

Public Document Pack



COTSWOLD
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Friday, 22 October 2021

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CABINET

A meeting of the Cabinet will be held in the Council Chamber at the Council Offices, Trinity Road, Cirencester on **Monday, 1 November 2021 at 6.00 pm.**

Rob Weaver
Chief Executive

To: Members of the Cabinet
(Councillors Rachel Coxcoon, Tony Dale, Andrew Doherty, Mike Evemy, Jenny Forde, Joe Harris, Juliet Layton and Lisa Spivey)

Recording of Proceedings – The law allows the public proceedings of Council, Cabinet, and Committee Meetings to be recorded, which includes filming as well as audio-recording. Photography is also permitted.

As a matter of courtesy, if you intend to record any part of the proceedings please let the Committee Administrator know prior to the date of the meeting.

AGENDA

1. **Apologies**
2. **Declarations of Interest**
To receive any declarations of interest from Members and Officers, relating to items to be considered at the meeting.
3. **Minutes** (Pages 5 - 8)
To approve the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 4 October 2021.
4. **Chair's Announcements (if any)**
5. **Public Questions**
To deal with questions from the public within the open forum question and answer session of fifteen minutes in total. Questions from each member of the public should be no longer than two minutes each and relate issues under the Committee's remit.
6. **Member Questions**
To deal with written questions by Members, relating to issues under the Committee's remit, with the maximum length of oral supplementary questions at Committee being no longer than one minute. Responses to any supplementary questions will be dealt with in writing if they cannot be dealt with at the meeting.
7. **Consideration of Notice of Motion 6/2020/21 Flytipping** (Pages 9 - 16)
Purpose
For Cabinet to consider the Notice of Motion submitted to Council in January 2021 in respect of surveillance of flytipping sites.

Recommendation
It is recommended that Cabinet do not support the provision of overt or covert CCTV to support flytipping prosecutions but continue with the present approach to investigating flytipping.
8. **Freedom of Information Act Requests** (Pages 17 - 22)
Purpose
A report to update members on the Council's compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and to set out proposals for the future management of requests for information.

Recommendations
It is recommended that Cabinet:
 - a) Notes the report;
 - b) Supports the publication of quarterly statistics on the Council's website as set out in paragraph 4.1 of this report;
 - c) Requests that the Business Manager for Corporate Responsibility undertakes further research into the options available for publishing all Freedom of Information requests on the Council's website and reports back to Cabinet in

January 2022; and

- d) Whilst the options for recommendation c) are being considered, supports the creation of a frequently asked Freedom of Information requests webpage as set out in paragraph 4.3 of this report.

9. **HomeseekerPlus Policy Update** (Pages 23 - 144)

Purpose

To update Members on the legislative changes needed to ensure that the Homeseeker Plus Policy meets the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Allocation of Accommodation standards and reflects the outcome of the stakeholder consultation.

Recommendations

That Cabinet:

- a) Approves the Policy for adoption
- b) Give approval for the HomeseekerPlus Management Board to:
 - Confirm the date for adoption once all partners have approval through their individual authorities governance structure (likely to be early 2022)
 - Professionally format the Policy prior to publication

10. **Cotswold District Council Community Housing Fund (CHF)** (Pages 145 - 152)

Purpose

To update Cabinet on the role of Community-Led Housing Enabler and seek Cabinet approval for proposals for the allocation of the CHF small grants fund.

Recommendation

That the Council agree to authorise the determination of allocations from the Council's CHF small grants fund to an Allocations Panel, to consist of the Group Manager for Commissioning, the Strategic Housing Manager, the Community-led Housing Enabler/Housing Enabling Officer, and the Chief Finance Officer, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness.

11. **Community Funding for the 2022 Queens Platinum Jubilee Celebrations** (Pages 153 - 158)

Purpose

To consider the Motion "Community Funding for the 2022 Queen's Platinum Jubilee Celebrations" put to Council on 22 September 2021.

Recommendation

That Cabinet agrees that it is appropriate to signpost community groups to either their local Town or Parish Council for small value contributions to the 2022 Queen's Platinum Jubilee Celebrations or to Crowdfund Cotswold for larger projects that require a financial contribution in excess of £500.

12. **Issue(s) Arising From Overview and Scrutiny and/or Audit**

At this point of the meeting, members of the public will be asked to leave before Cabinet formally considers agenda item 13. The item is classed as exempt under Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

13. **Property Works - Cirencester** (Pages 159 - 166)

Purpose

To request approval to fund Landlord roof works at a property in Cirencester

Recommendations

That Cabinet approves:

- a) option 3 for roof works at the property;
- b) funding for the roof works to be funded from the ring fenced lease income received from the tenants;
- c) a contingency sum to be included in the capital budget funded from the ring fenced lease income received from the tenants;
- d) that delegated authority is given to the Deputy Chief Executive in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet member for Finance to approve expenditure against the contingency sum if required; and
- e) delegated authority is given to the Deputy Chief Executive to update the Capital Programme, Capital Strategy and Treasury Management Strategy.

(END)

Cabinet
04/October2021



COTSWOLD
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Cabinet held on Monday, 4 October 2021.

Councillors present:

Tony Dale
Andrew Doherty

Mike Every (Chair)
Jenny Forde

Juliet Layton
Lisa Spivey

Officers present:

Angela Claridge, Interim Monitoring Officer
Caleb Harris, Democratic Services Officer
Claire Locke, Group Manager, Commissioning
Ben Patel-Sadler, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Jenny Poole, Deputy Chief Executive
Robert Weaver, Chief Executive

Observers:

Councillor Stephen Andrews

31 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Joe Harris and Rachel Coxcoon.

32 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest from Members.

There were no declarations of interest from Officers.

33 Minutes

RESOLVED that, subject to the following amendments, the minutes of the meeting of the 6 September 2021 be approved as a correct record:

- Councillors Nikki Ind and Patrick Coleman had attended the previous meeting as observers.

Record of Voting - for 6, against 0, abstention 0, absent 2.

34 Chair's Announcements (if any)

The Chair informed Cabinet that there had been a change to the leadership of the Opposition.

Councillor Tony Berry was the new leader of the Opposition.

The Deputy Leader of the Council welcomed Councillor Tony Berry to his new position.

35 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

36 Member Questions

There were no Member questions.

37 Medium Term Financial Strategy and Budget Proposals 2022-23

The Deputy Leader of the Council introduced the report which Cabinet noted addressed the position on Government funding and the subsequent need to increase Council revenue.

Cabinet noted the anticipated changes to business rates.

Scenario one anticipated that Government funding would equate to £6.4 million in 2022-23 which represented a reduction to the amount provided for the previous financial year.

Cabinet noted that it had been difficult to plan this budget due to the uncertainties around what the specific future levels of Government funding would be.

It was further noted by Cabinet that the Council had achieved the previously unidentified savings targets and had also ensured that investment was made to fund the Council's waste service.

Cabinet noted that a consultation on the budget would take place with residents. The consultation would be delivered using lessons learned from previous consultations. The aim was to engage with as many residents and businesses as possible. This would be achieved via the usage of several communication mediums. The consultation would run for six weeks, closing on 17 November 2021.

Cabinet noted that the views of residents and businesses would help to shape the proposed budget. The Cabinet would shape the final version of the proposed budget in February 2022 before it was then formally considered by the Council.

It was further noted by Cabinet that one of the key aspects of this work would be seeking the views of residents around a potential change to the way in which car parking charges were delivered in the district.

Challenges facing the Council included a potential shortfall in car parking income. The Council was now having to meet the full costs of any revenue losses in this area after Government support had ceased.

Cabinet noted that this budget sought to deliver further savings in the region of £800k. Delivery of this budget would achieve a surplus of £180k (as per scenario 1).

Cabinet

04/October2021

Cabinet noted that further funding pressures were around the costs of retaining drivers, flooding, ICT and work in active Gloucestershire.

Cabinet noted that the Council would be seeking to recruit a Director of Governance which would replace the current part-time Interim Monitoring Officer role. This appointment would complement the current senior staff team.

Cabinet noted that funding would be made available to support climate action in local communities.

Cabinet noted that there would be a renewed focus on investing in order to generate revenue.

Cabinet noted the risks around investing in order to generate revenue, particularly as it was sometimes common for such exercises to take some time to realise revenue generation.

Cabinet further noted the risks associated with the planning of the budget including the unknown future impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and others outlined in the report.

Cabinet noted that businesses had been receptive to the Council's strategy of providing employment opportunities to young people via technologically advanced businesses (including newly formed businesses). This was aligned with the Council's green economic growth strategy.

Cabinet further noted the importance of acknowledging the impact of current and potential inflation rates on the budget.

Cabinet acknowledged the changes to the current jobs market in relation to salary changes to certain professions/ positions and how this may impact on the Council going forwards.

The Cabinet noted that the Council could potentially undertake a cost recovery exercise in terms of fees and charges (this was dependent on the future rate of inflation).

In relation to investments made by the Council during a period of attempting to reduce costs, Cabinet noted it was essential to increase revenues so that investments in new programmes/ schemes for the benefit of local communities could take place. This was also dependent on levels of future grant funding.

Cabinet noted that if a three-year funding settlement figure was provided by the Government, it would be possible to determine where investments could be made.

Cabinet noted that an immediate decline in business rates collected by the Council was unlikely due to new businesses locating to the area and the nature of businesses currently located in the district.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

(a) Approved the draft 2022/23 budget for consultation.

(b) Approved the transfer of the balances on the earmarked reserves at Annex B to the Council Priorities Fund.

Record of Voting - for 6, against 0, abstention 0, absent 2.

38 Issue(s) Arising From Overview and Scrutiny and/or Audit

Cabinet noted the urgent decision taken in August 2021.

39 Property Acquisition - Cirencester

At this point of the meeting the Chair requested that members of the public now left before Cabinet formally considered agenda item 9 which was in relation to a property acquisition in Cirencester. The item was classed as exempt under Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972'.

Record of Voting - for 6, against 0, abstention 0, absent 2.

Following discussions, Cabinet noted the high level option appraisals prepared and agreed that Officers proceeded in line with the previous decisions and delegations to negotiate terms and acquire the site.

Record of Voting - for 6, against 0, abstention 0, absent 2.

The Meeting commenced at 6pm and closed at 07:30pm

Chair

(END)

Council name	COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	CABINET – 1 NOVEMBER 2021
Report Number	AGENDA ITEM 07
Subject	CONSIDERATION OF NOTICE OF MOTION 6/2020/21 FLYTIPPING
Wards affected	ALL
Accountable member	Cllr Andrew Doherty - Cabinet Member for Environment, Waste and Recycling Email: andrew.doherty@cotswold.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Jon Dearing – Group Manager for Resident Services Email: jon.dearing@publicagroup.uk Mandy Fathers – Business Manager for Operational Support and Enabling Email: mandy.fathers@publicagroup.uk
Summary/Purpose	For Cabinet to consider the Notice of Motion submitted to Council in January 2021 in respect of surveillance of flytipping sites.
Annexes	Annex A – Locations of Flytips
Recommendation/s	It is recommended that Cabinet do not support the provision of overt or covert CCTV to support flytipping prosecutions but continue with the present approach to investigating flytipping.
Corporate priorities	Delivering services to the highest standards
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	



I. BACKGROUND

- I.1. On 20 January 2021 a Notice of Motion was put to Council by Councillor Tony Berry and seconded by Councillor Julia Judd. The Motion is reproduced below:-

'The new mapping system introduced to identify instances of fly-tipping is highly successful and much appreciated. On checking recently that various events had been reported I was dismayed to see that there were 6 current instances in my Ward and so I spoke with ERS about what we might do to reduce this amount, particularly in those spots which regularly received unwanted deposits. To my amazement I was told we don't have any cameras which we can put in these locations to catch/deter those dumping their (or someone else's) rubbish.

Catching and finding these people that desecrate our countryside must be the best deterrent and usually gains good publicity. Although considerable efforts are being made to try to do so, catching people in the act must surely be an option our officers have to help them. From some research I discovered that motion activated cameras of good quality can be purchased for under £500. Whilst these might not be the right sort of camera, we can surely find out from Councils which are best suited and have good success rates. Even if they cost £1,000 each, it must be a worthwhile investment.

Equally there must be other 'good practices' in the industry that we could investigate (e.g. paying for skips in strategic locations).

We would therefore recommend to this Council that it puts aside up to £50,000 to:

- 1) Investigate the purchase and use of cameras to support the efforts to catch and fine fly-tippers.*
- 2) Investigate other possible activities that would help reduce or remove this scourge from our district, and report back to this Council if further funds are required.'*

- I.2. The Motion stood referred by Council to Cabinet to allow for further investigation. This report represents the reporting back to Cabinet on that further investigation.

2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1. The powers for enforcement of fly-tipping in open spaces or land owned, managed or maintained by the District lie with Cotswold District Council and are discharged by the Environmental Health Team. Where there is large scale dumping of hazardous waste, the Environment Agency may take the lead enforcement role. Waste dumped on private land is the responsibility of the landowner to remove and dispose of at a cost to them.
- 2.2. The use of Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) to catch and deter fly-tippers can be one part of an overall strategy to reduce the prevalence of this environmental crime. However, it has its costs and limitations and its use is highly regulated by legislation. It is



therefore important to review its use within the context of an overall strategy that combines resourcing (human and financial), prevention and enforcement.

Current Approach

- 2.3.** Over the last three budgets the Council has invested significant resource into the investigation, enforcement and where applicable prosecution of environmental crimes. Through investing £35,000 each year in additional staffing resource and £200,000 in the Clean and Green Initiative the Council is now able to investigate the fly tips in detail and where evidence is available of the person responsible for the waste (this could either be a householder, business or person transporting the waste) take action.
- 2.4.** The resource has also enabled a major education and awareness raising campaign to be launched promoting the district as Clean and Green.

Use of CCTV

- 2.5.** The use of CCTV, particularly covert surveillance, is regulated by laws which are intended to protect individual's rights to privacy. The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (as amended) (RIPA) requires the use of covert surveillance by a local authority to be authorised by a Magistrate. Authorisation requires periodic review and covert CCTV surveillance cannot be left in place indefinitely.
- 2.6.** The Act was brought in to regulate surveillance activity with a light touch review but was subsequently tightened to require Magistrate sign off after a series of high profile cases were raised by national government with the Communities Secretary Eric Pickles particular vocal about excessive use of covert surveillance by Councils.
- 2.7.** Notwithstanding this overt cameras can be a deterrent and may discourage fly-tipping from hotspots. Installation of overt cameras does not require authorisation by a Magistrate but does require clear policies for use.
- 2.8.** In all areas where CCTV is in use should be clearly signed. Such signs warn people that they are about to enter an area covered by a CCTV system or to remind them that they are still in an area covered by CCTV.
- 2.9.** Where CCTV signage is used and there might be penalties incurred from the images recorded, then the signs must reflect the risks. For example, where CCTV is used in relation to environmental offences, the signage must warn that legal action is a risk is offences are recorded.
- 2.10.** Mobile CCTV surveillance incurs not just the cost of equipment purchase, operation and maintenance, and signage mentioned above, but most significantly, the substantial cost of the staff time needed to gather and review information. If there is a positive catch of

someone on camera, that is where the work intensifies in identifying vehicles, potential offenders, taking statements and preparing the evidence for a final decision on enforcement action and potential prosecution. Unless the Council is prepared to fully resource the process from camera deployment to prosecution this is unlikely to be successful.

- 2.11. Mobile CCTV probably works best when it is incorporated into a wider public space CCTV environment so that cameras can be monitored through that arrangement. The CCTV arrangements for Cirencester are operated through the Town Council .
- 2.12. If the Council wishes to pursue CCTV as an option it will need to develop a policy setting out how CCTV is used by the Council for Enforcement purposes. This would need to be made publicly available and is an important part of transparency. Without this framework, accusations of unfair treatment may be levelled at the authority. More importantly, it will ensure that decision makers (senior officers and elected members) consider in advance the situations under which different types of enforcement action will be taken. This policy should form part of the Council's adopted Enforcement Policy and be consistent with it.
- 2.13. The Council will need to consider the measures it chooses dependent on whether its objective is to take enforcement action or simply deter would-be offenders. Purchasing surveillance equipment should only be considered if:
- There are identified key hot spots where fly tipping takes place at least once a month. Less than that you are unlikely to catch it on camera
 - There is a high level of commitment to using surveillance equipment
 - There is a commitment to increase human resources in the areas of intelligence gathering, deploying and servicing the cameras on site, and investigating recorded incidents
 - There is an ongoing budget for equipment purchase and maintenance.
- 2.14. The biggest downside to overt surveillance is that it merely pushes flytipping to other locations where the mobile cameras are not located with an outcome of chasing activity and tying up important investigative resource. Without a significant array of cameras it would prove impossible to prevent such activity.
- 2.15. The Council has invested heavily in this area over the last two years to deliver its 'Clean and Green' agenda through the investigation and prosecution of flytips based on evidence gathered at the scene. It is not felt appropriate at this stage to invest further taxpayers money setting up a CCTV regime that will be unlikely to receive Magistrate support for covert activity or merely push flytipping to other locations where overt signage is used.
- 2.16. In respect of other activities that the Council could undertake to reduce flytipping it is clear from the actions we have taken that education and personal responsibility plays a large part in this. Our recent work to publicise and educate on Clean and Green is leading



the way and this together with active enforcement and prosecutions provides a round solution to the problem.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1. Whilst the financial implications of the provision of cameras and associated equipment are quite low as set out below, there would be more significant ongoing costs from the associated staffing resources required to undertake the RIPA assessments; provide and maintain signage; and maintain and review camera footage.
- 3.2. A single camera, hardware and battery for the equipment to operate are costly and prices can range from £2,500 – £5,000. In order to achieve successful enforcement a minimum of two cameras would be required at each site. Cheaper alternatives are available but they may not be of a quality standard and functionality to achieve a successful outcome.
- 3.3. Investigatory and legal costs should not be underestimated although these may be recovered if a prosecution was successful.
- 3.4. More particularly there is a real risk that maintaining a camera regime that does not deliver evidence to support prosecution will detract from the exceptional work that the team are doing to support the Clean and Green Cotswold agenda.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. The law relating to the use of surveillance equipment is complex and strict and is different depending on whether overt or covert cameras are being used.
- 4.2. The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) governs the legislation in how covert surveillance operations are carried out. RIPA does not grant powers to carry out surveillance, it simply provides a framework that allows the Council to authorise and supervise surveillance in a manner that ensures compliance with the Human Rights Act 1998 principles as follows:
 - The proposed action must be lawful
 - The proposed action must be proportionate
 - The proposed action must be necessary
 - The proposed action must be non-discriminatory
- 4.3. RIPA was overseen by the Office of Surveillance Commissioners (OSC). However, from 1 Sept 2017 oversight is now provided by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office (IPCO). They are the independent inspection office whose remit includes providing comprehensive oversight of the use of the powers to which the RIPA code applies, and adherence to the practices and processes described in it. The OSC have unfettered access to all locations, documentation and information systems as is necessary to carry out their full functions and duties and they will periodically inspect the records and procedures of



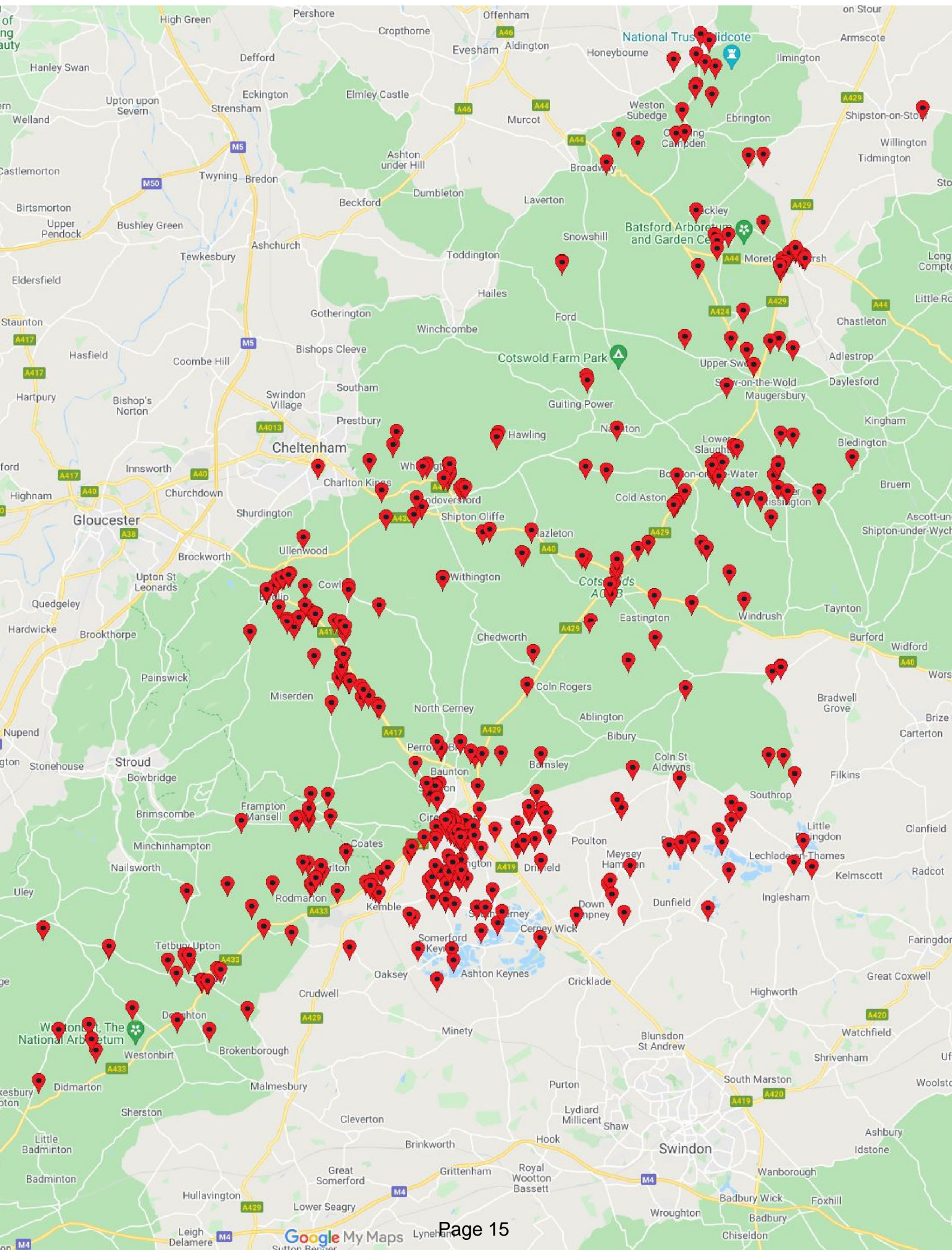
the Council to ensure the appropriate authorisations have been given, reviewed, cancelled, and recorded properly.

5. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 5.1. There are several risks associated with the use of CCTV. These are mainly in respect of the legislation.
- 5.2. Officers will need to have the appropriate training regarding the installation and use of equipment, as well as having an in-depth knowledge and understanding of criminal law and procedures.

6. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. Tackling fly tipping will make positive contributions towards improving the environment and sustainability. The fly tips create adverse impacts on the local environment and use significant resources in removing them and carrying out investigations



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Council name	COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	CABINET – 1 NOVEMBER 2021
Report Number	AGENDA ITEM 08
Subject	FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT REQUESTS
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Cllr Joe Harris, Leader of the Council Email: joe.harris@cotswold.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Claire Hughes, Business Manager for Corporate Responsibility Email: claire.hughes@publicagroup.uk
Summary/Purpose	A report to update members on the Council's compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and to set out proposals for the future management of requests for information.
Annexes	Annex A – Performance Statistics for 2020/21 and Q1 and Q2 of 2021/22
Recommendation(s)	<i>It is recommended that Cabinet:</i> <i>a) Notes the report;</i> <i>b) Supports the publication of quarterly statistics on the Council's website as set out in paragraph 4.1 of this report;</i> <i>c) Requests that the Business Manager for Corporate Responsibility undertakes further research into the options available for publishing all Freedom of Information requests on the Council's website and reports back to Cabinet in January 2022; and</i> <i>d) Whilst the options for recommendation c) are being considered, supports the creation of a frequently asked Freedom of Information requests webpage as set out in paragraph 4.3 of this report.</i>
Corporate priorities	Delivering our services to the highest standards
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	None other than those required as part of the reporting processes.



1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1** The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act) provides public access to information held by the Council. It does this in two ways:
- The Council is obliged to publish certain information about its activities; and
 - Members of the public are entitled to request information from the Council
- 1.2** The Act covers any recorded information that is held by the Council. Recorded information includes printed documents, computer files, letters, emails, photographs and sound or video recordings.
- 1.3** Unless one of the statutory exemptions applies, the Council is required to provide copies of information requested by members of the public.

2. PUBLICATION OF INFORMATION

- 2.1** As referenced above one of the requirements of the Act is an obligation on the Council to publish certain information about its activities. To assist public bodies in complying with this requirement the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) has developed and published a model publication scheme that provides a framework for publication of relevant data.
- 2.2** The Council has fully adopted the model publication scheme and this is available via the website: <https://www.cotswold.gov.uk/about-the-council/council-data-and-access-to-information/council-data-and-information-listings-freedom-of-information-publication-scheme/>. As such the Council has complied with this requirement.

3. REQUESTS MADE BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

- 3.1** In addition to publishing information, the Council is also required to respond to requests for information received from members of the public. The statutory timescale for responding is 20 working days, although it should be noted that this was relaxed for a period during the height of the Pandemic.
- 3.2** Statistics showing the number of requests received by the Council for the financial years 2019/20, 2020/21 and Q1 and Q2 of 2021/22 can be found in Annex A. This Annex also provides information relating to the percentage of requests that have been complied with within the statutory 20 working days.
- 3.3** Members may also wish to note that no complaints regarding the Council's handling of Freedom of Information requests have been referred to the ICO since 2018.



4. FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS

4.1 *Publication of statistics*

4.1.1 The ICO best practice encourages all public authorities with over 100 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) employees to publish, on a quarterly basis, details of their performance on handling requests for information, including:

- The number of requests received during the period;
- The number of the received requests that have not yet been processed (you may also wish to show how many of these outstanding requests have extended deadlines or a stopped clock, e.g. because a fee notice has been issued);
- The number of the received requests that were processed in full (including numbers for those that were met within the statutory deadline, those where the deadline was extended and those where the processing took longer than the statutory deadline);
- The number of requests where the information was granted in full;
- The number of requests where the information was refused in full (you may wish to identify separately those where this was because the information was not held);
- The number of requests where the information was granted in part and refused in part;
- The number of requests received that have been referred for internal review (this needs only reporting annually).

4.1.2 Given that the Council does not have over 100 FTEs it has no requirement to publish the data as recommended. However, to demonstrate the Council's commitment to openness and transparency it is suggested that this information is published every quarter with effect from the end of Q3 2021/22 and, where possible, the retrospective data for Q1 and Q2 of this financial year is published as soon as possible.

4.2 *Publication of all requests*

4.2.1 A further matter of best practice identified by the ICO is the publication of all requests received and the Council's responses. Officers have commenced exploring options to establish how this may be feasible. However, at this time no firm recommendation can be made. Therefore Cabinet is asked to note that this work is underway and that the Business Manager for Corporate Responsibility will report back to Cabinet with the potential option in January 2022.

4.3 *Introduction of frequently asked FOI's*

4.3.1 As part of the data collection process officers track information regarding the details of requests received. This enables them to identify key themes and frequently asked questions. At one of the partner Councils this tracking has facilitated the creation of a 'frequently made freedom of information requests' webpage where Officers actively can publish information in an attempt to reduce the number of requests received. Whilst the options referred to in 4.2 above are explored Cabinet is asked to endorse the creation of a similar webpage for Cotswold District Council.



5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 None associated with this report

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Save from the legal matters referred to there are no further legal implications arising directly from this Report.

7. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 There is a legal, financial and reputational risk to the Council if it fails to respond to requests for information promptly.

8. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 8.1 There are no equalities impacts arising from this report

9. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no climate or ecological emergency implications arising from this report.

10. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 10.1 Cabinet may determine to note the report and not to endorse recommendations b), c) and d)

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

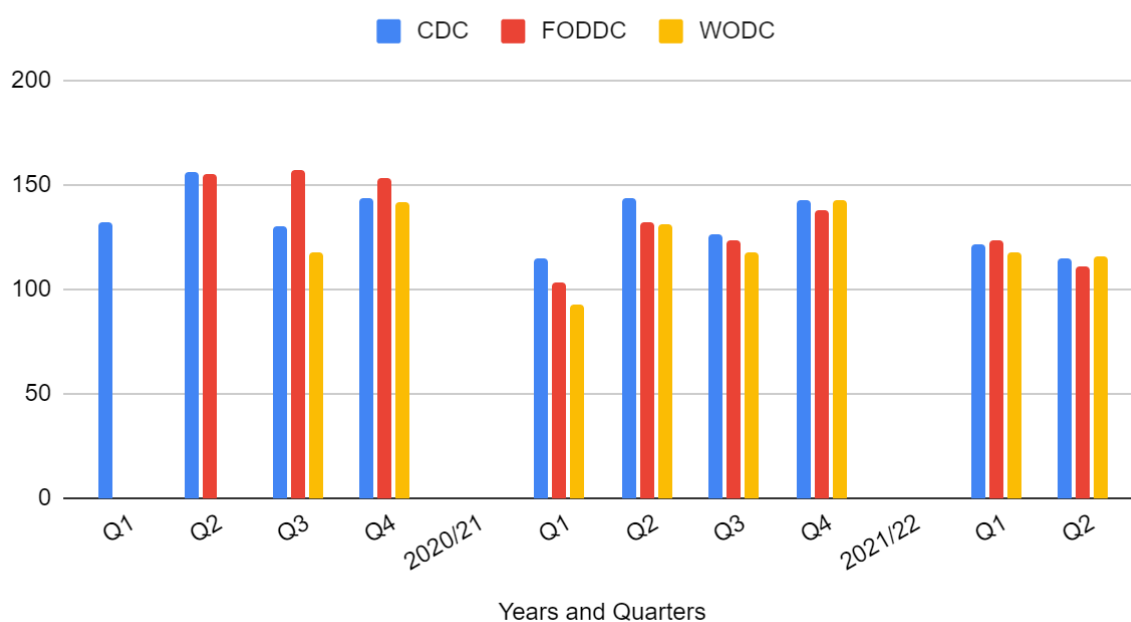
- 11.1 None

(END)

Performance Statistics

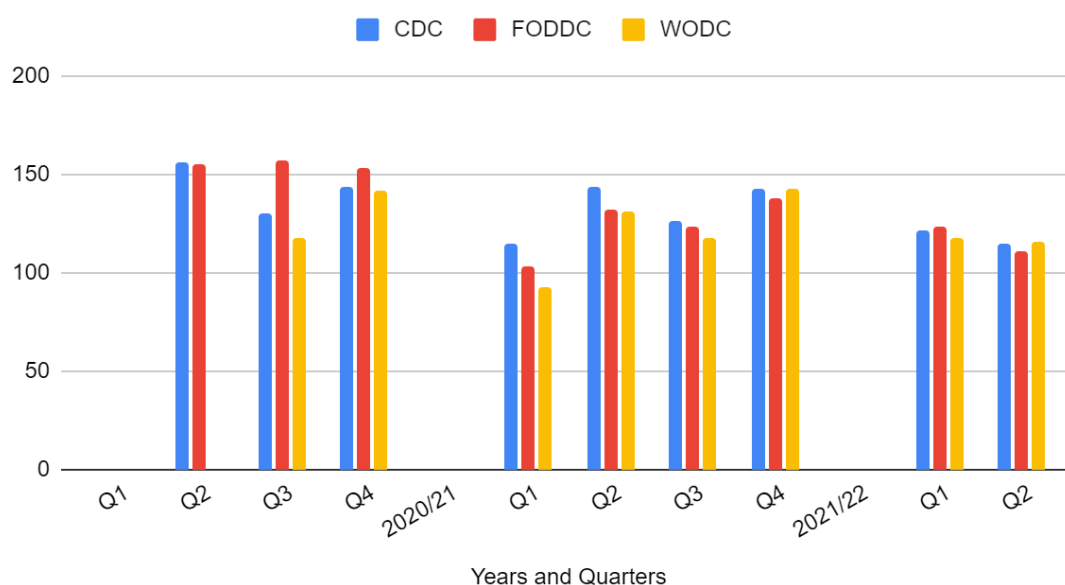
The chart below shows the number of requests received for CDC for the financial years 2019/20, 2020/21 and quarters 1 and 2 of 2021/22.

CDC, FODDC and WODC



The number of requests received can be compared with the partner councils as follows
Please note that there is no comparison for Q1 of 2019/20 due to a lack of data:

CDC, FODDC and WODC



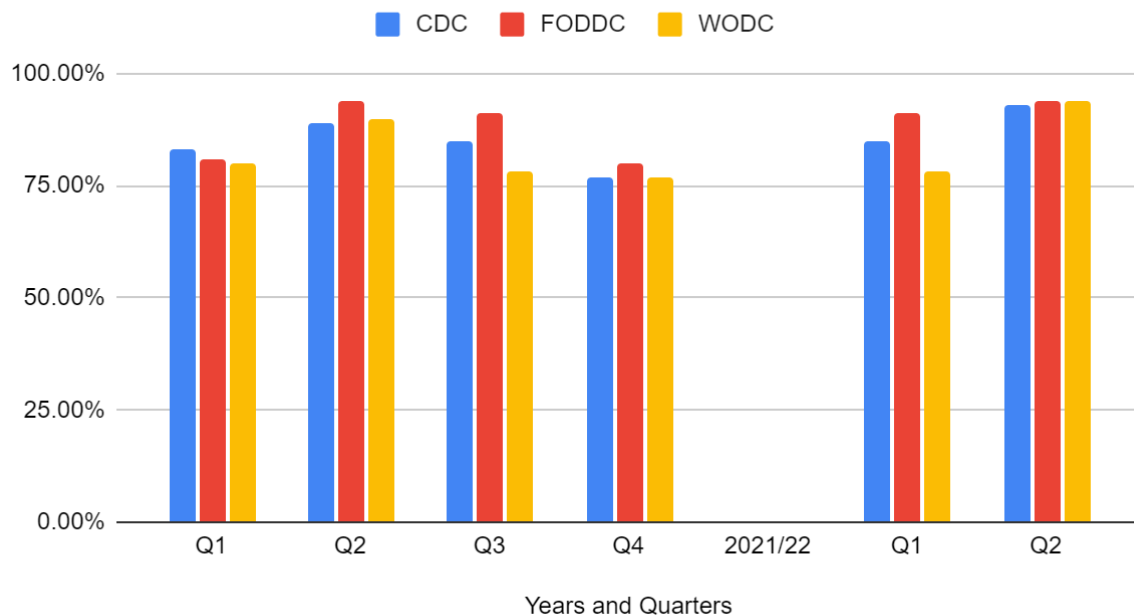
Response Rates

The chart below sets out by way of percentages the number of responses received that have been responded to within the statutory 20 working days for the 2020/21 financial year and the first two quarters of this financial year. It has not been possible to provide this level of detail for 2019/20 due to a lack of data.

It is notable that response rates have been variable, particularly for 2020/21 when the team were adversely affected by staff sickness and the pandemic.

As we have moved out of this turbulent period and into the first quarter of this financial year responses rates improved and have continued to improve during quarter 2.

CDC, FODDC and WODC





Council name	COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	CABINET – 1 NOVEMBER 2021
Report Number	AGENDA ITEM 09
Subject	Homeseeker Plus Policy Update
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Cllr Lisa Spivey – Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness Email: lisa.spivey@cotswold.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Caroline Clissold - Housing Manager Email: caroline.clissold@publicagroup.uk
Summary/Purpose	To update Members on the legislative changes needed to ensure that the Homeseeker Plus Policy meets the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Allocation of Accommodation standards and reflects the outcome of the stakeholder consultation
Annexes	Annex A – Draft Homeseeker Plus Policy (Pending Formatting) Annex B – Homeseeker Plus draft Policy 2019 approved for Consultation Annex C – Summary of Proposed Changes Homeseeker Plus Policy 2019 Annex D – Consultation outcome Annex E – 2019 Banding Table Annex F – New Banding Table 2021 Annex G – Equalities Impact Assessment
Recommendation(s)	<i>That Cabinet:</i> <i>a) Approves the Policy for adoption</i> <i>b) Give approval for the HomeseekerPlus Management Board to:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Confirm the date for adoption once all partners have approval through their individual authorities governance structure (likely to be early 2022)</i> <i>Professionally format the Policy prior to publication</i>
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivering our services to the highest standards Providing good quality social rented homes Helping residents and communities access the support they need for good health and wellbeing
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO



Consultees/ Consultation	<p>Deputy Chief Executive Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Housing Monitoring Officer Chief Executive Head of Legal Services Full Public Consultation including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• External Stakeholders (inc. Housing Providers, Support agencies, Social Media groups)• HomeseekerPlus applicants / users• Internal Stakeholders (inc. Members, Service and Senior Managers)
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I. BACKGROUND

- I.1** HomeseekerPlus is a Choice Based Lettings (CBL) scheme run by seven Local Authorities in partnership with social housing landlords operating within Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire.
- I.2** The seven Local Authorities are Cotswold District Council, Forest of Dean District Council, West Oxfordshire District Council, Tewkesbury Borough Council, Gloucester City Council, Stroud District Council and Cheltenham Borough Council.
- I.3** Demand for affordable housing within the HomeseekerPlus area is very high and cannot be met in its entirety from the available social housing resources.
- I.4** The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), formally the Ministry of Housing and Local Communities (MHCG), sets out Statutory Guidance relating to the fair and transparent allocation accommodation in the 'Allocation of Accommodation: Guidance for Local Authority's' document. The introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 has also impacted on how those applicants who are threatened with homelessness or are homeless should be assessed.
- I.5** Local Authorities are tasked with ensuring that all affordable and social rented accommodation made available through its Choice Based Lettings scheme is allocated fairly, transparently and to those in the highest housing need. The HomeseekerPlus Policy was therefore created to provide the framework for making those decisions and to ensure that all of its partners were acting in a consistent way
- I.6** Each District's Housing Options Service also has a duty to give advice on a range of housing options including the private rented sector.
- I.7** The Policy explains who is eligible and who qualifies to apply on HomeseekerPlus and sets out how applications will be assessed and awarded a subsequent Emergency, Gold, Silver or Bronze banding based on housing need (Annex E).
- I.8** Due to legislative and other changes the Policy is in need of a refresh. It is considered good practice for the partnership to consult the public and associated stakeholders on the new Policy.
- I.9** In late 2019, Cotswold District Council's Cabinet approved the suggested changes set out in the 2019 draft Policy (Annex B) and that these should be made available for wider consultation. However, the consultation period was unavoidably delayed until spring 2021 due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting pressures on services.



1.10 The draft Policy was made available for consultation with the public and stakeholders for 8 weeks which ensured an open, transparent and fair process. The consultation sought to allow comments on the proposed changes in

1.11 Policy and after fully reviewing the information provided, is now ready for final approval.

1.12 This report outlines the proposed Policy changes that have been consulted upon and sets out the legislative reasons for recommending the approval of the Final draft of the Homeseekerplus Policy.

2. MAIN POINTS

2.1 HomeseekerPlus enables Social Housing Landlords to advertise their homes and for applicants to bid for properties they are interested in.

2.2 To complement the scheme and ensure compliance with legislation, local strategies and Policies and the Statutory Code of Guidance on the Allocation of Accommodation, a HomeseekerPlus Policy has been implemented.

2.3 The initial Gloucestershire Homeseeker Partnership was established in 2009 but was updated in 2016 to include West Oxfordshire District Council into the partnership. The addition of a non-Gloucestershire Authority resulted in a name change to “HomeseekerPlus”. No other major changes to the Homeseekerplus Policy have been undertaken since 2016.

2.4 This has led to Policy drift as legislation has changed, with it being at times interpreted and applied differently across the Partnership. Therefore to remove ambiguity, add clarity and also include the provision for accredited private landlords to advertise their properties, a new Policy is being proposed. (Annex A)

2.5 There are a number of other minor changes to the Policy which are predominantly housekeeping changes.

2.6 A detailed outline of proposed major changes to the Policy are set out in Annex C with the changes to the Banding table set out in Annex F:

2.7 A brief summary of the changes are outlined below:

Section	Current	Proposed Change
Introduction	Included outdated or legislation that has been superseded	Removes specific legislation and gives a more general introduction on the purpose of the policy. Current legislation moved to its own section



Legal	No current section	Set out current legislation, Data retention and tenancy definitions
Qualifying applicants	Set out but does not define 'sufficient financial resources' Limited information on resolution around home ownership and adaptations to current properties	Expanded explanation affordability checks and consideration of accommodation meeting needs
Suspending or Demotion	Implications of Rent arrears - former or current tenancy Band demotion	Set out clearer time limits on former rent arrears or housing debts, suspension reasons and mitigating circumstances Give clear definition and consequence
Local Connection	Gives outlines of legislation, but limited clarity on what this means	Clearer definitions of local connection, 'normal residence' Updated legislation around homelessness and sofa surfing Clearer definition of family or employment connections Outlines what could be considered as 'special circumstances' Includes updated legislation around Care Leavers and Armed Forces
The Verification Process	Undefined	Set out the reasons why each application needs to be verified Lists documents that could be requested
Medical and Welfare Banding	Has this as one banding reason	Banding split into Medical category and Welfare category
Move on from Supported Accommodation	Contained outdated information Did not include Care Leavers	Updated Care Leavers definition included
Bedroom Need Criteria	Missing Equalities and Diversity information	Updated to be fully inclusive as per our duties under the Equality Act 2010



Global Banding	No Current Section	Full explanation now included
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3. Consultation

- 3.1** The main changes to the Policy constitute small adjustments to wording that haven't changed the overall document, meanings or how applicants are assessed or allocated housing.
- 3.2** There were two additional minor changes post consultation as set out in 3.3 and 3.5.
- 3.3** Section 4.35 of the Policy stated – ...“For example, a member of the household seeking accommodation is disabled and re-housing will enable that person to overcome urgent physical barriers created by current accommodation and it has been established that the home cannot be adapted to meet needs e.g. steps and stairs.”.

The word 'urgent' has been added in for the distinction between those with minor non-housing related physical barriers to those with urgent housing related physical barriers.

- 3.4** Section 6.13 of the Policy has been removed as this is no longer relevant and not how the current IT system is designed. “If there is an occasion where two or more applicants have the same band start date and application date, the Social Housing Landlord will make a decision which applicant best meets the aims and objectives of Homeseekerplus”.
- 3.5** Full details of the Consultation conclusion can be found in Annex D.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1** The HomeseekerPlus Policy required updating to reflect minor legislative changes
- 4.2** The Policy has been updated to widen its Equality and Diversity section to be compliant fully with the Equality Act 2010
- 4.3** Updating the Policy provides further clarity on various key points for both the client and Publica, designed to offer a more open and easier process for all

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1** The adoption of the updated HomeseekerPlus Policy will have no financial implications



6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1** The Housing Act 1996, Part 6 (“the Act”) sets out Local Authority responsibilities in the Allocation of Housing Accommodation. S166a of the Act states that ‘Every local housing authority must have a scheme (their ‘allocation scheme’) for determining priorities and as to the procedure to be followed in allocating housing accommodation.’
- 6.2** The Localism Act 2011 introduced significant amendments to the Act including Section 166a, amongst others, but notably:
- To include assurance that certain categories of applicants are given reasonable preference.
 - The requirement for an allocation scheme to contain a statement of the Authority’s Policy on offering a choice of accommodation or an opportunity to express preferences about their accommodation (section 166a (2))
- 6.3** In 2018, one of our Partner Authorities was required to submit the HomeseekerPlus Policy to the Housing Ombudsman for review in relation to a complaint about how banding was applied in their case. The Housing Ombudsman found that the Authority had correctly applied the banding and commented that this was a good example of an inclusive, fair and transparent Policy that met the requirements of the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Localism Act 2011.
- 6.4** The proposed Policy changes have not therefore changed the integrity of the 2016 version, but have instead incorporated the changes needed to bring this up to date with current legislation and thus avoid any legal challenges or criticism.

7. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 7.1** Should all seven Homeseekerplus Partners not agree to the Policy update, this may result in dissolution of the Partnership
- 7.2** If the Partnership dissolves due to non-agreement, the financial implications would be significant, with increased costs for Cotswold District Council.
- 7.3** The costs of the current IT system is approximately £90,000 per annum with an additional cost for a specialist full time shared officer to manage the system bringing the total to around £126,000 per annum.
- 7.4** As part of the Partnership, Cotswold District Council currently contributes £12,000 per annum



- 7.5** The costs of managing a single Authority system would therefore increase from £12,000 per annum to a minimum of £90,000 per annum (for the IT system) plus additional staffing may be needed as Cotswold District Council currently share staff with our Publica partners.
- 7.6** Should the Partnership dissolve, Cotswold District Council will lose the benefits of cross County / boundary working and shared knowledge of clients and shared staff resources
- 7.7** Although the current Policy was assessed as a good example by the Housing Ombudsman in 2018, there is also the risk that to not bring this up to date with recent legislation changes could leave the Partner Authorities open to legal challenge or criticism should a complaint escalate to the Housing Ombudsman

8. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 8.1** An EIA has been completed and there are no unacceptable adverse effects on the protected characteristics covered by the Equality Act 2010 that have been identified (Annex G).

9. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1** None identified

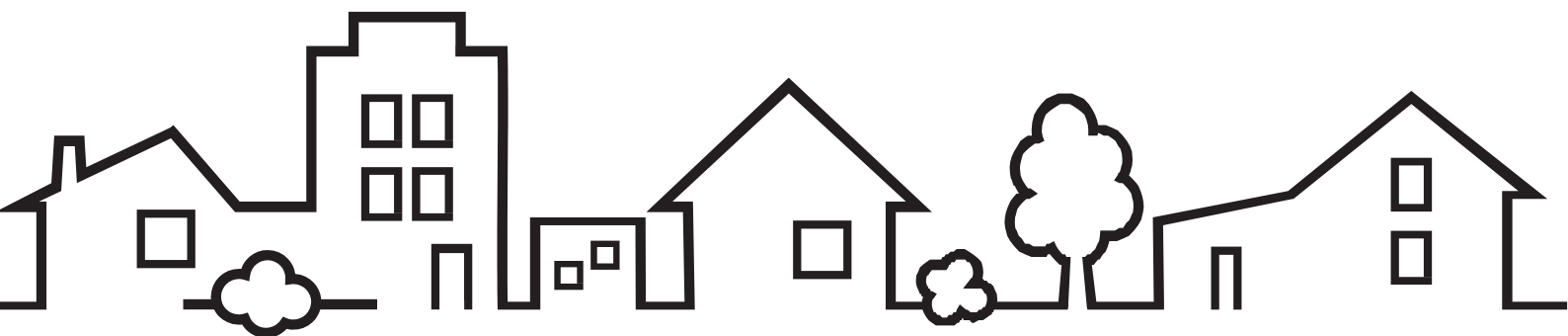
10. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 10.1** Cotswold District Council may wish to consider withdrawing from the current Homeseeker Plus Partnership and source its own Choice Based Letting system and design its own Policy
- 10.2** This option would increase the financial commitment from £12,000 per annum to upwards of £90,000 per annum. The current staffing arrangements would also need to be reviewed which could incur further costs.
- 10.3** Timescales to source a new provider, design a new system, create and consult on a new Policy would be estimated to be around 18 months to 2 years
- 10.4** On this basis, this option is not recommended

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1** None

HomeseekerPlus



Common allocations policy document



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Section 1: Introduction and policy statement

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Homeseekerplus is a choice-based lettings (CBL) scheme run by the seven local authorities in partnership with social housing landlords and any other housing providers that are required to deliver affordable homes through section 106 affordable housing obligations within Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire.
- 1.2 The seven local authorities are Tewkesbury Borough Council, Gloucester City Council, Cheltenham Borough Council, Stroud District Council, Forest of Dean District Council, Cotswold District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council.
- 1.3 Demand for affordable social housing within the Homeseekerplus area is very high and cannot be met from the available social housing resources. Only those in the highest housing need with a local connection to the area are likely to obtain housing through the Homeseekerplus scheme. Each district's Housing Advice Service will be able to give advice on a range of housing options including the private rented sector.
- 1.4 This policy explains who is eligible and qualifies to apply on Homeseekerplus and sets out how applications will be assessed based on housing need.
- 1.5 Homeseekerplus aims to allocate social housing in the partner council areas in a fair and transparent way while complying with all legal requirements.

2. Overview of how the partnership functions

- 2.1 Homeseekerplus enables social housing landlords and other housing providers that are required to deliver affordable homes through section 106 obligations to advertise their homes. Applicants are then able to express an interest in them; this is known as placing a "bid" for a property. Once a bid is placed the system generates a shortlist, sorting applicants in order of band, band start date and whether they meet the criteria of the advert. Priority for properties goes to those who have a local connection with the local authority in which the property is located, then to those who have a local connection with any of the other Homeseekerplus districts and finally to anyone else.
- 2.2 All applicants seeking social housing across Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire will complete the same application process and will be assessed against the same clear set of

criteria. Depending on their circumstances, applicants will be placed into one of four bands: Emergency, Gold, Silver or Bronze subject to final verification by a Homeseekerplus partner.

- 2.3 Once an application has been made, applicants are advised of their banding and banding start date, together with details of how to access the system. This enables applicants to bid for suitable social housing vacancies being advertised across the whole of Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire.
- 2.4 Once the bid deadline has passed, the successful applicant will normally be the highest priority household at the point of shortlisting. This is assessed against the criteria for the property, including where local connection applies, and taking into account any local letting plans.
- 2.5 Responsibility for letting each available property lies with the social housing landlord. The appropriate landlord must confirm that the details on the application are still correct and may undertake their own assessment to ensure the property is right for the applicant before making an offer. Incorrect information may result in the offer being withdrawn and the applicant's circumstances being re-assessed.
- 2.6 Applications for sheltered and extra care housing schemes may require an assessment of the household's support needs, prior to any offer being made.

3. Policy statement

- 3.1 This policy aims to:
 - Assist in building sustainable communities.
 - Enable informed choice of housing/ housing options and improve levels of customer satisfaction.
 - Operate a common selection system that offers realistic, informed choice for all applicants.
 - Ensure that those who have the greatest need for housing have the greatest opportunity to secure it.
 - Ensure that less able applicants are involved in the lettings process and have choices, offering equality of opportunity for all.
 - Make best use of available housing resources to meet local need.
 - Minimise the refusal of offers of accommodation and reduce rent loss by allowing people to choose where they live, thereby supporting sustainable communities.
 - Where possible, give people with a local connection to a district priority in the letting of housing within that district.
 - Enable mobility within social housing in Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire.
 - Enable the authorities to meet their statutory duties including where duties are owed to homeless Applicants under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, as amended and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
 - Contribute towards tackling discrimination.
 - Use a common eligibility criteria and housing application process.
 - Ensure fairness, simplicity and transparency with a system that is easily understood.

- Promote a feeling of ownership and commitment to their area as they will have chosen to live there.
- Assess applications according to the applicant's needs under the framework of the policy.

4. Equal opportunities and social inclusion

- 4.1 All partners of Homeseekerplus agree that applicants should be given every possible assistance to access the housing register and search for suitable properties. Applicants who are identified as being potentially disadvantaged by the scheme may be contacted to discuss alternative options.
- 4.2 All partners of Homeseekerplus are committed to the elimination of discrimination. They promote equality of opportunity for all and work towards this goal in the provision of services.
- 4.3 We are committed to:
- Eliminating discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Equalities Act 2010
 - Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and others who do not share it
 - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it
 - Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic
 - Taking steps to meet the needs of people who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of people who do not share it
 - Encouraging those people who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low
 - Making the best possible use of the existing and potential workforce and resources by enabling cross boundary moves
- 4.4 Applicants potentially disadvantaged by the scheme will initially be identified from the application process and they may be offered a home visit or interview. Staff will seek to establish any support needs and identify ways of enabling the applicants to fully participate in Homeseekerplus. This may include sending copies of the adverts in large print to an applicant or simply providing advice. Translation services may be provided where appropriate.
- 4.5 Disadvantaged applicants are able to nominate a person (including family members, friends or a professional worker) to help them bid, or to bid on their behalf for suitable properties. Signed consent will be required if requests are made by a third party.

- 4.6 The local authority may bid for suitable vacancies on a vulnerable applicant's behalf if they are at risk of being disadvantaged by the scheme and have no support to enable them to make bids themselves. This may include the use of the 'Autobid' function.
- 4.7 Agencies providing support may be able to assist their client with help on housing issues.

5. Legal Framework

- 5.1 Homeseekerplus complies with the local authorities' statutory duties under Part VI and VII of the Housing Act 1996 as amended, and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, in addition to any other relevant legal duties, and has regard to the following:
- Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England 2020
 - Equalities Act 2010
 - Public Sector Equality Duty
 - Data Protection Act 2018
 - Localism Act 2011
 - Immigration Act 2014
 - Local letting plans
 - S.106 agreements
 - Armed Forces Act 2011
 - Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- 5.2 Furthermore, this policy will have due regard to any subsequent superseding acts and/or guidance.

6. Data retention

- 6.1 As part of the application process, personal data is required to support any housing application. We will comply with all data protection legislation. This includes:
- For active applications, data is stored for as long as the application is active.
 - For housed applications, data is stored for three years
 - If Homeseekerplus is not accessed for a period of one year, then the case will be set to 'removed' and removed after six months.
 - Homeless applications are stored for three years.

7. Definition of social housing providers for Homeseekerplus

- 7.1 For the purposes of this policy, affordable housing is defined as being social rented and affordable rented housing provided to eligible households who otherwise would be unable to secure alternative provision, and who have been assessed under this policy. Housing

providers who operate within the Homeseekerplus boundaries are defined as being registered providers, arm's length management organisations or stock owning Councils. Eligibility and qualifying criteria for providers is set by this policy.

- 7.2 All partners have a common goal to provide homes for local people in housing need with eligibility determined within this policy framework.

8. Types of tenancies

- 8.1 Depending on the landlord and applicants' circumstances, an applicant may be offered either an introductory, secure, starter, assured, fixed term, assured short hold or flexible tenancy.

9. Who is eligible to register?

- 9.1 Homeseekerplus is open to anyone in housing need who is not subject to immigration rules which would otherwise exclude them. Eligible households may include, but are not limited to, existing tenants looking to transfer to another property, homeless households looking for a permanent home and other households who might, for example, reside in the private sector or lodge with family and friends. A household includes anyone that may reasonably be expected to live together with them as part of their application.

10. Who is not eligible to register?

- 10.1 Persons from Abroad

- 10.2 Persons subject to immigration control who are eligible for an allocation of housing accommodation, the following classes of persons subject to immigration control are persons who are eligible for an allocation of housing accommodation under Part 6 of the 1996 Act:

- Class A – a person who is recorded by the Secretary of State as a refugee within the definition in Article 1 of the Refugee Convention and who has leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom;
- Class B – a person:
 - who has exceptional leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom granted outside the provisions of the Immigration Rules; and
 - who is not subject to a condition requiring him to maintain and accommodate himself, and any person who is dependent on him, without recourse to public funds;
- Class C – a person who is habitually resident in the United Kingdom, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man or the Republic of Ireland and whose leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom is not subject to any limitation or condition, other than a person—

- who has been given leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom upon an undertaking given by his sponsor;
- who has been resident in the United Kingdom, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man or the Republic of Ireland for less than five years beginning on the date of entry or the date on which his sponsor gave the undertaking in respect of him, whichever date is the later; and
- whose sponsor or, where there is more than one sponsor, at least one of whose sponsors, is still alive; and
- Class D – a person who left the territory of Montserrat after 1st November 1995 because of the effect on that territory of a volcanic eruption.

10.3 If the local authority decides that an applicant is not eligible to register for any of these reasons, they will notify the person of the decision in writing, including the reason.

10.4 Other:

- Applicants under 16 years of age at the date they apply are not eligible to register for Homeseekerplus.

10.5 Persons who are ineligible for a tenancy in their own right may still be included within a household application and for determining the number of bedrooms needed for the household.

11. Who does not qualify?

11.1 Homeseekerplus has been established under the terms of the Housing Act 1996, as amended, and the Localism Act 2011. This gives local authorities the right to decide who will not qualify for social housing.

11.2 Applicants who may initially be eligible to register on Homeseekerplus but, following assessment, do not qualify, will be excluded from Homeseekerplus. Others may be eligible and qualify to be included but are subsequently suspended from bidding

11.3 The following are persons who do not qualify for Homeseekerplus:

An applicant may not hold two tenancies at one time, applicants must be able to end their current tenancy within a reasonable period from being made an offer.

- An applicant will not qualify for social housing if the local authority has undertaken an affordability check which has shown that they have sufficient financial resources to adequately resolve their own particular housing need through outright purchase, lease or mortgage. This check will consider the type of accommodation needed to meet these needs to resolve their own housing need within their district.
- Homeowners who own or part own a property which is suitable for the household's needs or where those needs can be resolved through adaptation, and where it is safe to remain.

- 11.4 If the local authority decides that an applicant does not qualify, they will notify the applicant of their decision in writing and the reasons for it.
- 11.5 Applicants who do not qualify will need to reapply in full if they feel their circumstances have changed to the extent that they may now qualify.

12. Suspending and demoting an application

- 12.1 Applications to Homeseekerplus may be suspended or demoted if any of the following circumstances are identified

- 12.2 Tenancy Debts:

If an applicant has rent arrears or other housing debt with a social landlord or any other housing provider (as detailed in 1.1 above) , which accrued less than 6 years ago, the applicant will be given the opportunity to clear the debt before a decision to suspend the application is made. If the applicant is unable to do this, they may be suspended for a period sufficient to reduce the debt to below the equivalent of eight weeks arrears, as well as having a repayment plan in place and payment being made before they can bid for properties.

- 12.3 Each case will be considered on its own merit, For example, an application would not be suspended if rent arrears arose as a result of domestic abuse.

- 12.4 Existing social housing tenants who are suspended because of rent arrears will be considered as an exception on an individual basis if proved that they cannot afford to stay in their current tenancy as a result of Welfare Reform Act changes.

- 12.5 If a partner landlord becomes aware of such a debt they will inform the relevant local authority when arrears are reduced. The local authority may unsuspend the application or advise the applicant to submit a change of circumstances for their application to be reassessed.

- 12.6 Time Limited Bands:

Applicants who have been awarded time limited bands are expected to bid on all suitable property types available within their local connection area. Failure to do so may result in suspension or demotion for a period the local authority deems appropriate.

- 12.7 Repeated Refusal of Properties:

Whilst Homeseekerplus aims to give applicants choice, it also needs to help social landlords let their available homes in an efficient way. If an applicant refuses three properties that the local authority considers suitable, the application will be demoted or suspended for a period of 6 months from the time of their last offer. This provision does not apply to final offers of accommodation made in order to discharge homeless duties under part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) or Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

12.8 Financial

Applicants who have unreasonably disposed of financial resources that could have enabled them to purchase/obtain their own accommodation will be suspended.

Financial Assessments of armed forces applicants will have due regard of statutory guidance to social housing for members of the armed forces.

12.9 Unreasonable behaviour/rent arrears

The applicant, or a member of their household, has been responsible for unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable to be a tenant of the local authority or a social housing landlord at the time of application.

12.10 Behaviour that may be regarded as unacceptable is as follows: -

- Criminal activity in the vicinity of the property
- History of anti-social behaviour or disruptive nuisance to neighbours
- Racial harassment
- Illegal drug use or dealing
- Any other breach of the tenancy agreement such that the landlord would be likely to apply for and obtain a possession order.

12.11 As part of the assessment, consideration will be given to the household's personal circumstances, the severity of the situation and any other factors that may be relevant.

12.12 Such applicants will be informed of the actions required from them to demonstrate that there has been a change in their behaviour such that they will become qualifying e.g. obtaining a satisfactory landlord reference for a period of six months or where regular repayments are made without fail against an agreed repayment plan for a period of six months.

12.13 Deliberately worsening their circumstances

An immediate review of an application will be undertaken if an applicant is found to have acted (or failed to act) in a way which deliberately worsened their housing situation. This could lead to the applicant being suspended, or being demoted to a lower band, for a minimum of 6 months.

12.14 Exceptions to these qualifying criteria include:

- Those people fleeing harassment or violence where the Police, Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVA) or Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) support a move
- Proven social or medical/welfare needs

12.15 In exceptional circumstances where the applicant has an urgent need to move, the local authority may waive this qualification and suspension criteria.

12.16 Requesting a review of a suspension / demotion:

Applicants will be advised as to what action/s will be necessary to lift the suspension or demotion.

- 12.18 Applicants who are suspended will need to contact their relevant local authority to ask for a review of this suspension if they feel their circumstances have changed. If agreed, their application will be reactivated and reassessed.

13. Providing false information and change of circumstances

- 13.1 Any applicant who knowingly or recklessly gives false information or knowingly withholds information in order to secure a home to which they are not entitled may lose any home provided to them and may also be prosecuted. Where false information is given and the applicant becomes non-qualifying or ineligible, the application will be removed. Where false information is given and the applicant still qualifies, the application will be suspended for a period of 3 months and the applicant will have to reapply with correct information. The law imposes severe penalties, including substantial fines up to £5000 or imprisonment, when an offence is proven.

14. Local Connections

- 14.1 Due to the exceptional demand for housing across the Homeseekerplus area and the difficulty in solving local housing need, preference will normally be given to applicants with a local connection to the appropriate district.
- 14.2 Homeseekerplus local connection is defined by any of the following:
- Those who are, or were in the past, normally resident in the local authority area, and that residence was of their own choice during six out of the past 12 months or during three out of the past five years.
 - those who are employed in the local authority area
 - Those who have immediate family connections in the local authority area for five years
 - Members of the armed forces
 - Other special circumstances
- 14.3 Local connection will be awarded by the lead authority only.

15. Local connection clarification

15.1 Normal residence

‘Normal residence’ is to be understood as meaning ‘the place where, at the relevant time, the person in fact resides.’ Residence in temporary accommodation provided by a housing authority can constitute normal residence of choice and contribute towards a local connection. In the case of a person who is street homeless or insecurely accommodated (‘sofa surfing’) within their district, the housing authority will need to satisfy themselves that the applicant has no settled accommodation elsewhere, and if from inquiries the authority is satisfied that the applicant does in fact reside in the district, then the applicant will be considered as normally resident.

15.2 Where the applicant raises family associations, this may extend beyond partners, parents, adult children or siblings. They may include associations with other family members provided there are sufficiently close links in the form of frequent contact, commitment or dependency. Family associations should be determined with regard to the fact-specific circumstances of the individual case.

15.3 Employment

For the purposes of employment, a member of the application should work in the district they are applying too: it would not be sufficient if the employer’s head office is located in the relevant district, but their place of work is not. In the case of self-employment, local connection will be defined by the address at which their business is registered. For agency, casual or other types of employment, proof must be provided that the employment contract is not short-term, casual or ancillary.

15.4 Special Circumstances

Special circumstances include but are not limited to the need to be near special medical or support services which are available only in a particular district and where transport links are not sufficient to meet those needs. Special circumstances will be assessed on their own individual merits.

15.5 Care leavers

Care leavers who are owed a ‘Leaving Care’ duty, will have a local connection to all districts within the area of the Children’s Services Authority. Care leavers who have been placed in accommodation in a different district to that of the Children’s Services Authority, and they have lived in the other district for at least 2 years, including some time before they turned 16, they will also have the same local connection until they are 21. Any local care leavers protocol applies.

15.6 Armed Forces

Members of the armed forces will have a local connection to a district of their choice. This applies to:

- Those currently serving, or having served within the immediately preceding five years.

- Bereaved spouses or civil partners who have recently, or will cease to be, entitled to Ministry of Defence accommodation following the death of their service spouse and the death was wholly or partly attributable to their service.
 - Existing or former members of the reserve forces who are suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is wholly or partly attributable to their service.
- 15.7 Local connection will also be awarded to divorced or separated spouses or civil partners of Service personnel who are required to move out of accommodation provided by the Ministry of Defence.
- 15.8 Persons from Abroad
- If an applicant has been subject to immigration control where they would not have been deemed eligible and subsequently become eligible, the date of where a local connection would apply is the date they moved into the area. Refugees would have a local connection outside of these criteria to the last area they were housed in by the Home Office under asylum support.
- 15.9 Local connection will not be awarded if your accommodation was not of the applicant's own choice. This includes but is not limited to:
- Approved premises
 - Rehabilitation units
- 15.10 Decisions on local connection will be made based on the facts at the date of the decision and not the date of application.

Section 2: Assessment of applications

16. How to register

- 16.1 Applicants are able to register for social housing through the Homeseekerplus website at www.homeseekerplus.co.uk. Homeseekerplus is an online application only and has been designed to be accessible to all with speech, reading and translation tools. Applicants needing advice and assistance with their application are advised to contact the authority they are applying to.
- 16.3 When an applicant applies through the Homeseekerplus website and has registered their household, they will complete an application for social housing, giving details of their housing situation. If, after completion of the application and provision of any necessary proof or further information, the applicant is assessed as being eligible, they will be given a band start date and placed in a local housing band.
- 16.4 Special rules are required for those in the armed forces to comply with The Localism Act recognising the services they have offered the country. On discharge members of the armed forces, with Homeless priority need (dependent children or vulnerable as a result of disability) will be awarded Gold band for 6 months from the discharge date. Homeless with a non - priority need are given Silver band from their discharge date. Should they become homeless again within 5 years of the discharge priority need or unintentionally homeless applicants will be awarded Gold band again for 6 months from Notice being received. Non-priority need or Intentional homeless will get Silver band backdated for 6 months from the Notice being received.
- 16.5 Applicants should make sure that they include all relevant details on the application so that proper consideration can be given to the application. Homeseekerplus may contact any of the applicants' previous landlords or agencies to check the details given.
- 16.6 All applicants will be given unique login details which can be updated from the account.
- 16.7 Applicants will be informed if further information or clarification is required. Failure to complete the online application form will result in it being deleted from the system.

17. Assessment of an application

- 17.1 By registering to join Homeseekerplus, the applicant will need to freely give their consent for enquiries to be made to verify their circumstances. Applicants will need to confirm that the information they have given is true and accurate.
- 17.2 The information the applicant has provided will guide the decision on which band they will be placed in. Applicants will be required to provide the lead authority with documentation to evidence the stated housing need.

18. Bedroom need assessment

- 18.1 The bedroom need for a household is assessed to match housing costs guidance to ensure suitability and affordability for low income households.
- 18.2 One bedroom is required for:
- An adult couple
 - A person aged 16 or over
 - 2 children aged up to 16 years of age of the same sex
 - 2 children aged up to 10 years of age of different sexes
- 18.3 When a child is born, the applicant must provide evidence of the birth as soon as possible and the bedroom need will then be re-assessed. This may not change the bedroom need or banding and any additional award will not be given until evidence of the birth is provided.
- 18.4 Visiting children will not be counted in this assessment.

