom parlour house	Household with 3 bedroom need or 4 bedroom need
4 bedroom house	Household with 3 bedroom need or 4 bedroom need
4 bedroom parlour house	Household with 4 bedroom need or 5 bedroom need

5 bedroom house

Household with 5 bedroom need or greater

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

Other criteria for labeling of properties

- 3.25 In addition to the general labeling criteria set out in the occupancy levels above, other circumstances may apply which require particular labeling of properties, schemes or estates. The examples below are for illustrative purposes and are not exhaustive. Other factors may arise which could affect the labeling of properties.
- 3.26 In most circumstances, properties will normally be labeled so that preference is given to applicants with a connection with the New Forest district.
- 3.27 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 labeled so that preference is given to transfer applicants.
- 3.28 Where a property is adapted for disabled use or where it has been provided for a specific purpose, such as supported accommodation, it will normally be labeled to give preference to the appropriate client group.
- 3.29 If there is a planning requirement for a scheme (eg Section 106 agreements), vacancies in that scheme will be labeled according to the planning requirements. Similarly, if a scheme has been developed for a specific client group then the labeling will reflect that.
- 3.30 Where the vacancy is in a local connection area, the labeling will normally require a local connection and that the applicant must be in the Priority or High Priority category.
- 3.31 If there is an established need for designated key-workers to be re-housed to ensure the availability of an essential public service within the district and the Council agrees that the key-worker issue takes priority over other housing issues, then vacancies can be labeled so that preference is given to key-workers who would be able to provide the service.
- 3.32 If there are no eligible applicants for a vacancy, then a vacancy may be labeled so as to increase the number of people who will be eligible. This could include, for example, being more flexible about bedroom requirements.

- 3.33 If it is known that there are a large number of people with urgent or particular need for a vacancy, the labeling of the property may be more specific to reduce the number of applicants who may apply when they have no realistic chance of being offered the property.
- 3.34 In order to provide incentives for applicants to work and make a positive contribution to the local community, a percentage of all general needs housing will be advertised so that preference is given to households where one or more adult member of the household is in employment. The annual percentage will be between 10 and 20%.
- 3.35 Where sensitive allocations are required because of the needs of other vulnerable or elderly tenants, labeling may stipulate that successful applicants will need to be able to demonstrate that they will be able to manage a tenancy successfully.

Lettings plans

- 3.36 Where there are longstanding issues such as shortage of key-workers, difficult-to-let schemes or estates, ongoing 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 whole estate or scheme may be appropriate. The lettings plan will determine special labeling of vacancies over a defined scheme or estate and for a specific period of time.
- 3.37 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 or vulnerable people.

Advertising of vacancies

- 3.38 All properties, unless excluded from the choice based letting process, will be advertised widely to provide applicants with the best possible chance of exercising choice. The advert will include the full description and labeling of the property. Each property will normally be advertised for a period of 7 days. Where a property is for a specific client group who may need support in seeking accommodation, contact will, as far as resources allow, be made with the client or client's carer to ensure they are able to apply for vacancies.

Applying for vacancies

- 3.39 Interested applicants will respond to the adverts electronically or via a property request form, within the prescribed time limit.

Supporting applicants

- 3.40 Some applicants will need assistance in responding to advertised vacancies. This may be because the applicant is vulnerable or would benefit from assistance for other reasons. The Homesearch Team will seek to identify applicants who need assistance at application stage and will, as far as resources allow, help them to manage their application for housing by identifying possible vacancies, assisting with applying for vacancies, making referrals to other agencies as appropriate and advising on other housing options.