19. Verification

- 19.1 Applicants will be able to bid for properties advertised, but no tenancy will be offered until verification has been completed by the relevant local authority. The purpose of this verification is to establish the accuracy or validity of the application.
- 19.2 Documents required for verification will depend upon individual circumstances. Documents must be provided to verify medical needs, eligibility and qualifying status etc.
- 19.3 Key documents will remain valid for 6 months or for the length of validity of the document, whichever is the longer or should your circumstances change then we may require further verification of your documents.
- 19.4 Key standard documents can include, but are not limited to:
- Identification for all household members on the application
 - 2 months bank statements of all household members over the age of 18
 - Proof of Child Benefit or an appropriate court order
 - Proof of residency to support 'right to rent' checks

20. Banding reasons

- 20.1 Applicants will be awarded a band appropriate to the household circumstances assessed from the information provided in their application.
- 20.2 To qualify for a particular band, applicants need to meet at least one of the criteria set out in the banding table below.

- 20.3 Applicants will be awarded two bands – one for their “local” band (lead authority) and one for their “global” band (other 6 authorities). In some cases, these may be with the same authority, depending on circumstances. However, having a local connection to another authority would not automatically deem a household to have a higher banding in that district.
- 20.4 An applicant’s banding may be time- limited due to the type of housing need, therefore, the household would be expected to bid for and accept any suitable property offered within that time limit. Failure to do so may lead to a direct match or demotion.

21. Right to move

- 21.1 Right to Move is for social housing tenants who need to move to another district in order to take up a job or live closer to employment or training. In order to qualify, social housing tenants must demonstrate that the job/apprenticeship will alleviate significant hardship and that there are no other options available to them.
- 21.2 To determine qualification, the following detail will need to be established:
- The distance and/or time taken to travel between work and home
 - The availability of transport, taking into account level of earnings
 - The nature of the work and whether similar opportunities are available closer to home
 - Other personal factors, such as medical conditions and child care options, which would be affected if the tenant could not move
 - Whether failure to move would result in the loss of an opportunity to improve employment circumstances or prospects, for example, by taking up a better job, a promotion or apprenticeship
- 21.3 Those who qualify for Right to Move will get a local banding preference of Silver, identifying that there is a “Significant welfare need that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation”.

22. Band criteria

a. Property size

22.1 Emergency Band

Existing Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire social housing tenants willing to move from family accommodation to non-family social housing property within the partnership area.

22.2 Gold Band

Existing Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire social housing tenants willing to move to smaller family sized accommodation if this has been agreed with the relevant local authority to release a property of higher demand or limited availability.

or

There is major overcrowding in the current property - lacking 2 or more bedrooms (this will not apply if the applicant has unreasonably allowed one or more people to move in to the property, as this is deliberately worsening the situation).

or

Environmental Health has inspected the property and has served a Prohibition Notice (or suspended Prohibition Licence) on the landlord due to overcrowding - subject also to the applicant not deliberately worsening the situation.

22.3 Silver Band

There is overcrowding in the current property - lacking 1 bedroom - (this will not apply if the applicant has unreasonably allowed one or more people to move in to the property, this is deliberately worsening the situation).

b. Property condition

22.4 Emergency band

Where Environmental Health has inspected the property and requires immediate vacation of the property because of an imminent risk of harm due to disrepair, major defects or grossly inadequate facilities. An Emergency Prohibition Order can be served on the landlord in these circumstances.

This award is time limited for 1 month when it will be reviewed. It can be extended if no suitable properties have become available in this time scale, or a direct match can be made.

22.5 Gold band

Where Environmental Health has inspected the property and has served a Prohibition Order

or

A Suspended Prohibition Order on the landlord that repairs have to be undertaken but the landlord is unable/unwilling to comply. In most cases the landlord will be required to undertake repairs to remedy the problem and when completed this should resolve the issue.

22.6 These only apply to the Local band so only when bidding for properties in the home/lead local authority area.

c. Homelessness

22.7 Homelessness is defined by Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 but was significantly updated by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The Homelessness Reduction Act set out new duties to local authorities to, amongst other things, prevent or relieve homeless.

22.8 Therefore applications to Homeseekerplus from those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness will fall into the following categories:

- A Prevention of Homelessness duty is ongoing or
- A Relief of Homelessness duty is ongoing or
- A Main Duty of Homelessness is ongoing or
- The applicant has made a homeless application to one of the Homeseeker Plus Local Authorities and remains assessed as eligible for assistance and homeless after the homelessness duties have ended.

22.9 More information on these duties can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities>

22.10 For the purpose of this policy and how banding will be assessed should the local authority owe you a duty under this legislation, banding will fall into either:

22.11 Gold banding (Main Duty)

The applicant has made a homelessness application under part VII of the housing act 1996, (as amended) to one of the Homeseekerplus local authorities, the 56 days of the Relief Duty have expired and the full s193 statutory homeless duty to secure accommodation for the applicant has been accepted by that authority. If this duty applies to an applicant, the applicant will receive a letter from the relevant local authority advising of this.

This is time limited for 1 month when it will be reviewed. It can be extended if no suitable properties have become available in this time scale. A suitable tenancy in the private sector or a direct match into social housing may be made to end the homelessness duty at any time.

22.12 Silver banding (Prevention or Relief Duties)

The applicant has made a homeless application to one of the Homeseekerplus local authorities and either:

- A Prevention of Homelessness duty has been accepted
- A Relief of Homelessness duty has been accepted

or

The applicant has made a homeless application under part VII of the housing act 1996, as amended to one of the Homeseekerplus local authorities and remains assessed as eligible

for assistance and homeless but has been found either non-priority or intentionally homeless.

d. Medical Need

22.13 None of the below refer to having a medical condition in its own right. It is only when the current housing is directly affecting that medical condition that priority is awarded. In other words, even if a member of the applicant's household has a very severe set of medical conditions, if their housing has little or no bearing on their health then no priority will be awarded.

22.14 Emergency band

The applicant is assessed as in immediate need of re-housing on medical grounds. This may be when they have had a major incident, are in hospital or another emergency provision and unable to return to the existing home because of their medical condition and immediate adaptations are not available.

This award is time limited for 1 month when it will be reviewed. It can be extended if no suitable properties have become available in this time scale or a direct match can be made.

22.15 Gold band

Urgent medical need or long-term disability that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation. This would apply when the situation is so serious that it would not be reasonable to expect the applicant to continue to live at the property for any length of time, given their particular medical circumstances but not a life-threatening emergency.

Proof of the situation would be required from Social Care services, NHS or other medical specialists.

For example, a member of the household seeking accommodation is disabled and re-housing will enable that person to overcome urgent physical barriers created by current accommodation and it has been established that the home cannot be adapted to meet needs e.g. steps and stairs.

22.16 Silver band

Significant medical need that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation. This could be situations/medical conditions that could apply to one or more members of the household which because of the particular household circumstances significant distress is caused. Proof of the situation would be required from Social Care services, NHS or other medical specialists.

Depression and asthma are the most commonly quoted medical conditions. Where these are mild and not directly related to the current property, priority is unlikely to be awarded.

e. Welfare Need

22.17 Emergency band

The applicant assessed as in immediate need of re-housing on welfare grounds where there has been a major incident and there is proven threat to life or limb. This would normally be based on information provided by the Police or other specialists.

22.18 Gold banding

Exceptional circumstances where the current property has a critical long-term detrimental effect on their welfare. This would normally be based on information provided by multi agency meetings or Social Care services.

22.19 Silver banding

Significant welfare need that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation. Proof of the situation would be required from Social Care services, housing association or other specialists to establish that a management move would not be appropriate.

This banding would only be used if the housing provider is unable to provide a suitable resolution.

f. Move on/care leavers

22.20 Gold band

A young person owed leaving care duties under section 23C of the Children Act 1989 and in a housing need will be awarded gold banding to the area of the Children Services Authority that owes them the duties. Homeseekerplus comprises of Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire which have different Children Services Authorities, therefore gold will only be awarded to housing authority districts falling within the area of the Children Services Authority.

Move-on from supported accommodation funded County Council commissioned services and where a local connection was agreed at point of referral by the relevant local housing authority.

When someone is placed in accommodation based supported housing and is not in their home/lead authority area there is a presumption that they will be reconnected back to their home area when ready to move-on from the supported accommodation.

The requirements for this priority are:

- That the supported accommodation provider has confirmed that the resident is ready for independent living by completing the standard move-on form detailing the work they have completed with the resident and assessment of any remaining support needs;

- That the local authority has been involved in the move-on planning and accepts that they are the appropriate local authority to re-house this applicant by awarding this priority;
- The accommodation is not low support, temporary or emergency provision or intensive housing management (unless subject to local individual arrangements).

g. Multi-Agency

22.21 Gold band

As a result of a multi-agency decision agreed by the relevant housing authority. Where multi agencies including the local housing authority are involved with a particular household and agree on a way forward to resolve an urgent housing situation, this priority can be awarded to better protect the public or local neighbourhood.

23. Banding Table

	Property conditions (this only applies to the district where the Notice is made)	Homelessness (this only applies to the district where any duty is owed)	Medical needs	Welfare needs	General
EMERGENCY BAND	Existing Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire social housing tenants willing to move from family accommodation to non-family social housing property within the partnership area.	Where Environmental Health has inspected the property and requires immediate vacation of the property because of an imminent risk of harm due to disrepair, major defects or grossly inadequate facilities.	The applicant assessed as immediate need of re-housing on medical grounds.	The applicant assessed as immediate need of re-housing on welfare grounds where there has been a major incident and there is proven threat to life or limb.	
GOLD BAND	Existing Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire social housing tenants willing to move to smaller family sized accommodation if this has been agreed with your local authority to release a property of higher demand and/or limited availability. or There is major overcrowding in the current property - lacking 2 or more bedrooms or Environmental Health has inspected the property and has served a Prohibition Notice	The applicant has made a homelessness application under part VII of the housing act 1996, as amended to one of the Homelessness local authorities and the full s193 statutory homeless duty to secure accommodation for the applicant has been accepted by that authority.	Urgent medical need or long-term disability that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation.	Exceptional circumstances where the current property has a critical long-term detrimental effect on their welfare.	A young person owed leaving care duties under section 23C of the Children Act 1989 and in a housing need or Move-on from supported accommodation funded County Council commissioned services and where a local connection was agreed at point of referral
SILVER BAND	There is overcrowding in the current property - lacking 1 bedroom	A Prevention or relief duty has been accepted or The applicant remains assessed as eligible for assistance and homeless but has either has been found either Non-priority, intentionally homeless.	Significant medical need that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation.	Significant welfare need that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation.	Right to move
BRONZE BAND	All other Applicants				

24 Additional bedroom needs criteria

- 24.1 Households will also be assessed to consider the need for one additional bedroom for each of the following, if they are assessed as being included as part of the household:
- A tenant requiring a non-resident overnight carer
 - Disabled child who cannot share a bedroom with their sibling due to their disability
 - An adult child who is serving away with the armed forces
 - A room for a foster child or children
- 24.2 Households can include someone on the application if there is a need for them to live with the household in order to give or receive care or support, where no one in the immediate household is able to provide that care. Evidence will be required to demonstrate:
- That the household is dependent upon this care or support and that other satisfactory arrangements cannot be made
 - that the arrangement is 'permanent'
- 24.3 We will also require evidence that the person requires your support or care; for example, proof that you/they are providing care, are in receipt of care allowances and are able to meet any costs associated with the additional bedroom either through benefits, income or savings.
- 24.4 We will usually only include members of the household that are currently living with you or that the Council can be satisfied will be reasonably expected to reside (if not currently residing) with you on your application.
- 24.5 In cases where two parents or guardians have joint access to children, bedroom eligibility will be awarded to the main care provider. Applicants will need to demonstrate that:
- they are the main care provider (children live with you for more than half the week -four nights or more) and are in receipt of child benefit and, if applicable, child tax credits
 - that the arrangement is 'permanent'
- 24.6 Please note the protections afforded by the Equality Act 2010 are intended to be available to all, including children and adolescents. Any required additional bedroom need will be awarded on a case by case basis in line with housing benefit rules and an assessment of affordability.

25. Time limited bands

- 25.1 Certain categories have a time limit of one month or more. This is given to recognise an urgent need. It is therefore important that applicants in this category are bidding for all suitable properties each week and in a wide range of locations.
- 25.2 At the end of the period the case will be reviewed by the Lead Authority.
- 25.3 If the applicant is in a time limited band and has either not bid for suitable properties advertised within one month or has been unsuccessful in obtaining an offer of a tenancy within the limit, a direct match of a property may be considered. Where a private sector

tenancy is available, suitable and affordable at the time the Local authority or its agents may look to secure a tenancy in the private rented sector.

26. Demotion

- 26.1 The Lead Authority may decide to demote an applicant to the band below at the end of the time-limited period if it is apparent that the applicant is choosing to wait for a particular type of property or location, and not treating their circumstances as being urgent.
- 26.2 Applicants are encouraged to make full use of their bids and seek all housing options available to them. Applicants will be assessed by a senior officer if they have unreasonably refused a property or to bid in a reasonable time if the following criteria have been met:
- they deliberately do or fail to do anything and as a consequence they miss out on suitable properties
 - it would have been reasonable for them to do so, and there is no other good reason why they have not
- 26.3 The demotion period will be what the local authority deems reasonable up to 12 months and will be considered on a case by case basis.

27. Global banding criteria

- 27.1 Applications will be awarded a global band equal to that of their local banding in all but the below cases:
- Where the lead authority has accepted a full statutory homeless duty to secure accommodation for the applicant. The global banding in this circumstance will be silver.
 - Where the lead authority has a gold move on agreement from supported accommodation, the global banding will be bronze.
 - Where the lead authority has assessed the property as having a prohibition notice, the global band will be bronze.
 - Where the lead authority has awarded a downsizing band, the global band will be silver.

28. Completed applications

- 28.1 Once the applicant has been assessed and accepted on to the Homeseekerplus scheme, a notification will be sent, where possible within 28 days, confirming the application details.
- 28.2 This will include:
- a) The band in which the applicant has been placed
 - b) The property size for which the applicant is eligible
 - c) The registration date
 - d) Band start date

- e) Reminder about the importance of notifying any change in circumstances
- f) A unique reference
- g) Details of the verification documents required
- h) Details of the appeal procedure

29. Annual Review process

- 29.1 Where an applicant has not made any bid on any property, nor updated their application in any way within the previous twelve months, they will be contacted to see if they still wish to remain on the Homeseekerplus Register. If there is no response within 28 days from the date of notification, the application will be closed. If the applicant contacts the Local Authority within 28 days of their application being closed and indicates that they still wish to be considered for housing, the application will be reinstated.
- 29.2 Applicants must renew their application if requested to do so by Homeseekerplus.

30. Removing applications

- 30.1 An application will be removed from Homeseekerplus:-
- At the request of the applicant
 - Where an applicant does not respond to an application review within the specified time limit
 - Where the applicant moves and does not provide a contact address
 - Where the applicant has died
 - Where an applicant ceases to be eligible

Section 3: Scheme Details - Properties

31. Bidding

- 31.1 Once applicants have been registered as live on Homeseekerplus and notified of banding and log in details, they can start to look and bid for a suitable property of their choice subject to their banding criteria.
- 31.2 Applicants may bid for eligible properties at any time before the deadline. It makes no difference to the final shortlist what time during the week the bid was placed. Property details and information should be carefully read as some properties may have additional requirements that make the property unsuitable for the applicant; for example the number of people the property is suitable for – some have only single bedrooms.
- 31.3 Applicants may have up to a maximum of three active bids at any one time. Until a decision has been made as to who will receive the offer, a bid will remain live. The applicant can withdraw their bid if they wish to bid for another property during the same cycle.
- 31.3 At the time the bid is placed, the applicant will be given their current position on the shortlist. This is only an indication, as the position can change, as other people bid, or bids are withdrawn. All shortlists are live and subject to change.

32. Advertisements

- 32.1 All partner landlords are committed to advertising their available properties as widely as possible. Properties will be advertised in several ways on daily basis.
- A dedicated website for Homeseekerplus is accessible to anyone with internet access. The website will allow applicants to view all available properties across the whole of Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire and bid 'on-line' for properties of their choice.
 - Adverts displayed in a number of localities across the Homeseekerplus partnership including local authority offices.
 - In any other format on request to aid those with particular needs, in line with the public sector equality duty.

33. Property descriptions

- 33.1 Properties advertised will carry (where possible) a photograph of the property location and a full description which will include the following details if applicable:
- Type of property and eligibility criteria
 - Number of bedrooms and eligible household size appropriate
 - Location of property
 - Any adaptations and therefore restrictions on who may apply

- Services provided
- Heating type
- Rent/service charges
- Local connection requirement
- Additional features, marketing information and pet restrictions
- Details on those who will be given priority
- Where rural settlement or local letting policies apply
- If a Social Housing Landlord's allocation policy applies
- Void start date or, for new build, when it is expected to be ready for occupation
- Any rent in advance payable
- Floor level of property

34. Rural settlements and local letting plans

- 34.1 Additional local connection criteria will apply for properties in rural villages where there are particular shortages of housing sites with planning conditions (Section 106 agreements, Local Letting Plans, affordable housing and rural exception sites) attached to them. In these cases, priority will be given to Applicants who are unable to live in their community due to the lack of affordable housing, who have a local connection to the parish or surrounding parishes by means of living in the parish, working in the parish or having immediate family connections to the parish. Where this applies the details will be explained in the property advertisement.
- 34.2 The Homeseekerplus Partnership is committed to creating balanced communities. For new developments and in areas where there are known problems, such as antisocial behaviour or abandoned properties, a local lettings plan may be applied. The plan will take into account the needs of the current and new residents and the makeup of the block, street or cluster of streets, to ensure a responsible letting is made. The local authorities will review each letting plan periodically with landlords.

Section 4: Allocations

35. Shortlisting

- 35.1 Once the advert deadline has passed, a shortlist will be produced for each advertised property showing all the applicants who have bid. For each property advertised, the successful applicant will generally be the applicant who has the highest band and the oldest band start date that is eligible to bid (i.e. who best meets the criteria in the advert and the policy)
- 35.2 The system will produce a shortlist based on the applicant's banding, banding start date, local connection and any other criteria stipulated in the advert.
- 35.3 Each Social Housing Landlord is responsible for checking to ensure there has been no change of circumstances including eligibility for social housing to the housing need assessment of the applicant since originally verified. This is to ensure that social housing is not allocated incorrectly to applicants who no longer match the criteria.
- 35.4 Each applicant will be given the opportunity to view the property before signing for a tenancy.
- 35.5 Should an applicant be at the top of the shortlist for more than one property, one of the Social Housing Landlords of the properties will contact the applicant as quickly as possible to ask them to decide which property they wish to be considered for. Once they have made their decision, their other bids will become invalid. In this circumstance, viewing of any of the properties before a decision is taken is unlikely to be available and will be at the Social Housing Landlord's discretion.
- 35.6 If an applicant is direct matched for a property, any other bids they have made will become invalid.
- 35.8 Any applicant who has a propriety interest in a property must be able and willing to dispose of that interest in a reasonable period.

36. By-passing

- 36.1 A by-pass is where an applicant has bid for a property but is not offered the tenancy.
- 36.2 The appropriate Social Housing Landlord will inform the household of the reason for the by-pass and of any steps needed to prevent further by-passes for the same reason.
- 36.3 By-passing will be carried out in line with the Social Housing Landlord's lettings policy, local letting plans and Homeseekerplus policy and applicants will be informed where reasonable.
- 36.4 Applicants will be required to match the requirements of this policy and match the criteria of the individual property as detailed in the advert. The advert includes details of both the type of applicant that is eligible for the property and any further restriction due to the Social Housing Landlord's own published allocation policy. If the applicant is at the top of the

shortlist but does not meet all these criteria, the Social Housing Landlord may not consider the applicant.

- 36.5 Where an offer is being made to a current tenant of a Social Housing Landlord within the partnership, it is made subject to the satisfactory conduct of the present tenancy and approval of that Social Housing Landlord (which may include a home inspection).

37 Withdrawal

- 37.1 A property shortlist may be withdrawn at any stage during advertising or shortlisting or an offer of a tenancy may be withdrawn at any stage up to the signing of the tenancy agreement.
- 37.2 This may happen in certain circumstances, such as the tenant of that particular property has failed to vacate the property or the property has been incorrectly labelled on the advert.
- 37.3 If this happens, the Social Housing Landlord will inform the successful applicant that the property is no longer available. If the property is not ready for occupation following a successful bid and the applicant is likely to wait some considerable time before being able to sign the tenancy agreement, the Social Housing Landlord will inform the applicant and give them the option to withdraw their bid so they can bid for any other suitable properties. If the property was mis-labelled on the advert it will be re-advertised.

38. Refusals

- 38.1 Applicants are expected to take reasonable care when bidding for a property to ensure it meets their needs. If however an applicant decides to refuse an offer of accommodation, the property will be offered to the next suitable applicant on the shortlist. An application will be reviewed if an applicant refuses three offers of accommodation which the local authority or its agents deem suitable. This could lead to the applicant being suspended for a minimum of six months or being placed in a lower band.
- 38.2 If an applicant in a time limited band refuses an offer of accommodation the application will be reviewed and may be suspended for a minimum of six months or placed in a lower band.

39. Homelessness Refusals

- 39.1 The local authority or its agents will normally expect an applicant to whom it has accepted a full homeless duty to bid for a wide range of suitable properties within the time limit in the Gold Band.
- 39.2 If the main homeless duty is accepted, the applicant will be placed onto autobid from the start of this duty.
- 39.3 At the same time the local authority or its agents may look to discharge the homeless duty into an affordable and suitable private sector tenancy. If one is identified, the Homeseekerplus application will be reviewed and any homeless banding priority awarded

will be removed whether or not the applicant accepts the private sector property found. This will still be subject to the statutory review process.