Managing choice for homeless applicants

- 3.41 To ensure that there is a turnover in the supply of temporary accommodation, applicants who have been accepted as homeless or whose homelessness has been prevented by the Council will have their applications managed by the Housing Needs Team.
- 3.42 Homeless applicants or those whose homelessness has been prevented by the Council will be placed on the Homesearch waiting list to ensure that they can be considered for settled housing.
- 3.43 Where possible, homeless applicants or those whose homelessness has been prevented by the Council will be entitled to the same degree of choice as other applicants but the level and choice of applications for vacancies 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 an application will be completed and submitted on their behalf for suitable vacancies. Refusal of any subsequent offer may discharge duties under the homelessness legislation.
- 3.44 If there is a shortage of temporary housing for homeless households or if households are facing homelessness and the Council may be obligated to assist them under the homelessness legislation, then the element of choice on the Homesearch list may be restricted so that homeless applicants or applicants whose homelessness has been prevented by the Council are required to consider or be considered for vacancies for which they do not normally express a preference. The effect of this may be to widen the types or locations of properties the households are applying for. This may expedite re-housing and enable

the Council to create vacancies of temporary housing or allow the Council to resolve the homelessness issues of applicants.

Managing choice for applicants with High Priority

- 3.45 Where applicants are awarded High Priority, the intention is that they should move more speedily than other applicants to quickly resolve their housing need. There is a presumption that applicants with High Priority will be considered for all suitable vacancies and not be too selective as this may delay re-housing. If the Homeseach Panel awards a High Priority, the Panel may place restrictions so that the High Priority applies only to certain property types and / or areas.

Sorting applications for vacancies

- 3.46 As soon as the time limit for applications has expired, the responses from applicants will be sorted. Those applicants who do not meet the advertised labeling criteria will be excluded from consideration. Where an advert stipulates that certain applicant types will be given preference over other applicant types (eg to working households, disabled households or applicants with a local connection), then all applicants within those groups will be considered above those who are not in the group to which preference is being given. Prioritisation for the vacancy will then take place 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.

- 3.47 Where the vacancy is in a rural parish, prioritising for the vacancy will take place in the following order:

- 1/ Applicants 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 in local connection Band A in the No Priority category in waiting list application date order.
- 11/ Applicants in local connection Band B in the No Priority category in waiting list application date order.
- 12/ Applicants in local connection Band C in the No Priority category in waiting list application date order.
- 13/ Other possible applicant groups (see below)

- 3.48 If a vacancy in a local connection parish area cannot be filled because there are no eligible applicants with a local connection, the property may be re-labeled to broaden the categories of people that may be eligible (for example, by under or over-occupying a property or by broadening the geographical locality to allow applicants with a connection with nearby rural parishes to be considered.) If it is still not possible to allocate a vacancy, applicants with a connection to the New Forest district will be considered and, finally, applicants without any connection to the district.

Adapted Properties

- 3.49 To ensure value for money and best use of stock, where a property has had significant adaptations for disabled people, the need of applicants for specific adaptations may take priority over other criteria (eg banding, date on list and local connection).

Verification of details

- 3.50 Before any offer of accommodation is made, applicants who may be offered the vacancy will be contacted for verification of all relevant information concerning their housing application and personal circumstances. This will include for example, family details; housing situation etc. If an applicant is found to be in rent arrears or to owe former tenant rent arrears, repair costs, damage deposit or rent in advance costs, then the applicant will not normally be offered re-housing unless a suitable arrangement is in place to clear the debt (this may include payment of a lump sum to reduce or clear the amount owing, or substantial evidence that an agreement is being adhered to) or where serious hardship would result if the accommodation is not offered.
- 3.51 Verification will also include gathering information on suitability to be a tenant. If it becomes clear at the verification stage that an applicant has demonstrated behaviour which may make them unsuitable to be a tenant (eg nuisance, criminal or anti-social behaviour or behaviour where they have deliberately or recklessly worsened their circumstances) then they will not normally be offered the tenancy. The applicant's priority and / or eligibility for the waiting list may also then be re-examined as information gleaned at verification stage may have an impact on the application.
- 3.52 For all vacancies in rural parishes, the local ward member will be contacted prior to allocation to obtain advice on the strength of the local connection.
- 3.53 If it is not possible to complete verification of the application within a reasonable time period, the applicant may be overlooked and the applicant next in line will be contacted.

- 3.54 Landlords may carry out their own verification processes and these will be in addition to the Homesearch verification.

Offer of tenancy

- 3.55 Once all verification processes are completed, the landlord makes an offer of the vacancy to the successful applicant.

Publishing details of the allocation

- 3.56 Feedback on allocations provides applicants with information to exercise choice and to gain information on the likely waiting time for re-housing. Details of the allocation will be published on the Homesearch website as soon as possible. Whilst the successful applicant's name will not be published, their application category and the length of time waiting will be published.

Exceptions to the choice based allocation process

- 3.57 Whilst most allocations will be managed through the choice based allocation process outlined above, there will be some circumstances when it will be necessary to exclude vacancies from the process.
- 3.58 Examples of lettings which may be excluded are as follows:
- a) Management moves (transfers or allocations carried out by the Council or housing associations to assist in the good management of tenancies and stock)
 - b) Decants to allow repairs to be carried out
 - c) Vacancies being let as temporary accommodation for households who are homeless or may be threatened with homelessness
 - 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
 - h) Where vacancies of extra-care housing are 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 re-housed, would be normally eligible for the type of property they occupy if it was to become vacant and wish to remain in the property

i) Renewal of flexible or shorthold tenancies

3.59 To ensure that the allocation system is open and transparent, vacancies excluded from the choice based allocations process should be kept to a minimum.

Allocations of extra-care housing

3.60 Allocations of extra-care housing will normally be managed outside of the choice based lettings process due to the vulnerability of applicants for extra-care schemes and the required partnership working with Hampshire County Council and care and support providers.

3.61 A separate agreement with Hampshire County Council will be entered into to set out detailed allocations processes for extra care, so this section of the Homeseach scheme will only set out broad principles.

3.62 Extra-care housing will normally be advertised on Homeseach on a non-specific basis to ensure awareness of the availability of extra-care.

3.63 The Homeseach Team will assess housing needs in accordance with the Homeseach scheme. An extra-care assessment and allocation panel (ECAP) will assess support and care needs.

3.64 For each vacancy, the ECAP will determine whether it is a vacancy for an applicant with High, Medium or Low care needs. This decision will depend on an understanding of the profile of tenants within the scheme (to ensure a balanced scheme) and the details of the particular vacancy (eg a fully adapted property may suggest higher care needs.)

3.65 All applicants on the list for extra-care housing will have an assessment of housing need as determined by the Homeseach allocation scheme and an assessment of the level of care needs (ie High / Medium / Low.) The number of hours of care provided for each applicant will be a useful measure of the level of care needs.

3.66 Each vacancy will be allocated to the most suitable applicant. When allocating, the following principles will apply:

- A vacancy of a High / Medium or Low care vacancy will normally be offered to the applicant with the equivalent level of care who is the highest on the Homeseach housing waiting list (ie – if there is a medium care vacancy, this will normally be allocated to the applicant with medium care needs who is highest placed on the Homeseach waiting list.)
- Other factors may be taken into consideration as well as the level of housing need. These will include the needs and preferences of

individuals (eg wheelchair needs, preferences for floor level and scheme preferences etc.)

- In line with the Homeseach policy, applicants with a local connection to the district will normally take priority over those without.
- If there is a vacancy of a double flat, consideration will be given to giving preference to couples.
- Where there are no suitable applicants, consideration will be given to applicants with a different level of care from the assessed vacancy if appropriate.
- Where it is still not possible to allocate a vacancy, the vacancy may be individually advertised on Homeseach as a vacancy of older persons' housing within an extra-care scheme and allocated by the Homeseach team.

4. Administration of the Homeseach Allocation Scheme

Responsibility for decisions made under the scheme

- 4.1 The following decisions will normally be the responsibility of named positions (or positions at equivalent or higher level) within New Forest District Council:

<u>Decision</u>	<u>Responsible Positions</u>
Eligibility of applicants	Allocations officer
Qualifying Persons	Allocations officer
Reasonable preference, category of applicants and connection to district	Allocations officer
Labeling of properties	Allocations officer
Whether to refer case to Homeseach Panel	Housing assistant
Local Connection Band	Housing assistant / Allocations officer