- 39.4 If a homeless applicant has not been actively bidding for all suitable properties or a suitable private sector property is not available at the end of the one month time limit, the local authority or its agents will secure an offer of suitable, affordable settled accommodation for the household, subject to availability.
- 39.5 Due to limited resources, high demand, and duties to provide accommodation to some groups of applicants in urgent housing need the degree of choice that the local authority is able to offer may be limited.
- 39.6 Applicants will be able to express a preference regarding the area in which they would like to live and the property type they would like, but should be aware that the local authority ability to satisfy a preference is limited. Expressing a preference over where an applicant would like to live does not mean that this preference can be met, or that the local authority will not offer suitable accommodation outside of a preferred area. The local authority will consider whether the property is suitable and is a reasonable offer in order to meet its duties under Section 189B (2) relief of homelessness duty or the main section 193 (2) duty under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996.
- 39.7 Not all properties that become available will be advertised and offered through the Band and date order procedure

40. Direct matching

- 40.1 A direct match is a property which is not available through Homeseekerplus. All the partner social housing landlords are committed to advertising as many of their vacant properties as possible through Homeseekerplus. There will be occasions when certain properties will not be advertised and the reasons for these exclusions will be monitored. Some examples are: -
- Over-riding social reason to move the household for safety reasons, as recommended by the Police, partner organisations, or as agreed through multiagency need and risk assessment panels.
 - Those let to discharge statutory duties to Homeless applicants in certain circumstances.
 - Properties required for existing tenants whose properties are subject to major works requiring them to vacate their own properties (either on a temporary or permanent basis).
 - Extra-care vacancies and any supported accommodation where there is an applicant with a Care package that needs a specific property.
 - Applicants who have succeeded to a tenancy or, in certain circumstances such as following the death of a family member, left in occupation but who need to move to alternative accommodation.
 - Where a property has been adapted and meets the specific needs of a client.
 - Applications subject to the Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976.
- 40.2 There will be circumstances where for urgent operational reasons there is a need to make direct offers of housing outside of the normal policy banding and date order criteria.

- 40.3 This may also restrict the time an applicant is able to bid for accommodation. The offer of accommodation would be in any area of the district that is considered reasonable and the property is suitable and safe for the applicant to live in.
A decision to make a direct match offer could be where:
- An applicant is not being realistic in the areas they are bidding for accommodation and as a result they may be occupying accommodation provided as homeless longer than they need to.
- or
- To assist the local authority in effective management (including financial) of its homeless accommodation

Section 5: Monitoring and review

41. Review/appeal procedure

- 41.1 All applicants have the right to request a review of any Homeseekerplus decisions. The review/appeal should include the reason why the applicant believes the decision is incorrect, together with any additional information.

41.2 Stage One – Internal Review

If you disagree with the way we have assessed your application for housing, or with the housing need band in which we have placed your application, you may request a review which will be decided by a senior housing officer who was not involved in the original decision from the local authority or the agent dealing with your application. To request a review:

- You must complete a Stage 1 - Internal Review Request Form which can be downloaded from the Homeseekerplus website www.homeseekerplus.co.uk and when completed in full, send to the council you applied to within 14 days of receiving your letter or notification.
- We will deal with your request within 14 days or let you know if we will require additional time.
- We will write to you with the outcome of the review within a further seven days of being determined.

41.3 Stage Two –Homeseekerplus Appeal Panel

- 41.4 If you disagree with the outcome of the stage 1 internal review, you can request that your case be taken to the Homeseekerplus Appeal Panel. This Panel is made up of three or more Senior Housing Officers from three of the Partner Councils. These Officers will not have been involved in the original decision or the Officer decision on internal review. The applicant must submit a request for an appeal in writing and send to the Homeseekerplus Co-ordinator within 14 days of the review notification letter. The local authority or its agent will acknowledge receipt of the request for an appeal within 14 days and provide the applicant with contact details of the officer dealing with the request and the time it will take to reply to the applicant. If the review cannot be completed within 56 days, the applicant will be informed and the timescales for the review set out.

- 41.5 The panel will be made up of senior housing officers from three or more of the other local authorities. The appeal will consider the facts surrounding the case and your request should specify whether there are additional facts the Panel should take into consideration or whether you feel that the original facts you submitted with your application have not been fully taken into account. If you have additional evidence, such as additional medical reports, then these should also be submitted up to one week before the panel meet.
- 41.6 The Panel will consider the review on the papers submitted by the applicant and the housing officer from the local authority involved in the case. If determined by the Homeseekerplus Co-ordinator the applicant or the relevant Housing Officer may be asked to attend this review hearing in person if additional information from either party is required. The applicant can bring a representative.
- 41.7 The Homeseekerplus Co-ordinator will chair this panel and a nominated representative for the applicant will be present at the Hearing to ensure that all relevant information has been presented and is dealt with correctly.
- 41.8 The panel must come to a majority decision, should this not be the case, the Homeseekerplus Co-ordinator and chair of the panel will arbitrate.
- 41.9 Once the appeal has been determined, or if the Panel require the applicant to attend a further Hearing, the Homeseekerplus Co-ordinator will write to the applicant giving full details within 14 days or as soon as reasonably practicable thereafter.

42. Local Authority Complaints Procedure

- 42.1 If you feel that you have been treated unfairly or you believe the process has not been carried out as described above you can use your Local Authority's (or its agents) Complaints Procedure to make a formal complaint.
- 42.2 The complaint must be made in writing to the appropriate authority within 14 days of the date of the written notification of the decision of the Homeseekerplus Appeal Panel.
- 42.3 If the applicant is still dissatisfied, they may complain directly to the Local Government Ombudsman.

43. Subject access requests

- 43.1 Applicants are entitled under the Data Protection Act 2018 or any superseding legislation to request details of their personal data held by the seven local authorities.

44. Use of statistical information

- 44.1 The information supplied by Applicants on their housing application may also be used for housing management and research purposes within legal guidelines (such as identifying

what size and where new housing is required). No individual will be identified in collating such information.

45 Policy management

- 45.1 The Homeseekerplus Co-ordinator will run regular reports to monitor performance of the scheme in meeting the aims of the policy.
- 45.2 The Homeseekerplus policy will be regularly reviewed and at least annually to ensure that it takes into account change in demand and need within the district, that it continues to meet its aims and objectives and that it complies with any legislative changes.
- 45.3 Any changes to the Homeseekerplus Policy will be implemented only with the majority agreement of the members of the Partnership. An interested party may contact any of the local authority partners to make observations to be considered at the next review.

June 2019 Edition

Homeseekerplus

Common Allocations Policy Document



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Introduction and policy statement

Introduction

Homeseeckerplus is a choice based lettings (CBL) scheme run by the seven local authorities in partnership with social housing landlords and Blenheim Palace Estates operating within Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire.

The seven local authorities are Tewkesbury Borough Council, Gloucester City Council, Cheltenham Borough Council, Stroud District Council, Forest of Dean District Council, Cotswold District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council.

Demand for affordable social housing within the Homeseeckerplus area is very high and cannot be met from the available social housing resources. Only those in the highest housing need, with a local connection to the area are likely to obtain housing through the homeseeckerplus scheme. Each district's Housing Advice Service will be able to advise on a range of housing options including the private rented sector.

The policy explains who is eligible and qualifying to apply on Homeseeckerplus and sets out how applications will be assessed based on housing need.

Homeseeckerplus aims to allocate social housing in their area in a fair and transparent way while complying with all legal requirements.

Overview of how the partnership functions

Homeseeckerplus enables social housing landlords and Blenheim Palace Estates to advertise their homes and applicants are able to express an interest in them. This is known as a "bid" for a property. Once a bid is placed the system will generate a shortlist placing applicants in order of band, band start date and whether they meet the criteria of the advert. Priority for properties goes to those who have a local connection with the local authority in which the property is located, then to those who have a local connection with any of the other Homeseeckerplus districts and finally to anyone else.

All applicants seeking social housing across Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire will complete the same application process and will be assessed against the same clear set of criteria. Depending on their circumstances, applicants will be placed into one of four bands Emergency, Gold, Silver or Bronze subject to final verification by a Homeseeckerplus partner.

Once an application has been made, applicants are advised of their banding and banding start date, together with details of how to access the system. This enables applicants to bid for suitable social housing vacancies being advertised across the whole of Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire.

Once the Bid deadline has passed, the successful applicant is the highest priority household at the point of shortlisting. This is assessed against the criteria for the property, including where local connection applies and any local letting plans.

Responsibility for letting each available property lies with the social housing landlord. The appropriate landlord must confirm that the details on the application are still correct and may undertake their own assessment to ensure the property is right for the applicant before making an offer. Incorrect information will result in the offer being withdrawn and the applicant circumstances being re-assessed.

Application for sheltered and extra care housing schemes may need an assessment of the support needs, prior to an offer being made.

Policy statement

This policy aims to:

- Assist in building sustainable communities.
- Enable informed choice of housing/ housing options and improve levels of customer satisfaction.
- Operate a common selection system that offers realistic, informed choice for all applicants.
- Ensure that those who have the greatest need for housing have the greatest opportunity to secure it.
- Ensure that less able applicants are involved in the lettings process and they have choices offering equality of opportunity for all.
- Make best use of available housing resources to meet local need.
- Minimise the refusal of offers of accommodation and reduce rent loss by allowing people to choose where they live thereby supporting sustainable communities.
- Where possible, give people with a local connection to a district priority in the letting of housing within that district.
- Enable mobility within social housing in Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire.
- Enable the authorities to meet their statutory duties including where duties are owed to homeless Applicants under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, as amended and the homelessness reduction act 2017.
- Contribute towards tackling discrimination.
- Use a common eligibility criteria and housing application process.
- Ensure fairness, simplicity and transparency with a system that is easily understood.
- Promote a feeling of ownership and commitment to their area as they have chosen to live there.
- Assess applications according to the applicant's needs under the framework of the policy.

Equal opportunities and social inclusion

All partners of Homeseekerplus agree that applicants should be given every possible assistance to access the housing register and search for suitable properties. Applicants who are identified as potentially disadvantaged by the scheme maybe contacted to discuss alternative options.

All partners of Homeseekerplus are committed to the elimination of discrimination. They promote equality of opportunity for all and work towards this goal in the provision of services.

We are committed to:

- Eliminating discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Equalities Act 2010.
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and others who do not share it.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it
- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of people who do not share it
- Encouraging those people who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low
- Making the best possible use of the existing and potential workforce and resources by enabling cross boundary moves.

Applicants should be given every assistance to access the housing register and search for suitable properties.

Applicants potentially disadvantaged by the scheme will initially be identified from the application process and they may be offered a home visit or interview. Staff will seek to establish what the support needs are and identify ways of enabling the applicants to participate in Homeseekerplus. This may include sending copies of the adverts in large print to an applicant or simply providing advice. Translation services may be provided where appropriate.

Disadvantaged applicants are able to nominate a person (including family members, friends or a professional worker) to help them bid or bid on their behalf for suitable properties. Signed consent will be required if requests are made by a 3rd party.

The local authority may bid for suitable vacancies on a vulnerable applicant's behalf if they are at risk of being disadvantaged by the scheme and have no support to enable them to do so. This may include the use of the Autobid function.

Any supporting agencies should be able to provide their clients with help on housing issues including the application and bidding process.

Legal

Legal Framework

The Homeseekerplus complies with the local authority's statutory duties under Part VI and VII of the Housing Act 1996 as amended and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, in addition to any other relevant legal duties and has regard to the following:

- Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England 2012
- Equalities Act 2010
- Public Sector Equality Act 2010
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Localism Act 2011
- Immigration Act 2014
- Local letting plans
- S.106 agreements

Data retention

As part of the application process, personal data is required to support any housing application. We will comply with all data protection legislation. This includes:

- For active applications, data is stored for as long as your application is active.
- For housed applications, data is stored for 3 years
- If you do not use Homeseekerplus for a period of 1 year, then your case will be set to removed and removed after 6 months.
- Homeless applications are kept for 3 years.

Definition of social housing providers for Homeseekerplus

Affordable housing is social rented and affordable rented provided to eligible households who otherwise would be unable to secure alternative provisions and have been assessed under this policy. For this policy, housing providers who operate within the Homeseekerplus boundaries are registered providers, arm's length management organisations or Council owned stock, eligibility and qualifying criteria is set by this policy.

All partners have a common goal to provide homes for local people in housing need with eligibility determined within this policy framework.

Types of tenancies

Depending on the landlord and applicants circumstances, an applicant may be offered either an introductory; secure; starter; assured; fixed term; assured short hold; or flexible tenancy.

Who is eligible to register?

Homeseekerplus is open to anyone in housing need who is not subject to immigration rules which would otherwise exclude them. This may include but not is limited to existing tenants looking to transfer to another property, homeless families looking for a permanent home and other households who either rent in the private sector or lodging with family and friends. A household may include anyone that may reasonably be expected to live with them as part of their application.

Who is not eligible to register?

Consistent with Right to Rent regulations within the Immigration Act 2014, persons from abroad who do not have leave to remain are ineligible this includes those who are:

- Subject to immigration control and has over stayed their visa or is a visitor
- Illegal entrants
- Asylum seekers
- People in the UK on condition that they have no recourse to public funds
- A person from abroad who is in breach of the European community right of residence directive
- A person whose only right to reside in the UK arises under European law based on their status as a job seeker or an initial 3 months right of residence
- A person from abroad who has been the subject of a sponsorship agreement for less than five years and whose sponsor is still alive
- A person with limited leave not granted as a result of a claim for asylum

If the local authority decides that an applicant is not eligible to register under any of these criteria, they will notify the person of the decision in writing including the reason.

Persons who are ineligible for a tenancy in their own right may still be included within a household application and for determining the bedroom need of the household.

Applicants under 16 years of age at the date they apply.

Scheme conditions

Who does not qualify?

Homeseekerplus has been established under the terms of the Housing Act 1996, as amended and the Localism Act 2011. This gives local authorities the right to decide who will not qualify for social housing.

Some applicants may be eligible to register on Homeseekerplus but subsequently do not qualify and are excluded to be included. Others may be eligible and qualify to be included but are subsequently suspended from bidding.

The following are persons who do not qualify for Homeseekerplus.

An applicant may not hold two tenancies at one time, applicants must be able to end their current tenancy within a reasonable period from being made an offer.

An applicant will be non-qualifying for social housing if the local authority has undertaken an affordability check which has shown that they have sufficient financial resources to adequately resolve their own particular housing need through outright purchase, lease or mortgage. This check will consider the type of accommodation needed to meet these needs to resolve their own housing need within their district.

Homeowners who own or part own a property which is suitable for their needs or where those needs can be resolved through adaptation and where it is safe to remain.

If the local authority decides that an applicant does not qualify, they will notify the applicant of their decision in writing and the reasons for it.

Applicants who do not qualify will need to reapply in full if they feel their circumstances have changed where they may now qualify.

Suspending and demoting an application

If an applicant has rent arrears or other housing debt with a social landlord or Blenheim Palace Estates, which accrued less than 6 years ago, the applicant will be given the opportunity to clear the debt before a decision to suspend is made. If the applicant is unable to do this, they may be suspended for a period as required to reduce the debt to below 8 weeks arrears and have a repayment plan in place and in payment before they can bid for other properties.

Each case will be considered on their own merits, for example if the rent arrears arose directly due to domestic abuse, an application would not be suspended.

Existing social housing tenants who may be suspended because of rent arrears will be considered as an exception on an individual basis if proved that they cannot afford to stay in their current tenancy as a result of Welfare Reform Act changes.

If a partner landlord becomes aware of such a debt they will advise the relevant local authority when arrears are reduced. The local authority may suspend the application or advise the applicant to undertake a change of circumstances for their application to be reassessed.

Applicants who have been awarded time limited bands are expected to bid on all suitable property types across all areas if no suitable properties are available within their local connection area. Failure to do so may result in suspension or demotion for a period the local authority deem fit.

Whilst Homeseekerplus aims to give applicants choice, it also needs to help social landlords let their available homes in an efficient way. If an applicant refuses 3 properties that the local authority considers were suitable, the application will be demoted or suspended for a period of 6 months from the time of their last offer. This provision does not apply to final offers of accommodation made in order to discharge homeless duties under part VII of the housing act 1996 (as amended) or homelessness reduction act 2017.

Applicants who have unreasonably disposed of financial resources that could have enabled them to purchase/obtain their own accommodation.

An applicant will not be non-qualifying if the applicant, or a member of their household, has been responsible for unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable to be a tenant of the local authority or a social housing landlord at the time of application.

Behaviour that may be regarded as unacceptable is as follows: -

- Criminal activity in the vicinity of the property
- History of anti-social behaviour or disruptive nuisance to neighbours
- Racial harassment
- Drug use or dealing
- Any other breach of the tenancy agreement such that the landlord would be likely to apply for and obtain a possession order.

As part of the assessment consideration will be given to the household's personal circumstances, the level of the debt, the household's history of arrears and any other factors that may be relevant.

Such applicants will be informed of the actions required from them to demonstrate that there has been a change in their behaviour such that they will become qualifying e.g. obtaining a satisfactory landlord reference for a period of 6 months or where regular repayments are made without fail against an agreed repayment plan for a period of 6 months.

Exceptions to these qualifying criteria include:

- Those people fleeing harassment or violence where the Police, Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVA) or MultiAgency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) support a move
- proven social or medical/welfare needs

In exceptional circumstances where the applicant has an urgent need to move, the local authority may waive this qualification and suspension criteria.

An immediate review of an application will be undertaken if an applicant is found to have acted (or failed to act) in a way which deliberately worsened their housing situation. This could lead to the applicant being suspended, or being demoted to a lower band, for a minimum of 6 months.

Applicants will be advised as to what action/s will be necessary to lift the suspension or demotion.

Applicants who are suspended will need to reapply in full if they feel their circumstances have changed and their application will be reassessed.

Providing false information and change of circumstances

Any applicant who knowingly or recklessly gives false information or knowingly withholds information in order to secure a home to which they are not entitled may lose any home provided to them and may also be prosecuted. Where false information is given and the applicant becomes non-qualifying or not eligible, the application will be removed. Where false information is given and the applicant still qualifies, the application will be suspended for a period of 3 months and the applicant will have to reapply with correct information. The law imposes severe penalties, including substantial fines up to £5000 or imprisonment, when an offence is proven.

Local Connections

Due to the exceptional demand for housing across the Homeseekerplus area and the difficulty in solving local housing need, preference will usually be given to applicants with a local connection to the appropriate district.

Homeseekerplus local connection is defined by any of the following:

- Those who are, or were in the past, normally resident there, and that residence was of their own choice during 6 out of the past 12 months or during 3 out of the past 5 years.
- those who are employed in the local authority area
- Those who have immediate family connections in the local authority area for 5 years
- Members of the armed forces

- Other special circumstances

Local connection will be award by the lead authority only.

Local connection clarification

‘Normal residence’ is to be understood as meaning ‘the place where at the relevant time the person in fact resides.’ Residence in temporary accommodation provided by a housing authority will not constitute normal residence of choice and will not contribute towards a local connection. In the case of a person who is street homeless or insecurely accommodated (‘sofa surfing’) within their district, the housing authority will need to satisfy themselves that applicant has no settled accommodation elsewhere, and if from inquiries the authority is satisfied that they do in fact reside in the district, then they will be considered normally residence.

Where the applicant raises family associations, this may extend beyond partners, parents, adult children or siblings. They may include associations with other family members such as step-parents, grandparents, grandchildren, aunts or uncles provided there are sufficiently close links in the form of frequent contact, commitment or dependency. Family associations should be determined with regard to the fact-specific circumstances of the individual case.

For the purposes of employment, a member of the application should work in the district they are applying too: it would not be sufficient that their employer’s head office was located there but their place of work was not. In the case of self-employment, local connection would be classified by the address their business is registered. For agency, casual or other types of employment, you must be able to prove that the employment contract is not short-term, casual, ancillary or voluntary.

Special circumstances would include but are not limited to the need to be near special medical or support services which are available only in a particular district and where transport links would not suffice in the ability to meet those needs. Special circumstances will be assessed on their own individual merits.

In cases of care leavers who are owed a leaving care duty, they will have a local connection to all districts within the area of the children services authority. For care leavers who have been placed in accommodation in a different district to that of the children’s services authority, and they have lived in the other district for at least 2 years, including some time before they turned 16, they will also have the same local connection until they are 21.

Local connection will not be awarded if your accommodation was not of your own choice, this includes but not limited to:

- Approved premises
- Rehabilitation units

Members of the armed forces will have a local connection to a district of their choice. This will be the same for those currently serving, served within the immediately preceding 5 years. Bereaved spouse or civil partner who has recently or will cease to be entitled to Ministry of Defence accommodation

following the death of their service spouse and the death was wholly or partly attributable to their service. Existing or former members of the reserve forces who are suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is wholly or partly attributable to their service. local connection will also be awarded for divorced or separated spouses or civil partners of Service personnel who are required to move out of accommodation provided by the Ministry of Defence will also be awarded.

If an applicant has been subject to immigration control where they would not have been deemed eligible and subsequently become eligible, the date of where a local connection would apply would be from the date they have lived in the area. Refugees would have a local connection outside of this criteria to the last area they were housed in by the Home Office under asylum support.

Decisions on local connection must be made based on the facts at the date of the decision and not the date of application.

Assessment of applications

How to register

The applicant will be able to register for social housing through the Homeseekerplus website at www.Homeseekerplus.co.uk. Homeseekerplus is an online application only and has been designed to be accessible to all with easy speech, reading and translation tools. If an applicant needs advice and assistance with their application, they will need to contact the authority they are applying to.

When an applicant applies through the Homeseekerplus website and has registered their household, they will then complete an application for Social Housing explaining their housing situation. If, after completion of the application and provision of any necessary proof or further information, the applicant is eligible, they will be given a band start date and placed in a local housing band.

The applicant should make sure that they include all relevant details on the application so that proper consideration can be given to the application. Homeseekerplus may consult any of the applicants' previous landlords or agencies to check the details they have given.

All applicants will be given unique login details which can be updated from their account.

Applicants will be informed if further information or clarification is required. Failure to complete the online application form will result in this being deleted from the system.

Assessment of an application

By registering to join Homeseekerplus, the applicant will need to freely give their consent for enquiries to be made to verify their circumstances. Applicants will have to confirm that the information they have given is true and accurate.

The information the applicant has provided will guide the decision on which band they will be placed in. Applicants will be required to provide the lead authority with documentation to evidence their housing need stated.

Bedroom need assessment

The bedroom need for a household is assessed to match Housing costs guidance to ensure suitability and affordability for low income households.

One bedroom is required for:

- An adult couple
- A person aged 16 or over
- 2 children aged up to 16 years of age of the same sex
- 2 children aged up to 10 years of age of different sexes

When a child is born, the applicant must provide evidence of the birth as soon as possible and the bedroom need will then be re-assessed. This may not change your bedroom need or banding and any additional award will not be given until evidence of the birth is provided.

Visiting children will not normally be counted in this assessment.

Verification

Applicants will be able to bid for properties advertised, but no tenancy will be offered until verification has been completed by the local authorities. The purpose of the verification is to establish the accuracy or validity of your application.

Documents requested for verification will depend on your individual circumstances. These documents must be provided to verify your medical needs, eligibility and qualifying status.

As standard, verification of key documents will remain valid for 6 months or the validity of the document, whichever is longer.