Decisions on key-worker status	Housing manager or assistant housing manager in consultation with the Head of Housing and Portfolio Holder for Housing.
Decisions on community contribution issues	Housing or assistant housing manager in consultation with the Head of Housing and Portfolio Holder for Housing.
Reducing the category of applicants	Allocations officer
Lettings Plans	Assistant director of housing
Sorting and selecting successful applications	Allocations officer
Verification	Allocations officer
Properties excluded from letting process	Allocations officer
Reviews (Appeals)	Assistant housing manager
Property labeling	Allocations officer
Households and bedroom requirements	Housing assistant / Allocations officer
Management transfers	Housing or assistant housing manager or allocations officer via Homeseach Panel

4.2 Other decisions will be taken by officers at an appropriate level.

Areas of choice

- 4.3 For administration and management purposes, applicants are required to stipulate which areas they would like to be housed in when they join the list. The following areas can be indicated freely by any applicant:

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

Rolling review

4. 4 A rolling review of housing applications will take place so that the waiting list is kept up to date. Each case will be reviewed at least every 12 months although applications may be reviewed at any time if it is considered that there are reasons for review. 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. Eligibility and qualification for the list may be reconsidered when an application is being reviewed.

Advice, information and confidentiality

- 4.5 Applicants have the right, on request, to information on any decisions made about the facts of their case which has been, or will be, taken into account in considering whether to allocate accommodation. Applicants have the right to general information to enable them to assess how their application is likely to be assessed or has been processed and information on the likelihood of being re-housed and likely waiting times. The Council will publish such information on the Homesearch website.
- 4.6 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.
- 4.7 The fact that an applicant or tenant has applied for re-housing will not normally be disclosed to any other member of the public without their consent being given.
- 4.8 Information recorded on the Council's computer system and on an applicant'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.

Right of review of decisions

- 4.9 Where the Council decides that an applicant is ineligible or is not a qualifying person, 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.

Procedures on review

- 4.10 The applicant will be notified of the timescale within which they must request a review. Normally, this will be a period of 21 days from the date the applicant is notified of the decision although the time limit may be extended in exceptional circumstances.
- 4.11 The applicant will be notified that review requests must be in writing. Following a request for a review, the applicant will be notified that they, or someone acting on their behalf, may make further written representations, normally within 10 days.
- 4.12 The review will be carried out by an officer senior to the officer that made the original decision. The review will take place on the basis of all information available at the time of the review. The applicant will be notified of the decision and reasons for the decision within 8 weeks of the original review request.

The Homesearch Panel

- 4.13 The Panel will normally meet on a fortnightly basis. The Panel will be quorate with two or more members present. The Panel is for professionals only and applicants are not able to attend.
- 4.14 The Panel will be chaired by an allocations officer and members of the panel may be:
 - Allocations officers
 - Homelessness and housing advice officers
 - Housing assistants
 - Neighbourhood and tenancy management officers or assistants
 - Representatives from partner housing associations
 - Representatives from Social Services
 - Representatives from the Locality Mental Health Teams
 - An occupational therapist
 - Support workers
 - Other professionals
- 4.15 The Homesearch Panel will make decisions on whether applicants should be given additional priority on the waiting list. Each case will be dealt with on its own merits whilst having regard to the general housing circumstances in the area.
- 4.16 As the Panel makes decisions on cases, Panel members should not be involved in decisions if they are presenting a case and any interests must be declared.

- 4.17 The position of the applicant on the waiting list will be taken into account as applicants in the Priority category with an early application date may not require additional priority to be speedily re-housed.
- 4.18 The Panel may set limits on choices of property types and areas for applicants where additional priority has been awarded.
- 4.19 The Panel may make decisions on the numbers of bedrooms required by applicants and on whether applicants require a bedroom for a carer.
- 4.20 The Panel will monitor the effect of awards of High Priority and may reduce priority if the applicant has not been applying for suitable properties.
- 4.21 If there is a high volume of cases, a Pre-Panel meeting may take place to make an initial assessment of each applicant's case and decide if the case should be presented to the Homeseach Panel. The Pre-Panel will consist of two allocations or homelessness and housing advice officers.
- 4.22 Where cases are considered by the Pre-Panel, they will not be put forward to the Homeseach Panel if:
- (i) There is no likelihood of them being considered for High Priority status by the Homeseach Panel
 - (ii) Information provided for consideration is irrelevant, insignificant, insufficient or has been duplicated from previous assessments
 - (iii) The case has previously been considered by the Pre-Panel or Panel and there is insufficient new information to warrant further consideration.

Role of Allocations Officer Panel

- 4.23 The Allocations Officer Panel will normally meet on a weekly basis to determine the labeling of vacant properties.
- 4.24 The Allocations Officer Panel will set eligibility and preference criteria for each vacancy and property labeling will take account of information on the likely level and type of need and the requirements of the landlord of the vacant properties.
- 4.25 The Allocations Officer Panel will make decisions on excluding vacancies from the choice based allocations process.

Fair housing policy

- 4.26 The Council is subject to the general public sector equality duty in the Equality Act 2010. The Council and its partner landlords are committed to providing equality of opportunity to all individuals who apply for re-

housing. Monitoring of applications and lettings may take place to ensure that everyone is being treated fairly.

Local connection with New Forest District

4.27 The following criteria will establish a local connection:

- i) Residence of applicant in the New Forest district for the two years immediately prior to application or for 10 years or more in the past.
- ii) Work-base of applicant in the district for five years or more.
- iii) Designated key worker, working in the district.

4.28 There may be rare instances where discretion needs to be exercised when assessing whether an applicant has a local connection. For example, where applicants have moved out of the district for very short periods of time or because of housing emergencies then it may be appropriate to exercise discretion.

Bedroom requirements

4.29 The table below sets out the normal bedroom requirements for typical households.

Family Size	Size of Accommodation
Single person	Bedsit or one bedroom
Two adults living as a couple	One bedroom
Adult couple, or single person with one child	Two bedrooms
Adult couple, or single person with two children of the same sex	Two bedrooms
Adult couple, or single person with two children of opposite sexes	Three bedrooms
Adult couple, or single person with three children	Three bedrooms
Adult couple, or single person with four or more children	Three/ four bedrooms
Adult couple, or single person with five or more children	Four / five bedrooms

4.30 Two siblings of the same sex and the same generation shall be expected to share one bedroom of appropriate size if they are living as part of their parents' household.

4.31 In exceptional circumstances, where it is accepted that two siblings of the same sex and the same generation form their own household they shall normally be entitled to separate bedrooms.

- 4.32 Siblings of a different generation are entitled to separate bedrooms. A 10-year age gap is a useful guideline for deciding whether siblings are from different generations, although each case shall be treated on its own merits.
- 4.33 Where applicants state that they need a separate bedroom for a carer, the Council will assess whether the carer is part of the household.
- 4.34 Where applicants state that a separate bedroom is required for household members who would normally be expected to share a bedroom, the Council will make a decision on whether a separate bedroom is required. Decisions may be referred to the Homeseach Panel if consideration of medical, social or welfare grounds is necessary.

Households

- 4.35 When applicants join the list, and whenever an application is reviewed, an assessment will be made of the make-up of the applicant's household. This assessment will normally be straightforward, but decisions may need to be made as to whether individuals included on an application form are accepted by the Council as being part of the household who, in the event of re-housing, will be accommodated with the applicant. The size and make-up of the household will determine the bedroom requirement.
- 4.36 Where there is household separation, the guidelines under 3.12(viii) will be applied to decide the make-up of the household.
- 4.37 Where the applicant states that they need a carer to live with them who would not normally be considered to be part of the household, then the Council will decide whether the carer is part of the household or could reasonably be expected to be part of the household. When making this decision, the starting point will be that instances where applicants need a live-in carer on a 24 hour basis who will form part of their household will be exceptional. In most cases, care can be provided without the provision of a separate bedroom for a carer.
- 4.38 Each case will be dealt with on its own merits, and the following factors will be taken into consideration along with any other relevant facts:
- Whether there is an established need for live-in 24 hour care
 - Availability of supported or extra-care housing which may meet the applicant's needs
 - Current living and care arrangements
 - Likely future living and care arrangements
 - Special circumstances