Key standard documents are as follows, but not limited to:

- Identification of all members of the application
- 2 months bank statements of all members over the age of 18
- Child benefit or an appropriate court order
- Proof of residency to support right to rent checks

Banding reasons

Applicants need to meet the criteria in one box to be assessed in that band in the table below. Applicants will be awarded two bands – one for their “local” band (lead authority) and one for their “global” band (other 6 authorities). In some cases, these may be with same depending on your circumstances, however, having a local connection to another authority would not automatically deem you to have a higher banding in that district.

Applicants banding may be time limited due to the type of housing need they have, therefore, they would be expected to bid for and accept any suitable property offered to them during their time limit. Failure to do so may lead to a direct match or demotion.

Right to move

Right to Move is for social housing tenants who need to move to another District in order to take up a job or live closer to employment or training.

In order to qualify, social housing tenants must demonstrate that the job/apprenticeship will alleviate significant hardship and that there are no other options available to them.

- To determine qualification, the following detail will need to be established:
- The distance and/or time taken to travel between work and home
- The availability of transport, taking into account level of earnings
- The nature of the work and whether similar opportunities are available closer to home
- Other personal factors, such as medical conditions and child care, which would be affected if the tenant could not move
- Whether failure to move would result in the loss of an opportunity to improve their employment circumstances or prospects, for example, by taking up a better job, a promotion or apprenticeship

Those who qualify for Right to Move will get a local banding preference of Silver, identifying that there is a “Significant welfare need that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation”.

Property size

Emergency Band

Existing Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire social housing tenants willing to move from family accommodation to non-family social housing property within the partnership area.

Gold Band

Existing Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire social housing tenants willing to move to smaller family sized accommodation if this has been agreed with your local authority to release a property of higher demand or limited availability.

or

There is major overcrowding in the current property - lacking 2 or more bedrooms (this will not apply if the applicant has unreasonably allowed one or more people to move in to the property, this is called deliberately worsening your own situation).

or

Environmental Health has inspected the property and has served a Prohibition Notice (or suspended Prohibition Licence) on the landlord due to overcrowding - subject also to the applicant not deliberately worsening your own situation.

Silver Band

There is overcrowding in the current property - lacking 1 bedroom - (this will not apply if the applicant has unreasonably allowed one or more people to move in to the property, this is called deliberately worsening your own situation).

Property condition

Emergency band

Where Environmental Health has inspected the property and requires immediate vacation of the property because of an imminent risk of harm due to disrepair, major defects or grossly inadequate facilities. They could serve an Emergency Prohibition Order on the landlord in these circumstances.

This award is time limited for 1 month when it will be reviewed. It can be extended if no suitable properties have become available in this time scale or a direct match can be made.

Gold band

Where Environmental Health has inspected the property and has served a Prohibition Order or Suspended Prohibition Order on the landlord that repairs have to be undertaken but the landlord is unable/unwilling to comply. In most cases the landlord will be required to undertake repairs to remedy the problem and when completed this should resolve the issue. These only apply to the Local band so only when bidding for properties in the home/lead local authority area.

Homelessness

Gold banding

The applicant has made a homelessness application under part VII of the housing act 1996, as amended to one of the Home Seekerplus local authorities and the full s193 statutory homeless duty to secure accommodation for the applicant has been accepted by that authority.

This is time limited for 1 month when it will be reviewed. It can be extended if no suitable properties have become available in this time scale. A suitable tenancy in the private sector or a direct match into social housing may be made to end the homelessness duty at any time.

Silver banding

The applicant has made a homeless application to one of the Homeseekerplus local authorities and either:

- A Prevention of Homelessness duty has been accepted
- A Relief of Homelessness duty has been accepted

or

The applicant has made a homeless application under part VII of the housing act 1996, as amended to one of the Homeseekerplus local authorities and remains assessed as eligible for assistance and homeless but has either has been found either non-priority or intentionally homeless.

Medical Need

None of the below refer to having a medical condition in its own right. It is only when the current housing is directly affecting that medical condition that priority is awarded. In other words even when a member of the applicant's household has a very severe set of medical conditions, if their housing has little or no bearing on their health then no priority will be awarded.

Emergency band

The applicant assessed as immediate need of re-housing on medical grounds. This may be when they have had a major incident, are in hospital or another emergency provision and unable to return to the existing home because of their medical condition and immediate adaptations are not available.

This award is time limited for 1 month when it will be reviewed. It can be extended if no suitable properties have become available in this time scale or a direct match can be made.

These are time limited for 1 month when they will be reviewed. It can be extended if no suitable properties have become available in this time scale or a direct match can be made.

Gold band

Urgent medical need or long-term disability that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation. This would apply when the situation is so serious that it would not be reasonable to expect the applicant to continue to live at the property for any length of time,

given their particular medical circumstances but not a life-threatening emergency.

Proof of the situation would be required from Social Care services, NHS or other medical specialists.

A member of the household seeking accommodation is disabled and re-housing will enable that person to overcome physical barriers created by current accommodation and it has been established that the home cannot be adapted to meet needs e.g. steps and stairs.

Silver band

Significant medical need that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation. This could be situations/medical conditions that could apply to one or more members of the household which because of the particular household circumstances significant distress is caused. Proof of the situation would be required from Social Care services, NHS or other medical specialists.

Depression and asthma are the most commonly quoted medical conditions. Where these are mild and not directly related to the current property priority is unlikely to be awarded.

Welfare Need

Emergency band

The applicant assessed as immediate need of re-housing on welfare grounds where there has been a major incident and there is proven threat to life or limb. This would normally be based on information provided by the Police or other specialists.

Gold banding

Exceptional circumstances where the current property has a critical long-term detrimental effect on their welfare. This would normally be based on information provided by multi agency meetings or Social Care services.

Silver banding

Significant welfare need that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation. Proof of the situation would be required from Social Care services, housing association or other specialists to establish that a management move would not be appropriate.

This banding would only be used if the housing provider is unable to provide a management move.

Move on/care leavers

Gold band

A young person owed leaving care duties under section 23C of the Children Act 1989 and in a housing need will be awarded gold banding to the area of the children services authority that owes them the duties. Homeseekerplus comprises of Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire which have different children services authorities, therefore gold will only be awarded to housing authority districts falling within the area of the children services authority.

Move-on from supported accommodation funded County Council commissioned services and where a local connection was agreed at point of referral by the relevant local housing authority.

When someone is placed in accommodation based supported housing and is not in their home/lead authority area there is a presumption that they will be reconnected back to their home area when ready to move-on from the supported accommodation.

There are 2 requirements for this priority:

- that the supported accommodation provider has confirmed that the resident is ready for independent living by completing the standard move-on form detailing the work they have completed with the resident and assessment of any remaining support needs.;
- that the local authority has been involved in the move-on planning and accepts that they are the appropriate local authority to re-house this applicant by awarding this priority.
- The accommodation is not low support, temporary or emergency provision or intensive housing management (unless subject to local individual arrangements).

General

Gold band

As a result of a multi-agency decision agreed by the relevant housing authority. Where multi agencies including the local housing authority are involved with a particular household and meet to agree a way forward to resolve an urgent housing situation this priority can be awarded to better protect the public/local neighbourhood.

BANDING TABLE

Additional bedroom needs criteria

Households will also be assessed to consider the need for one additional bedroom for each of the following if they are assessed as being included as part of the household:

- A tenant requiring a non-resident overnight carer
- Disabled child who cannot share a bedroom with their sibling due to their disability
- An adult child who is serving away with the armed forces
- A room for a foster child or children

You can include someone on your application if they need to live with you in order to give or receive care or support and no one in your immediate household is able to care for you. You will need to evidence on your application the reason why an additional person or a carer needs to live with you and demonstrate:

- they or you need to be supported or cared for and are dependent upon this
- that other satisfactory arrangements cannot be made
- that the arrangement is 'permanent'

We will also require you to provide evidence such as that the person requires your support or care; for example, proof that you/they are providing care, are in receipt of care allowances and are able to meet any costs associated with the additional bedroom either through benefits, income or savings.

We will not include family members currently living abroad on your application and therefore they cannot be re-housed with you until such a time that they return to the UK and the Council is satisfied that they are reasonably expected to reside with you.

In cases where two parents or guardians have joint access to children, bedroom eligibility will be awarded to the main care provider. You will need to demonstrate:

- you are the main care provider (children live with you for more than half the week -four nights or more) and you are in receipt of child benefit and if applicable child tax credits
- that the arrangement is 'permanent'

The protections afforded by the Equality Act 2010 are intended to be available to all, including children and adolescents. Any required additional bedroom need will be awarded on a case by case basis in line with housing benefit rules and affordability.

Time limited bands

Certain categories have a time limit of one month or more. This is given to recognise an urgent need. It is therefore important that applicants in this category are bidding for all suitable properties each week and in a wide range of locations.

At the end of the period the case will be reviewed by the Lead Authority.

If the applicant is in a time limited band and has either not bid for suitable properties advertised within the 1 month or has been unsuccessful in obtaining an offer of a tenancy within the limit, a direct match of a property may be considered. Where a private sector tenancy is available, suitable and affordable at the time the Local authority or its agents may look to secure a tenancy in the private rented sector.

Demotion

The Lead Authority may however decide to demote an applicant to the band below at the end of the time-limited period if it is obvious that the applicant is choosing to wait for a particular type of property or immediate location and not treating their circumstance as urgent.

Applicants are encouraged to make full use of their bids and seek all housing options available to them. Applicants will be assessed by a senior officer if they have unreasonably refused a property or to bid in a reasonable time if the following criteria have been met:

- they deliberately do or fail to do anything in consequence of which they missed out on suitable properties
- it would have been reasonable for them to do so and there is no other good reason why they have not

The demotion period will be what the local authority deems reasonable up to 12 months and will be considered on a case by case basis.

Global banding criteria

Global banding will be awarded to those on bandings where it would be unduly burdening another authority where the duty to house the household should remain with the lead authority.

Applications will be awarded a global band equal to that of their local banding in all but the below cases:

Where the lead authority has accepted a full statutory homeless duty to secure accommodation for the applicant. Your global banding in this circumstance will be silver.

Where the lead authority has a gold move on agreement from support accommodation, your global banding will be bronze.

Where the lead authority has assessed your property as having a prohibition notice then your global band will be bronze.

Where the lead authority has awarded you a downsizing band, your global band will be silver.

Scheme Details

Completed applications

Once the applicant has been assessed and accepted on to the Homeseekerplus scheme, they will receive, where possible within 28 days, notification, confirming their application details.

This will include;

- a) The band in which the applicant has been placed
- b) The property size for which the applicant is eligible
- c) The registration date
- d) Band start date
- e) reminder about the importance of notifying any change in circumstances
- f) A unique reference
- g) Details of the verification documents required
- h) Details of the appeal procedure

Annual renewal process

Where an applicant has not made any bid on any property, nor updated their application in any way within the previous twelve months, they will be contacted to see if they still wish to remain on the Homeseekerplus Register. If there is no response within 28 days from the date of notification, the application will be removed. If the applicant contacts the Local Authority within 28 days of their application being cancelled and indicates that they still wish to be considered for housing, the application will be reinstated.

Applicants must renew their application if requested to do so by Homeseekerplus.

Reapplying

Any former applicant will need to make a new application, which will be dated from when it was received.

Removing applications

An application will be cancelled from Homeseekerplus:-

- At the request of the applicant
- Where an applicant does not respond to an application review within the specified

time limit

- Where the applicant moves and does not provide a contact address
- Where the applicant has died
- Where an applicant ceases to be eligible

Bidding

Once applicants have been registered as active on Homeseekerplus and notified of banding and log in details, they can start to look and bid for a suitable property of their choice subject to the terms and conditions of their banding.

Applicants may bid for eligible properties within the deadline given. It makes no difference to the final shortlist what time during the week the bid was placed. Property details and information should be carefully read as some properties will have additional requirements that make the property unsuitable for the applicant e.g. the number of people the property is suitable for – some have only single bedrooms.

Applicants may have up to a maximum of three bids in any given bidding cycle. Until a decision has been made as to who will receive the offer, a bid will remain live. The applicant can withdraw their bid if they wish to bid for another property during the same cycle.

At the time the bid is placed, the applicant will be given their current position on the shortlist. This is only an indication, as the position can change, as other people bid, or bids are withdrawn. All shortlists are live and subject to change.

Advertisements

All partner landlords are committed to advertising their available properties as widely as possible. Properties will be advertised in several ways on a weekly basis.

- A dedicated website for Homeseekerplus is accessible to anyone with Internet access. The website will allow applicants to view all available properties across the whole of Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire and bid 'on-line' for properties of their choice.
- Adverts displayed in a number of localities across the Homeseekerplus partnership including local authority offices.
- By post in a number of formats to aid those in line with the public sector equality act.

Property descriptions

Properties advertised will carry (where possible) a photograph of the property location and a full description which will include:

- Type of property and eligibility criteria
- Number of bedrooms and eligible household size appropriate
- Location of property
- Any adaptations and therefore restriction on those who may apply
- Services provided
- Heating type
- Rent/service charges
- Local connection requirement
- Additional features, marketing information and pet restrictions
- Details on those who will be given priority
- Where rural settlement or local letting policies apply
- If a Social Housing Landlord's allocation policy applies
- Void start date or new build when it's expected to be ready
- Any rent in advance payable
- Floor level of property

Rural settlements and local letting plans

Additional local connection criteria will apply for properties in rural villages where there are particular shortages of housing sites with planning conditions (Section 106 agreements and rural exception sites) attached to them. In these cases, priority will be given to Applicants who are unable to live in their community due to the lack of affordable housing, who have a local connection to the parish or surrounding parishes by means of living in the parish, working in the parish or having immediate family connections to the parish. Where this applies the details will be explained in the property advertisement.

The Homeseekerplus Partnership is committed to creating balanced communities. For new developments and in areas where there are known problems, such as antisocial behaviour or abandoned properties, a local lettings plan may be applied. The plan will take into account the needs of the current and new residents and the makeup of the block, street or cluster of streets, to ensure a responsible letting is made. The local authorities will review each letting plan periodically with landlords.

Allocations

Shortlisting

Once the advert deadline has passed, a shortlist will be produced for each advertised property showing all the applicants who have bid. For each property advertised, the successful applicant will generally be the applicant who has the highest band and the oldest band start date that is eligible to bid (i.e. who best meets the criteria in the advert and the policy)

The system will produce a shortlist based the applicants banding, banding start date, local connection and any other criteria stipulated in the advert.

Each Social Housing Landlord is responsible for checking to ensure there has been no change of circumstances including eligibility for social housing to the housing need assessment of the applicant since originally verified. This is to ensure that social housing is not allocated incorrectly to applicants who no longer match the criteria.

Each applicant will be given the opportunity to view the property before signing for a tenancy.

Should an applicant be at the top of the shortlist for more than one property, one of the Social Housing Landlords of the properties will contact the applicant as quickly as possible to ask them to decide which property they wish to be considered for. Once they have made their decision, their other bids will become invalid. In this circumstance, viewing of any of the properties before a decision is taken is unlikely to be available and will be at the Social Housing Landlord's discretion.

If an applicant is direct matched for a property, any other bids they have made will become invalid.

Any applicant who has a propriety interest in a property must be able and willing to dispose of that interest in a reasonable period.

By-passing

A by-pass is where an applicant has bid for a property but is not offered the tenancy.

The appropriate Social Housing Landlord will inform the household of the by-pass and of any steps needed to prevent further by-passes for the same reason.

By-passing will be carried out inline with social housing landlords lettings policy, local letting plans and homeseekerplus policy and inform you where reasonable.

Applicants will be required to match the requirements of this policy and match the criteria of the individual property as detailed in the advert. The advert includes details of both the type of applicant that is eligible for the property and any further restriction due to the Social Housing Landlord's own published allocation policy. If the applicant is at the top of the shortlist but does not meet all these criteria, the Social Housing Landlord may not consider the applicant.

Where an offer is being made to a current tenant of a Social Housing Landlord within the partnership, it is made subject to the satisfactory conduct of the present tenancy and approval of that Social Housing Landlord (which may include a home inspection).

If there is an occasion where two or more applicants have the same band start date and application date, the Social Housing Landlord will make a decision which applicant best meets the aims and objectives of Homeseekerplus.

Withdrawal

A shortlist maybe withdrawn at any stage during advertising or shortlisting.

An offer of a tenancy may be withdrawn at any stage up to the signing of the tenancy agreement.

This may happen in certain circumstances, such as the tenant of that particular property has failed to vacate the property or the property has been incorrectly labelled on the advert.

If this happens, the Social Housing Landlord will inform the successful applicant that the property is no longer available. If the property is not ready for occupation following a successful bid and the applicant is likely to wait some considerable time before being able to sign the tenancy agreement, the Social Housing Landlord will inform the applicant and give them the option to withdraw their bid so they can bid for any other suitable properties. If the property was mis-labelled on the advert it will be re-advertised.

Refusals

Applicants are expected to take reasonable care when bidding for a property to ensure it meets their needs. If however an applicant decides to refuse an offer of accommodation, the property will be offered to the next suitable applicant on the shortlist. An application will be reviewed if an applicant refuses 3 offers of accommodation which the local authority or its agents deem suitable. This could lead to the applicant being suspended for a minimum of 6 months or being placed in a lower band.

If an applicant in a time limited band refuses an offer of accommodation the application will be reviewed and may be suspended for a minimum of 6 months or placed in a lower band.

Homelessness

The local authority or its agents will normally expect an applicant to whom it has accepted a full homeless duty to bid for a wide range of suitable properties within the time limit in the Gold Band.

If the main homeless duty is accepted, you will be placed onto autobid from the start of this duty.

At the same time the local authority or its agents may be looking to discharge the homeless duty into an affordable and suitable private sector tenancy. If one is identified, the Homeseekerplus application will be reviewed and any homeless banding priority awarded will be removed whether or not the applicant accepts the private sector property found which will still be subject to the statutory review process.

If a homeless applicant has not been actively bidding for all suitable properties or a suitable private sector property is not available at the end of the one month time limit, the local authority or its agents will secure an offer of suitable, affordable settled accommodation for the household subject to availability.

Due to limited resources, high demand, and duties to provide accommodation to some groups of applicants in urgent housing need the degree of choice that the local authority is able to offer may be limited.

Applicants will be able to express a preference over the area in which they would like to live and the property type they would like, but should be aware that the local authority ability to satisfy a preference will be limited. Expressing a preference over where an applicant would like to live does not mean that this preference can be met, or that the local authority will not offer suitable accommodation outside of a preferred area. The local authority will consider whether the property is suitable for you and is a reasonable offer in order to meet its duties under Section 189B (2) relief of homelessness duty or the main section 193 (2) duty under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996.

Not all properties that become available will be advertised and offered through the Band and date order procedure

Direct matching

A direct match is a property which is not available through Homeseekerplus. All the partner social housing landlords are committed to advertising as many of their vacant properties as possible through Homeseekerplus. There will be occasions when certain properties will not be advertised and the reasons for these exclusions will be monitored. Some examples are: -

- Over-riding social reason to move the household for safety reasons, as recommended by the Police, partner organisations, or as agreed through multiagency need and risk assessment panels.
- Those let to discharge statutory duties to Homeless applicants in certain circumstances.
- Properties required for existing tenants whose properties are subject to major works requiring them to vacate their own properties (either on a temporary or permanent basis).
- Extra-care vacancies and any supported accommodation where there is an applicant with a Care package that needs a specific property.
- Applicants who have succeeded to a tenancy or, in certain circumstances such as following the death of a family member, left in occupation but who need to move to alternative accommodation.
- Where a property has been adapted and meets the specific needs of a client.
- Applications subject to the Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976.

There will be circumstances where for urgent operational reasons there is a need to make direct offers of housing outside of the normal policy banding and date order criteria.

This may also restrict the time an applicant is able to bid for accommodation. The offer of accommodation would be in any area of the district that is considered reasonable and the property is suitable and safe for the applicant to live in.

A decision to make a direct match offer could be where:

- An applicant is not being realistic in the areas they are bidding for accommodation and as a result they may be occupying accommodation provided as homeless longer than they need to.

or

- To assist the local authority in effective management (including financial) of its homeless accommodation

Monitoring and review

Review/appeal procedure

All applicants have the right to request a review of any Homeseekerplus decisions. The review/appeal should include the reason why the applicant believes the decision is incorrect, together with any additional information.

Stage One – Internal Review

If you disagree with the way we have assessed your application for housing, or with the housing need band in which we have placed your application, you may request a review which will be decided by a senior housing officer who was not involved in the original decision from the local authority or the agent dealing with your application. To request a review:

- You must complete a Stage 1 - Internal Review Request Form which can be downloaded from the Homeseekerplus website www.Homeseekerplus.co.uk and when completed in full, send to the council you applied to within 14 days of receiving your letter or notification.
- We will deal with your request within 14 days or let you know if we will require additional time.
- We will write to you with the outcome of the review within a further 7 days of being determined.

Stage Two – Homeseekerplus Appeal Panel

If you disagree with the outcome of the stage 1 internal review, you can request that your case be taken to the Homeseekerplus Appeal Panel. The Homeseeker Panel is made up of 3 or more Senior Housing Officers from 3 of the Partner Councils. These Officers will not have been involved in the original decision or the Officer decision on internal review. The applicant must submit a request for an appeal in writing and send to Homeseekerplus Co-ordinator within 14 days of the review notification letter. The local authority or its agent will acknowledge receipt of the request for an appeal within 14 days and provide the applicant with contact details of the officer dealing with the request and the time it will take to reply to the applicant. If the review cannot be completed within 56 days, the applicant will be informed and the timescales for the review set out.

The panel will be made up of senior housing officers from three or more of the other local authorities. The appeal will consider the facts surrounding the case and your request should specify whether there are additional facts the Panel should take into consideration or whether you feel that the original facts you submitted with your application have not been fully taken into account. If you have additional evidence, such as additional medical reports, then these should also be submitted up to one week before the panel meet.

The Panel will consider the review on the papers submitted by the applicant and the housing officer from the local authority involved in the case. If determined by the Homeseekerplus Co-ordinator the applicant or the relevant Housing Officer maybe asked to attend this review hearing if requiring additional information from either party and, should this be the case, the applicant and the relevant Housing Officer will be asked to personally attend a further review Hearing. The applicant can bring a representative.

The Homeseekerplus Co-ordinator will chair this panel and a nominated representative will be present at the Hearing to ensure that all relevant information has been presented and is dealt with correctly.

The panel must come to a majority decision, should this not be the case, the Homeseekerplus Co-ordinator and chair of the panel will arbitrate.

Once the appeal has been determined, or if the Panel require the applicant to attend a further Hearing, the Homeseekerplus Co-ordinator will write to the applicant giving full details within 14 days or as soon as reasonably practicable thereafter.

Local Authority Complaints Procedure

If you feel that you have been treated unfairly or you believe the process has not been carried out as described above you can use your Local Authority's (or its agents) Complaints Procedure to make a formal complaint.

The complaint must be made in writing to the appropriate authority within 14 days of the date of the written notification of the decision of the Homeseekerplus Appeal Panel.

If the applicant is still dissatisfied, they may complain directly to the Local Government Ombudsman.

Subject access requests

Applicants are entitled under the Data Protection Act 2018 or any superseding legislation to request details of their personal data held by the seven local authorities. A charge will be made for providing this information.

Use of statistical information

The information supplied by Applicants on their housing application may also be used for housing management and research purposes within legal guidelines (such as identifying what size and where new housing is required). No individual will be identified in collating such information.

Policy management

The Homeseekerplus Co-ordinator will run regular reports to monitor performance of the scheme in meeting the aims of the policy.

The Homeseekerplus policy will be regularly reviewed and at least annually to ensure that it takes into account change in demand and need within the district, that it continues to meet its aims and objectives and that it complies with any legislative changes.

Any changes to the Homeseekerplus Policy will be implemented only with the majority agreement of the members of the Partnership. An interested party may contact any of the local authority partners to make observations to be considered at the next review.

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Annex C - Summary of Proposed Changes

Summary Report prepared by the HomeseekerPlus County Coordinator September 2021

Reason for policy change

In 2009 the Gloucestershire Homeseeker partnership was formed, since then there have been tweaks to the policy and in 2016 the partnership and policy had a major change to include West Oxfordshire and changed names to HomeseekerPlus. Other than minor tweaks to include new legalisation such as the Homelessness Reduction Act there has been no major rewrite and clarification of the policy undertaken.

This has led to the common allocation policy being interpreted differently across the partnership, therefore this new policy aims to remove ambiguity and add clarification.

Old policy

I Introduction.

I.1. HomeseekerPlus is a choice based lettings (CBL) scheme run by the seven local authorities in partnership with the majority of Social Housing Landlords operating within Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire.

I.2. It must be recognised that the demand for affordable social housing within the HomeseekerPlus area is very high and cannot be met from the available resources. Only those in the highest housing need, with a local connection to the area are likely to obtain housing through the scheme. Each district's Housing Advice Service will be able to discuss a range of housing options.

I.3 The policy takes into account the Localism Act 2012, Welfare Reform Act 2012 and the Statutory Code of Guidance on the Allocation of Accommodation 2012. It also has regard to the Councils' Homelessness, Tenancy Strategies and Housing Policy.

Proposed change

I.1 HomeseekerPlus is a choice based lettings (CBL) scheme run by the seven local authorities in partnership with social housing landlords, and any other housing providers that are required to deliver affordable homes through section 106 affordable housing obligations operating within Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire.

I.2 The seven local authorities are Tewkesbury Borough Council, Gloucester City Council, Cheltenham Borough Council, Stroud District Council, Forest of Dean District Council, Cotswold District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council.

I.3 Demand for affordable social housing within the HomeseekerPlus area is very high and cannot be met from the available social housing resources. Only those in the highest housing need, with a local connection to the area are likely to obtain housing through the HomeseekerPlus scheme. Each district's Housing Advice Service will be able to give advice on a range of housing options including the private rented sector.

1.4 The policy explains who is eligible and qualifying to apply on HomeseekerPlus and sets out how applications will be assessed based on housing need.

1.5 HomeseekerPlus aims to allocate social housing in their area in a fair and transparent way while complying with all legal requirements.

Overview of how the partnership functions

2.1 HomeseekerPlus enables social housing landlords, and any other housing providers that are required to deliver affordable homes through section 106 affordable housing obligations to advertise their homes and applicants are able to express an interest in them. This is known as a “bid” for a property. Once a bid is placed the system will generate a shortlist placing applicants in order of band, band start date and whether they meet the criteria of the advert. Priority for properties goes to those who have a local connection with the local authority in which the property is located, then to those who have a local connection with any of the other HomeseekerPlus districts and finally to anyone else.

Legal section

The current Policy only makes passing reference to the Legislation and Statutory Guidance which need to be complied with, with several of those mentioned now being superseded.

Due to this we have provided a separate section, adding in references to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the Data Protection Act 2018. The section on Data Retention clarifies our existing Policies which were designed alongside the Council’s Audit and Compliance Team.

Old Policy

No current section

Proposed Change

5.1 The HomeseekerPlus complies with the local authority’s statutory duties under Part VI and VII of the Housing Act 1996 as amended and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, in addition to any other relevant legal duties and has regard to the following:

- Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England 2012
- Equalities Act 2010
- Public Sector Equality Act 2010
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Localism Act 2011
- Immigration Act 2014
- Local Letting Plans
- S.106 agreements

Data retention

- 6.1 As part of the application process, personal data is required to support any housing application. The Council will comply with all data protection legislation. This includes:
- For active applications, data is stored for as long as your application is active.
 - For housed applications, data is stored for 3 years
 - If you do not use HomeseekerPlus for a period of 1 year, then your case will be set to removed and removed after 6 months.
 - Homeless applications are kept for 3 years.

Definition of social housing providers for HomeseekerPlus

- 7.1 For the purposes of this policy, affordable housing is defined as being social rented and affordable rented housing provided to eligible households who otherwise would be unable to secure alternative provision, and who have been assessed under this policy. Housing providers who operate within the Homeseekerplus boundaries are defined as being registered providers, arm's length management organisations or stock owning Councils. Eligibility and qualifying criteria for providers is set by this policy.

All partners have a common goal to provide homes for local people in housing need with eligibility determined within this policy framework.

Types of tenancies

- 8.1 Depending on the landlord and applicants circumstances, an applicant may be offered either an introductory; secure; starter; assured; fixed term; assured short hold; or flexible tenancy.

Who does not qualify?

This section was greatly expanded to provide clarity to existing homeowners facing hardship and where someone does not qualify due to being evicted for anti-social behaviour, they can be provided with defined actions/timescales for them to take before consideration would be made.

Old policy

An applicant will not be accepted for social housing if we are satisfied that: -

- a) They have sufficient financial resources to resolve their own housing need.
- b) Where they have unreasonably disposed of financial resources that could have enabled them to purchase/obtain their own accommodation.
- c) They own or part own a property which is suitable for their needs, or where those needs can be resolved through adaptation, sale or where, if they sold it, they

could afford to buy another property. We may make exceptions to this rule in the case of proven social or medical needs.

- d) The applicant, or a member of their household, has been responsible for unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable to be a tenant of the Authority or a Social Housing Landlord at the time of application. Each case would be considered upon its own merits and subject to the spirit of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 according to individual circumstances.

Proposed change

11.3 The following are persons who do not qualify for HomeseekerPlus:

- An applicant may not hold two tenancies at one time, applicants must be able to end their current tenancy within a reasonable period from being made an offer.
- An applicant will not qualify for social housing if the local authority has undertaken an affordability check which has shown that they have sufficient financial resources to adequately resolve their own particular housing need through outright purchase, lease or mortgage. This check will consider the type of accommodation needed to meet these needs to resolve their own housing need within their district.
- Homeowners who own or part own a property which is suitable for the household's needs or where those needs can be resolved through adaptation, and where it is safe to remain.

Financial

12.8 Applicants who have unreasonably disposed of financial resources that could have enabled them to purchase/obtain their own accommodation will be suspended.

Financial Assessments of armed forces applicants will have due regard of statutory guidance to social housing for members of the armed forces.

Unreasonable behaviour/rent arrears

12.9 The applicant, or a member of their household, has been responsible for unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable to be a tenant of the local authority or a social housing landlord at the time of application.

12.10 Behaviour that may be regarded as unacceptable is as follows: -

- Criminal activity in the vicinity of the property
- History of anti-social behaviour or disruptive nuisance to neighbours
- Racial harassment
- Illegal drug use or dealing
- Any other breach of the tenancy agreement such that the landlord would be likely to apply for and obtain a possession order.

12.11 As part of the assessment, consideration will be given to the household's personal circumstances, the severity of the situation and any other factors that may be relevant.

12.12 Such applicants will be informed of the actions required from them to demonstrate that there has been a change in their behaviour such that they will become qualifying e.g. obtaining a satisfactory landlord reference for a period of six months or where regular repayments are made without fail against an agreed repayment plan for a period of six months.

Suspending and demoting

Rewritten and expanded, some parts were moved from other areas of the Policy, this now means all the reasons for suspending or demoting are all in one place. This will make it easier for Customers and Staff to refer back to the Policy.

Old policy

9.1 If we become aware that a household has rent arrears or other housing debt accrued after an application has been registered the applicant will be given the opportunity to clear the debt before an offer proceeds. If the applicant is unable to do this, they may be suspended for a period as required to clear the debt before they can bid for other properties but each case will be considered upon its own merits. If a partner landlord becomes aware of such a debt they will advise the relevant local authority who may suspend or cancel the application as non-qualifying depending on the circumstances.

9.2 Applicants who have been awarded time limited bands are expected to bid on all suitable property types in a reasonably wide range of areas. Failure to do so may result in suspension or demotion for a period.

9.3 Whilst HomeseekerPlus aims to give applicants choice for good reason it also needs to help social landlords let their available homes in an efficient way. If an applicant refuses 3 properties that the local authority considers were suitable, the application may be demoted or suspended for a period.

9.4 An immediate review of an application will be undertaken if an applicant is found to have acted (or failed to act) in a way which deliberately worsened their housing situation. This could lead to the applicant being suspended, or being demoted to a lower band, for a minimum of 6 months.

9.5 Applicants will be advised as to what action/s will be necessary to lift the suspension or demotion.

Proposed change

Tenancy Debts

12.2 If an applicant has rent arrears or other housing debt with a social landlord or any other housing provider (as detailed in 1.1 above) , which accrued less than 6 years ago, the applicant will be given the opportunity to clear the debt before a decision to suspend the application is made. If the applicant is unable to do this, they may be suspended for a period sufficient to reduce the debt to below the equivalent of eight

weeks arrears, as well as having a repayment plan in place and payment being made before they can bid for properties.

12.3 Each case will be considered on its own merit, For example, an application would not be suspended if rent arrears arose as a result of domestic abuse.

12.4 Existing social housing tenants who are suspended because of rent arrears will be considered as an exception on an individual basis if proved that they cannot afford to stay in their current tenancy as a result of Welfare Reform Act changes.

12.5 If a partner landlord becomes aware of such a debt they will inform the relevant local authority when arrears are reduced. The local authority may unsuspend the application or advise the applicant to submit a change of circumstances for their application to be reassessed.

Time Limited Bands

12.6 Applicants who have been awarded time limited bands are expected to bid on all suitable property types available within their local connection area. Failure to do so may result in suspension or demotion for a period the local authority deems appropriate.

Repeated Refusal of Properties

12.7 Whilst Homeseekerplus aims to give applicants choice, it also needs to help social landlords let their available homes in an efficient way. If an applicant refuses three properties that the local authority considers suitable, the application will be demoted or suspended for a period of 6 months from the time of their last offer. This provision does not apply to final offers of accommodation made in order to discharge homeless duties under part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) or Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

Financial

12.8 Applicants who have unreasonably disposed of financial resources that could have enabled them to purchase/obtain their own accommodation will be suspended.

Financial Assessments of armed forces applicants will have due regard of statutory guidance to social housing for members of the armed forces.

Deliberately worsening their circumstances

12.13 An immediate review of an application will be undertaken if an applicant is found to have acted (or failed to act) in a way which deliberately worsened their housing situation. This could lead to the applicant being suspended, or being demoted to a lower band, for a minimum of 6 months.

Exceptions

12.14 Exceptions to these qualifying criteria include:

- Those people fleeing harassment or violence where the Police, Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVA) or Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) support a move
- Proven social or medical/welfare needs

12.15 In exceptional circumstances where the applicant has an urgent need to move, the local authority may waive this qualification and suspension criteria.

Requesting a review of a suspension / demotion

12.16 Applicants will be advised as to what action/s will be necessary to lift the suspension or demotion.

Applicants who are suspended will need to contact their relevant local authority to ask for a review of this suspension if they feel their circumstances have changed. If agreed, their application will be reactivated and reassessed.

Local connection

This is one of the key sections of the Policy, it was felt the old Policy was unnecessarily wordy which had the potential for confusion. A section has been added going into more detail on how this will be considered, it also provides specific advice covering Care Leavers, those in or have left the Armed Forces and people who have recently travelled from Abroad (including refugees and asylum seekers).

Old policy

Local Connection is defined in Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 as:

- Those who are normally resident in the local authority area, and that residence is or was of their own choice. (Local Authority Agreement guidelines suggest this as having resided in the area for six of the last twelve months, or three of the last five years, where residence has been out of choice);
- Those who are employed in the local authority area. (Local Authority Agreement guidelines suggest this as employment other than of a casual nature);
- Those that have family connections in the local authority area. (Local Authority Agreement guidelines suggest this as immediate family members who have themselves lived in the area for five years).
- Members of the armed forces have a local connection to the district of their choice (Those currently serving, served within the immediate preceding 5 years; bereaved spouse or civil partner who has recently or will cease to be entitled to Ministry of Defence accommodation following the death of their service spouse and the death was wholly or partly attributable to their service; existing or former members of the reserve forces who are suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is wholly or partly attributable to their service).
- Other special circumstances.

Proposed change

Local Connections

14.1 Due to the exceptional demand for housing across the Homeseekerplus area and the difficulty in solving local housing need, preference will normally be given to applicants with a local connection to the appropriate district.

14.2 Homeseekerplus local connection is defined by any of the following:

- Those who are, or were in the past, normally resident in the local authority area, and that residence was of their own choice during six out of the past 12 months or during three out of the past five years.
- Those who are employed in the local authority area
- Those who have immediate family connections in the local authority area for five years
- Members of the armed forces
- Other special circumstances

14.3 Local connection will be awarded by the lead authority only.

Local connection clarification

15.1 Normal residence

‘Normal residence’ is to be understood as meaning ‘the place where, at the relevant time, the person in fact resides.’ Residence in temporary accommodation provided by a housing authority can constitute normal residence of choice and contribute towards a local connection. In the case of a person who is street homeless or insecurely accommodated (‘sofa surfing’) within their district, the housing authority will need to satisfy themselves that the applicant has no settled accommodation elsewhere, and if from inquiries the authority is satisfied that the applicant does in fact reside in the district, then the applicant will be considered as normally resident.

15.2 Where the applicant raises family associations, this may extend beyond partners, parents, adult children or siblings. They may include associations with other family members provided there are sufficiently close links in the form of frequent contact, commitment or dependency. Family associations should be determined with regard to the fact-specific circumstances of the individual case.

15.3 Employment

For the purposes of employment, a member of the application should work in the district they are applying too: it would not be sufficient if the employer’s head office is located in the relevant district, but their place of work is not. In the case of self-employment, local connection will be defined by the address at which their business

is registered. For agency, casual or other types of employment, proof must be provided that the employment contract is not short-term, casual or ancillary.

15.4 Special Circumstances

Special circumstances include but are not limited to the need to be near special medical or support services which are available only in a particular district and where transport links are not sufficient to meet those needs. Special circumstances will be assessed on their own individual merits.

15.5 Care leavers

Care leavers who are owed a 'Leaving Care' duty, will have a local connection to all districts within the area of the Children's Services Authority. Care leavers who have been placed in accommodation in a different district to that of the Children's Services Authority, and they have lived in the other district for at least 2 years, including some time before they turned 16, they will also have the same local connection until they are 21.

Any local care leavers protocol applies.

15.6 Armed Forces

Members of the armed forces will have a local connection to a district of their choice. This applies to:

- Those currently serving, or having served within the immediately preceding five years.
- Bereaved spouses or civil partners who have recently, or will cease to be, entitled to Ministry of Defence accommodation following the death of their service spouse and the death was wholly or partly attributable to their service.
- Existing or former members of the reserve forces who are suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is wholly or partly attributable to their service.

15.7 Local connection will also be awarded to divorced or separated spouses or civil partners of Service personnel who are required to move out of accommodation provided by the Ministry of Defence.

15.8 Persons from Abroad

If an applicant has been subject to immigration control where they would not have been deemed eligible and subsequently become eligible, the date of where a local connection would apply is the date they moved into the area. Refugees would have a local connection outside of these criteria to the last area they were housed in by the Home Office under asylum support.

15.9 Local connection will not be awarded if your accommodation was not of the applicant's own choice. This includes but is not limited to:

- Approved premises
- Rehabilitation units

15.10 Decisions on local connection will be made based on the facts at the date of the decision and not the date of application.

Verification

This section was vague, and each council verified in different ways and at different times. To have a more comprehensive verification we have added in what documents are needed and what verification is. This also works in with the functions on the HomeseekerPlus website so applicants can upload these when they apply which they previously couldn't do.

Old policy

Applicants will be able to bid for properties advertised, but no tenancy will be offered until verification has been completed.

Proposed change

19.1 Applicants will be able to bid for properties advertised, but no tenancy will be offered until verification has been completed by the relevant local authority. The purpose of this verification is to establish the accuracy or validity of the application.

19.2 Documents required for verification will depend upon individual circumstances. Documents must be provided to verify medical needs, eligibility and qualifying status etc.

19.3 Key documents will remain valid for 6 months or for the length of validity of the document, whichever is the longer or should your circumstances change then we may require further verification of your documents.

19.4 Key standard documents can include, but are not limited to:

- Identification for all household members on the application
- 2 months bank statements of all household members over the age of 18
- Proof of Child Benefit or an appropriate court order
- Proof of residency to support 'right to rent' checks

Medical and welfare banding

This section is mostly the same, but we have split medical and welfare into two new bands instead of a joint band. The wording has stayed mostly the same. This will be the only change that will affect people as they will need to be rebanded into separate bands, this shouldn't change their bands unless their circumstance have changed.

The reason for this change is to better highlight the types of situations people are being banded for. Medical/Welfare is at present a big category and this will allow a more fine-tuned consideration of households being awarded these bandings.

Old policy

Emergency Band

The applicant assessed as immediate need of re-housing on medical grounds. This is most likely to be when they have had a major incident, are in hospital or other emergency provision and unable to return to the existing home because of changed medical condition.

Or

Exceptional circumstances where there is proven threat to life or limb. This would normally be based on information provided by the Police or Emergency services.

Or

Exceptional circumstances where the current property has a critical detrimental effect on their welfare. This would normally be based on information provided by Emergency services, multi-agency meetings or Social Care services.

These are time limited for 1 month when they will be reviewed. It can be extended if no suitable properties have become available in this time scale or a direct match can be made.

Gold Band

Urgent medical/welfare need or long term disability that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation. This would apply when the situation is so serious that it would not be reasonable to expect the applicant to continue to live at the property for any length of time, given their particular medical/welfare circumstances but not a life threatening emergency.

Proof of the situation would be required from Social Care services, NHS or other medical specialists.

Silver Band

Significant medical or welfare need that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation. This could be situations/medical conditions that could apply to one or more members of the household which because of the particular household circumstances significant distress is caused. Proof of the situation would be required from Social Care services, NHS or other medical specialists.

Depression and asthma are the most commonly quoted medical conditions. Where these are mild and not directly related to the current property priority is unlikely to be awarded.

Proposed change

Medical Need

Emergency band

22.14 The applicant is assessed as in immediate need of re-housing on medical grounds. This may be when they have had a major incident, are in hospital or another emergency provision and unable to return to the existing home because of their medical condition and immediate adaptations are not available.

This award is time limited for 1 month when it will be reviewed. It can be extended if no suitable properties have become available in this time scale or a direct match can be made.

Gold band

22.15 Urgent medical need or long-term disability that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation. This would apply when the situation is so serious that it would not be reasonable to expect the applicant to continue to live at the property for any length of time, given their particular medical circumstances but not a life-threatening emergency.

Proof of the situation would be required from Social Care services, NHS or other medical specialists.

For example, a member of the household seeking accommodation is disabled and re-housing will enable that person to overcome urgent physical barriers created by current accommodation and it has been established that the home cannot be adapted to meet needs e.g. steps and stairs.

Silver band

22.16 Significant medical need that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation. This could be situations/medical conditions that could apply to one or more members of the household which because of the particular household circumstances significant distress is caused. Proof of the situation would be required from Social Care services, NHS or other medical specialists.

Depression and asthma are the most commonly quoted medical conditions. Where these are mild and not directly related to the current property, priority is unlikely to be awarded.

Welfare Need

Emergency band

22.17 The applicant assessed as in immediate need of re-housing on welfare grounds where there has been a major incident and there is proven threat to life or limb. This would normally be based on information provided by the Police or other specialists.

Gold banding

22.18 Exceptional circumstances where the current property has a critical long-term detrimental effect on their welfare. This would normally be based on information provided by multi agency meetings or Social Care services.

Silver banding

22.19 Significant welfare need that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation. Proof of the situation would be required from Social Care services, housing association or other specialists to establish that a management move would not be appropriate.

This banding would only be used if the housing provider is unable to provide a suitable resolution.

Move on/care leavers

This section was expanded to include the new care leaver duty.

Old policy

Move-on from supported accommodation where a planned move is agreed by the relevant local housing authority. When someone is placed in accommodation based supported housing and is not in their home/lead authority area there is a presumption that they will be reconnected back to their home area when ready to move-on from the supported accommodation. The support provider will also discuss other housing options before putting them forward for social housing.

There are 2 requirements for this priority:-

1. that the supported accommodation provider has confirmed that the resident is ready for independent living by completing the standard move-on form detailing the work they have completed with the resident and assessment of any remaining support needs.;
2. that the local authority has been involved in the move-on planning and accepts that they are the appropriate local authority to re-house this applicant by awarding this priority.

Proposed change

22.20 Gold Band

A young person owed leaving care duties under section 23C of the Children Act 1989 and in a housing need will be awarded gold banding to the area of the Children Services Authority that owes them the duties. Homeseekerplus comprises of Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire which have different Children Services

Authorities, therefore gold will only be awarded to housing authority districts falling within the area of the Children Services Authority.

Move-on from supported accommodation funded County Council commissioned services and where a local connection was agreed at point of referral by the relevant local housing authority.

When someone is placed in accommodation based supported housing and is not in their home/lead authority area there is a presumption that they will be reconnected back to their home area when ready to move-on from the supported accommodation.