- The impact on scarce housing resources of providing additional bedrooms
- 4.39 Other cases may arise where there are queries about households (eg where adult sons or daughters return home or where distant relatives or friends are included on the housing application.)
- 4.40 In all such cases, the Council will make a decision on who should be considered to be part of the household and the following factors will be taken into consideration along with any other relevant facts:
- Access of people included on the application to other suitable accommodation
 - Previous living arrangements
 - Actual living arrangements
 - Preferred living arrangements
 - Evidence of longstanding residence and commitment to being part of the household
 - Likely longer-term living arrangements
 - Special circumstances
 - The impact on scarce housing resources of providing additional bedrooms

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

- 4.41 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 and make-up. If household sizes and make-up are similar, then other factors may be taken into consideration including previous tenancy history (poor tenancy conduct eg arrears, ASB issues will count against applicants), special circumstances and any positive contribution to the local community that applicants make. 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

- 4.42 If an applicant 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 qualifying person status and reducing the level of priority on the list.

Definitions

- 4.43 References to 'applicants' throughout the policy will normally also refer to all members of the household.
- 4.44 A restricted person is a person subject to immigration control who is not eligible for homelessness assistance because he does not have leave to enter or remain in the UK or has leave which is subject to a no recourse to public funds condition.
- 4.45 A work-base is defined as the main office or business establishment at which a person is based or from where their work is managed.
- 4.46 Applicants will be defined as being in work if they are in jobs where they hold explicit (written or oral) or implicit employment contracts which give them a remuneration which is declared for tax purposes, or are self-employed in meaningful employment and declare income for tax purposes. In establishing whether an applicant is in work, evidence may be required including written information such as tax returns, payslips, accounts etc. or evidence of tools of trade.
- 4.47 The date of application will normally be the date at which the applicant joined the list. The date of joining the list is usually defined as the date the fully completed application form is received by the Council. 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, a new application form will normally be required but the application date will remain the same unless there has been a significant change in their housing situation or the applicant has not informed the Council of their change of address in a timely manner. In the latter situation, the application date will normally change to the date of receipt of the new application form.
- 4.48 Anti-social behaviour is defined as a behaviour where a person acts in a manner that causes or is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons not of the same household as himself or has caused nuisance or annoyance to neighbours, or has been convicted of using their dwelling house or allowing it to be used for immoral or illegal purposes.
- 4.49 Poor tenancy or household management arises where there is evidence that applicants have failed to appropriately manage their occupation of accommodation, including significant arrears or other housing debts or problems with dilapidation. In all cases, the individual circumstances of the applicant will be taken into consideration.
- 4.50 Isolated areas within the New Forest will normally include all of the local connection areas and Calshot. However, other areas may be designated as isolated depending on the individual needs of the applicant.

- 4.51 Hard-to-let properties are properties which the Council ordinarily finds difficulty in letting due to low demand.
- 4.52 Applicants will be considered to have the means to resolve their own housing problems if they have the resources to resolve any housing issues they face which would fall under section 3.12 of the policy. Resources could be financial or otherwise and include access to alternative housing in the United Kingdom or elsewhere.

DRAFT

5. Other Allocation Processes

5.1 A number of other allocation processes take place which are outside of the normal allocation processes of the Homesearch scheme.

Allocation of temporary housing

5.2 For allocations of temporary housing to homeless people or to prevent homelessness, direct allocations will be made by the homelessness and housing advice officers.

5.3 The main aims of allocating temporary housing are to resolve homelessness, meet statutory requirements and to minimise the use of bed and breakfast.

5.4 There are a number of situations in which applicants can be waiting for temporary housing. The most common ones are:

- Accepted homeless applicants who have been placed in bed and breakfast.
- Accepted homeless applicants in other forms of emergency housing (e.g. refuge, staying with friends/relatives).
- Households being assisted to prevent homelessness.
- Households already in temporary housing where the household is going back to the owner.
- Households already in temporary accommodation where the accommodation is not fully suitable for their needs.

5.5 Allocations of temporary housing are a question of judgement for each individual vacancy, as the homelessness and housing advice officer will have to balance the needs and requirements of a number of different individuals in different circumstances. The matters which the homelessness and housing advice officer must take into account include:

- The length of time applicants have been in bed and breakfast. Bed and breakfast is not suitable accommodation for applicants with family commitments unless used in an emergency and then for a maximum of six weeks.

- The length of time applicants have been in other forms of emergency housing awaiting temporary accommodation. Whilst refuge and other forms of emergency accommodation are normally more suitable than bed and breakfast, lengthy waits in emergency housing should be avoided where possible.
- Where temporary accommodation is going back to the owner and delays may cause families to be placed in bed and breakfast or significant difficulties to landlords.
- The length of time that a client in temporary housing has been waiting for alternative temporary accommodation and the extent of the problems that the applicant is experiencing in their current accommodation.
- Where the Council has been trying to prevent homelessness, the length of time that a household has been waiting for accommodation and the possibilities that they will become homeless if not offered housing.
- The areas of choice of each applicant and the availability of accommodation in or close to the areas of choice.

Management moves

- 5.6 Management moves take place when it is necessary or appropriate to transfer a tenant or occupier of a Council or housing association property to assist in the best management of the landlord's housing stock. Management moves may be a more suitable course of action in addressing tenancy issues than consideration of additional priority for applicants as issues may not strictly be related to housing problems.
- 5.7 Where a management move is agreed, tenants or occupiers may have their application placed in the High Priority Urgent category or considered for a direct allocation. In all cases, applications will be managed so that the Homesearch Team takes decisions on which property will be suitable.
- 5.8 Where management moves are considered because of neighbour problems or issues of anti-social behaviour, a move should only be explored in exceptional circumstances.
- 5.9 A useful rule of thumb for consideration of a management move when there are issues of anti-social behaviour, is whether there are concerns that the tenant may be living in a situation that may trigger a homelessness application (i.e. concerns over the reasonableness of the applicant remaining in residence).
- 5.10 If the tenant is a Council tenant and a transfer within the Council's own stock is appropriate, the Neighbourhood and Tenancy Management

Team will seek a decision from the Homesearch Team. At this stage, a decision may be sought from the Homesearch Panel if appropriate. If a transfer to a partner housing association is also sought as an option, then the case must be passed to the Homesearch Panel for a decision.

- 5.11 If the tenant is a housing association tenant and a transfer within the housing association's own stock is appropriate, then the housing association will notify the Council of the transfer after it has taken place. If a transfer to an alternative housing association or to the Council is requested, then the case must be passed to the Homesearch Panel for a decision.
- 5.12 When a management move is approved which requires alternative housing to be secured by the Homesearch Team, appropriate locations and types of properties must be identified and agreed by the Homesearch Team. Normally, management moves will take place to similar property types and sizes. However, applicants who are under-occupying their tenancy may be offered accommodation more suitable to the needs of their household. Offers may also depend on the availability of housing within the required area the applicant needs to move to (for example, some areas do not have many flats, so there may be an offer of either a flat or a house). The tenant will be notified of the agreed areas and property types.
- 5.13 The allocations officer will identify suitable vacancies and submit applications on behalf of the tenant. If appropriate, direct allocations may be made to properties which are not advertised.

Allocation of garages

- 5.14 To be considered for a Council garage, applicants must be 18 years or older and submit an application to the Council on the appropriate form.
- 5.15 Garages will normally be allocated on a date order basis from when the application form was received, however:
- Preference may be given to applicants living in the same street as the void garage.
 - Preference will be given to applicants who do not currently hold a NFDC garage tenancy over an applicant who already has 2 or more garages.
- 5.16 Applicants may not be allocated a garage if the:
- applicant owes NFDC former or current arrears on a council property or garage
 - applicant owes NFDC former or current recharges on a council property or garage
 - applicant owes housing-related debts to the Council

- applicant has previously been evicted or has had poor past payment history of a garage tenancy.
- 5.17 A review of the garage waiting list will be carried out at least once a year.
- 5.18 Succession of a garage may take place depending on a number of factors:
- Demand in the area
 - The successor tenant's address
 - Payment history
- 5.19 Charities or non profitable organisations are able to apply for a garage to be held on a free of charge basis. Only hard-to-let garages may be let free of charge (ie where there are 2 or more garages available to let in the same street and where there are no eligible applicants on the garage waiting list for them.)