The requirements for this priority are:

- that the supported accommodation provider has confirmed that the resident is ready for independent living by completing the standard move- on form detailing the work they have completed with the resident and assessment of any remaining support needs;
- that the local authority has been involved in the move-on planning and accepts that they are the appropriate local authority to re-house this applicant by awarding this priority;
- the accommodation is not low support, temporary or emergency provision or intensive housing management (unless subject to local individual arrangements).

Bedroom need criteria

This section was tweaked to include clarification of shared custody and the reasons for an extra bedroom to be awarded.

Old policy

The bedroom need for a household is assessed to match Housing Benefit rules because from April 2013 the same rules apply to all renting households including social housing.

One bedroom is required for:-

- An adult couple,
- A person aged 16 or over.
- 2 children aged up to 16 years of age of the same sex.
- 2 children aged up to 10 years of age of different sexes.

19.2 When a child is born, the applicant must provide evidence of the birth as soon as possible and the bedroom need will then be re-assessed to ensure it is still correct.

19.3 An extra bedroom will be considered where the following applies:

- A carer who provides the applicant or their partner with regular overnight care, who is not normally living with you. Evidence will be required to substantiate any claim which may include the care component of DLA (Disability Living Allowance), PIP (Personal Independent Payment) or attendance allowance, or details of a care package from a care providing agency funded by Social Services.
- An independent medical adviser has confirmed the need for an extra bedroom.

In all cases an assessment of affordability will be undertaken, with discretion for the final decision being with the relevant local authority and social housing landlord.

19.4 Potential children of foster or adoptive carers will be considered in the bedroom need assessment on an individual basis once they have been accepted by the appropriate Social Care Panel.

19.5. No visiting children should be included on the application and they will not be included in the bed room need assessment.

Proposed change

18.1 The bedroom need for a household is assessed to match housing costs guidance to ensure suitability and affordability for low income households.

18.2 One bedroom is required for:

- An adult couple
- A person aged 16 or over
- 2 children aged up to 16 years of age of the same sex
- 2 children aged up to 10 years of age of different sexes

18.3 When a child is born, the applicant must provide evidence of the birth as soon as possible and the bedroom need will then be re-assessed. This may not change the bedroom need or banding and any additional award will not be given until evidence of the birth is provided.

18.4 Visiting children will not be counted in this assessment.

Additional bedroom needs criteria

24.1 Households will also be assessed to consider the need for one additional bedroom for each of the following, if they are assessed as being included as part of the household:

- A tenant requiring a non-resident overnight carer
- Disabled child who cannot share a bedroom with their sibling due to their disability
- An adult child who is serving away with the armed forces
- A room for a foster child or children

24.2 Households can include someone on the application if there is a need for them to live with the household in order to give or receive care or support, where no one in the immediate household is able to provide that care. Evidence will be required to demonstrate:

- that the household is dependent upon this care or support and that other satisfactory arrangements cannot be made
- that the arrangement is 'permanent'

24.3 We will also require evidence that the person requires your support or care; for example, proof that you/they are providing care, are in receipt of care allowances and are able to meet any costs associated with the additional bedroom either through benefits, income or savings.

24.4 We will usually only include members of the household that are currently living with you or that the Council can be satisfied will be reasonably expected to reside (if not currently residing) with you on your application.

24.5 In cases where two parents or guardians have joint access to children, bedroom eligibility will be awarded to the main care provider. Applicants will need to demonstrate that:

- they are the main care provider (children live with you for more than half the week – four nights or more) and are in receipt of child benefit and, if applicable, child tax credits
- that the arrangement is 'permanent'

24.6 Please note the protections afforded by the Equality Act 2010 are intended to be available to all, including children and adolescents. Any required additional bedroom need will be awarded on a case by case basis in line with housing benefit rules and an assessment of affordability.

Demotion

New section not previously clarified. It was only written in general terms.

Old policy

No current section

Proposed change

26.1 The Lead Authority may decide to demote an applicant to the band below at the end of the time-limited period if it is apparent that the applicant is choosing to wait for a particular type of property or location, and not treating their circumstances as being urgent.

26.2 Applicants are encouraged to make full use of their bids and seek all housing options available to them. Applicants will be assessed by a senior officer if they have unreasonably refused a property or to bid in a reasonable time if the following criteria have been met:

- they deliberately do or fail to do anything and as a consequence they miss out on suitable properties
- it would have been reasonable for them to do so, and there is no other good reason why they have not

26.3 The demotion period will be what the local authority deems reasonable up to 12 months and will be considered on a case by case basis.

Global banding criteria

This section has always been missing from the policy even though we have always had a global band.

Old policy

No current section

Proposed change

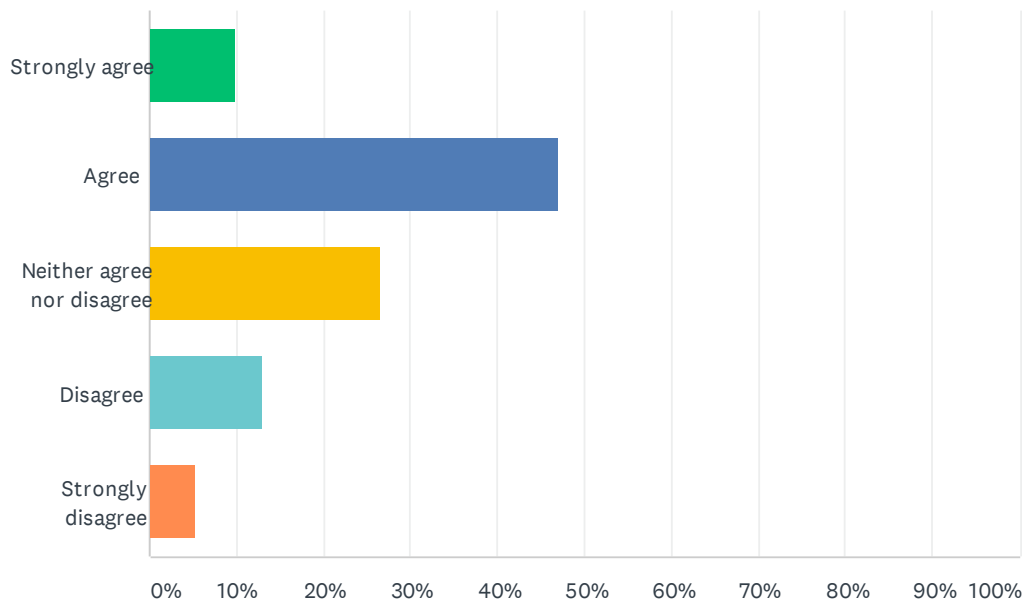
27.1 Applications will be awarded a global band equal to that of their local banding in all but the below cases:

- Where the lead authority has accepted a full statutory homeless duty to secure accommodation for the applicant. The global banding in this circumstance will be silver.
- Where the lead authority has a gold move on agreement from supported accommodation, the global banding will be bronze.
- Where the lead authority has assessed the property as having a prohibition notice, the global band will be bronze.
- Where the lead authority has awarded a downsizing band, the global band will be silver.

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Q1 Do you agree with the objectives of the allocation policy? (see page 3-5 of the common allocations consultation document)

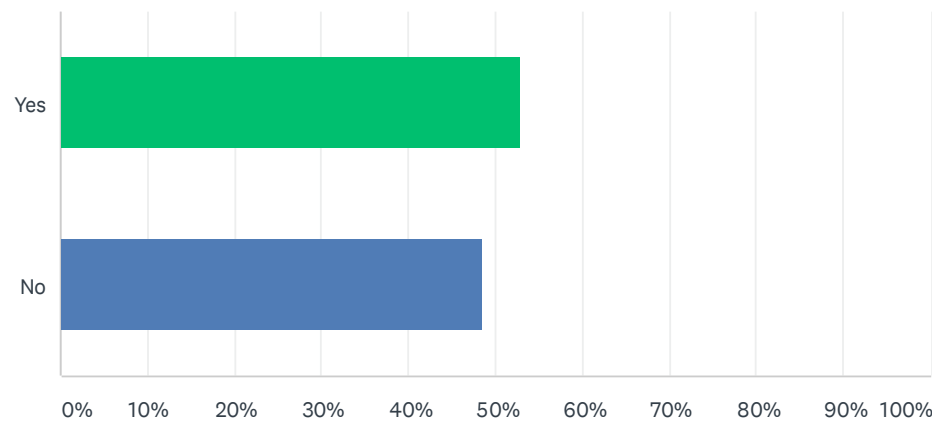
Answered: 225 Skipped: 7



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly agree	9.78%	22
Agree	47.11%	106
Neither agree nor disagree	26.67%	60
Disagree	12.89%	29
Strongly disagree	5.33%	12
Total Respondents: 225		

Q2 Are there any housing needs that you feel have not been addressed?

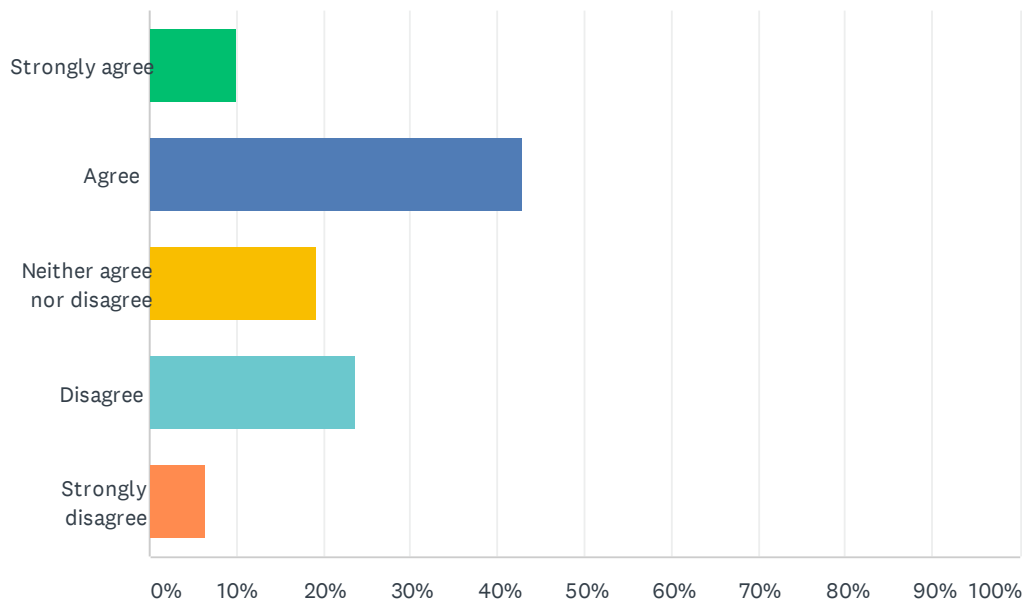
Answered: 227 Skipped: 5



ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES	
Yes		52.86%	120
No		48.46%	110
Total Respondents: 227			

Q3 Do you agree that the banding system will give priority to those most in need of housing? (see Clarification of Band criteria page 15-19)

Answered: 229 Skipped: 3



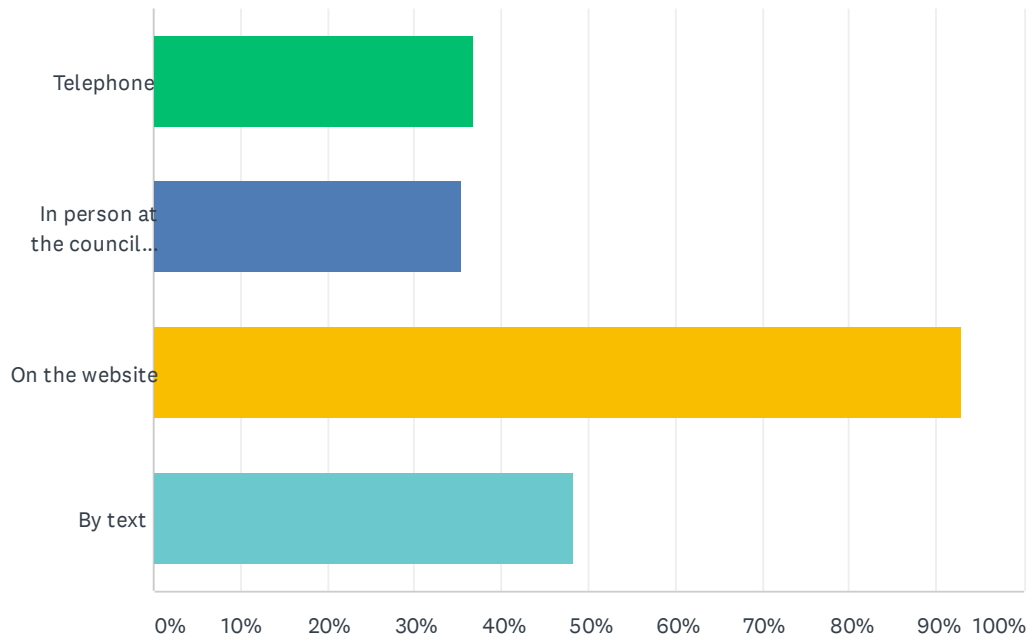
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly agree	10.04%	23
Agree	42.79%	98
Neither agree nor disagree	19.21%	44
Disagree	23.58%	54
Strongly disagree	6.55%	15
Total Respondents: 229		

Q4 Do you have any other comments on the allocation policy?

Answered: 157 Skipped: 75

Q5 What method of bidding (expressing an interest) do you think should be available? (you may choose as many as you like)

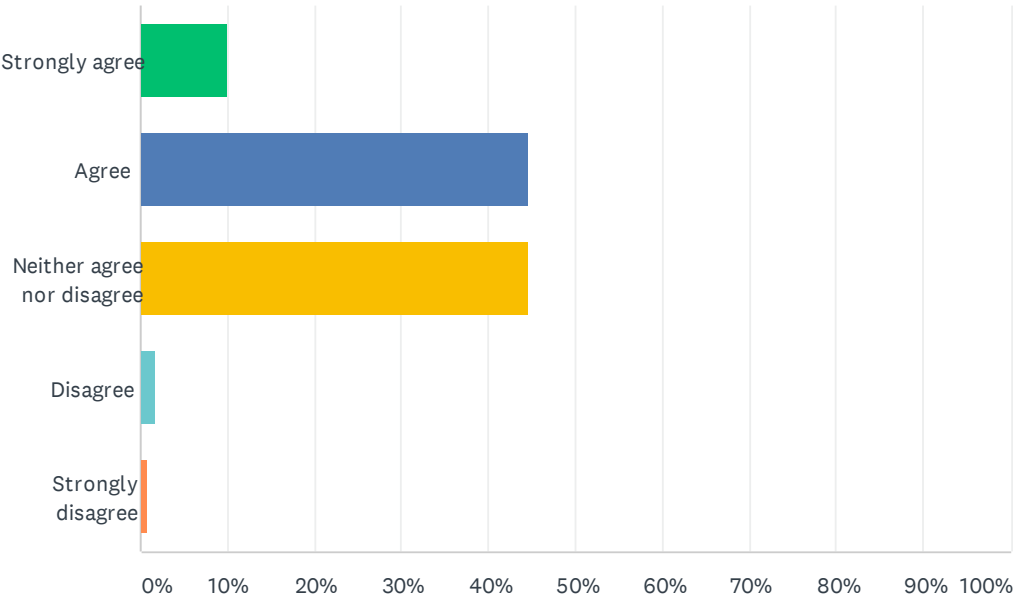
Answered: 226 Skipped: 6



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Telephone	36.73%	83
In person at the council offices	35.40%	80
On the website	92.92%	210
By text	48.23%	109
Total Respondents: 226		

Q6 Do you agree or disagree with the data retention statement? (see section 2.2)

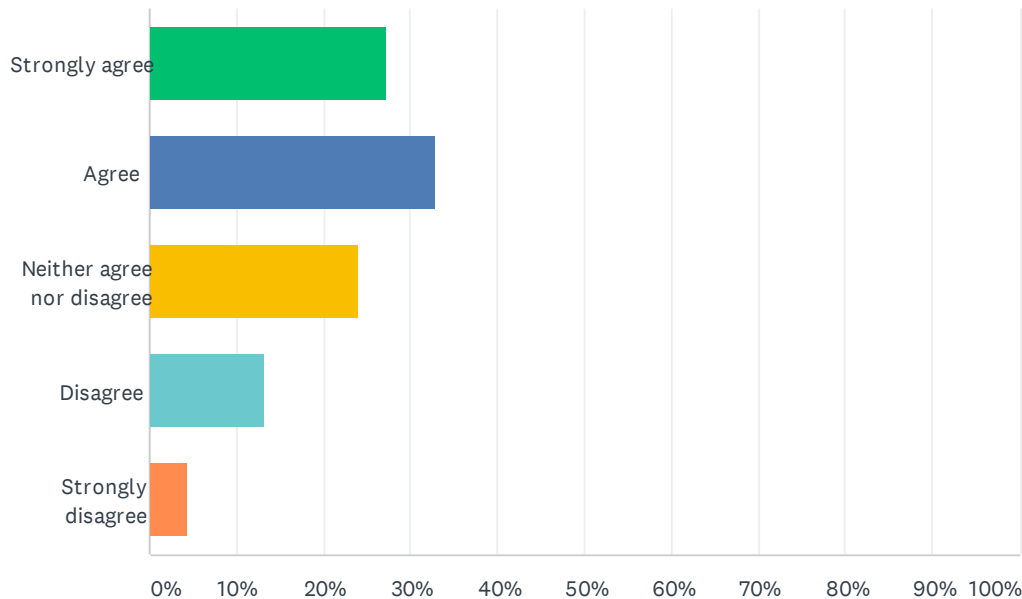
Answered: 229 Skipped: 3



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly agree	10.04%	23
Agree	44.54%	102
Neither agree nor disagree	44.54%	102
Disagree	1.75%	4
Strongly disagree	0.87%	2
Total Respondents: 229		

Q7 Do you agree that where an applicant have unreasonably disposed of financial resources that they should be non-qualifying? (see section 3.9)

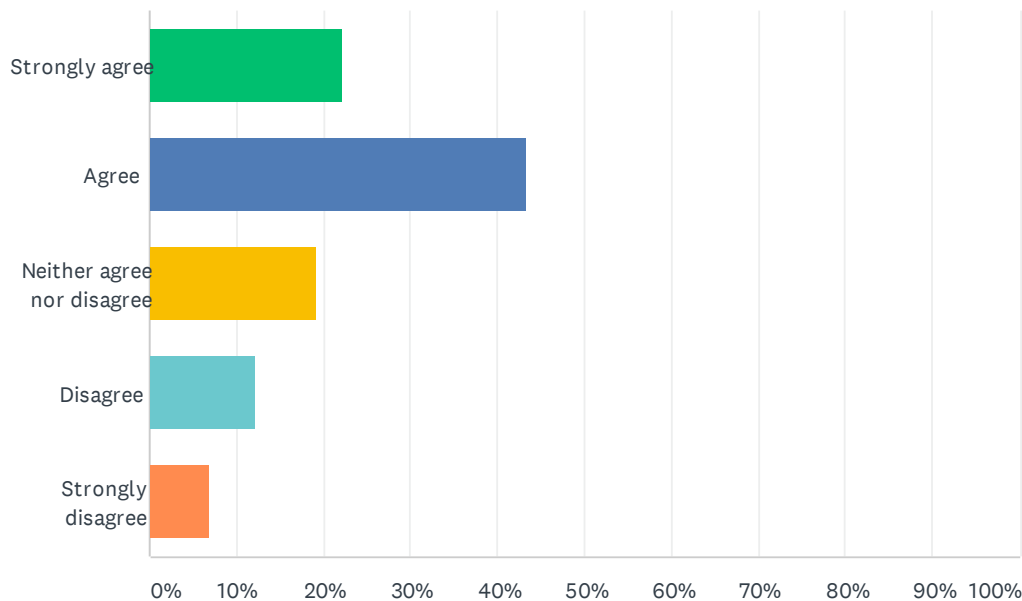
Answered: 228 Skipped: 4



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly agree	27.19%	62
Agree	32.89%	75
Neither agree nor disagree	24.12%	55
Disagree	13.16%	30
Strongly disagree	4.39%	10
Total Respondents: 228		

Q8 Do you agree with the objectives of the local connection clarification?
(see section 3.17-3.23)

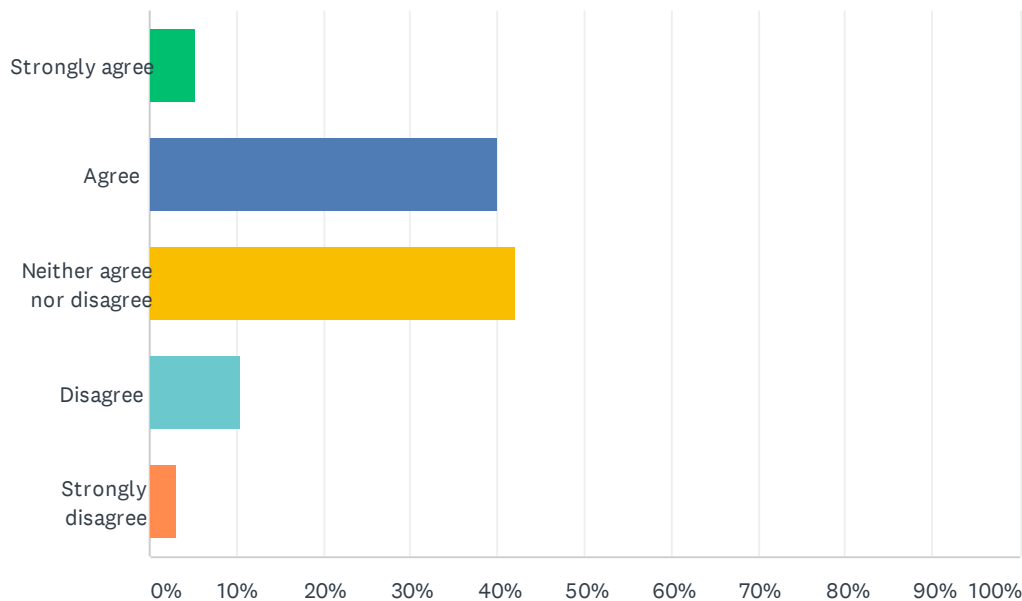
Answered: 229 Skipped: 3



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly agree	22.27%	51
Agree	43.23%	99
Neither agree nor disagree	19.21%	44
Disagree	12.23%	28
Strongly disagree	6.99%	16
Total Respondents: 229		

Q9 Do you agree that the assessment of applications section is reflective of the policies aims and objectives? (see page 3-5 of the common allocations consultation document)

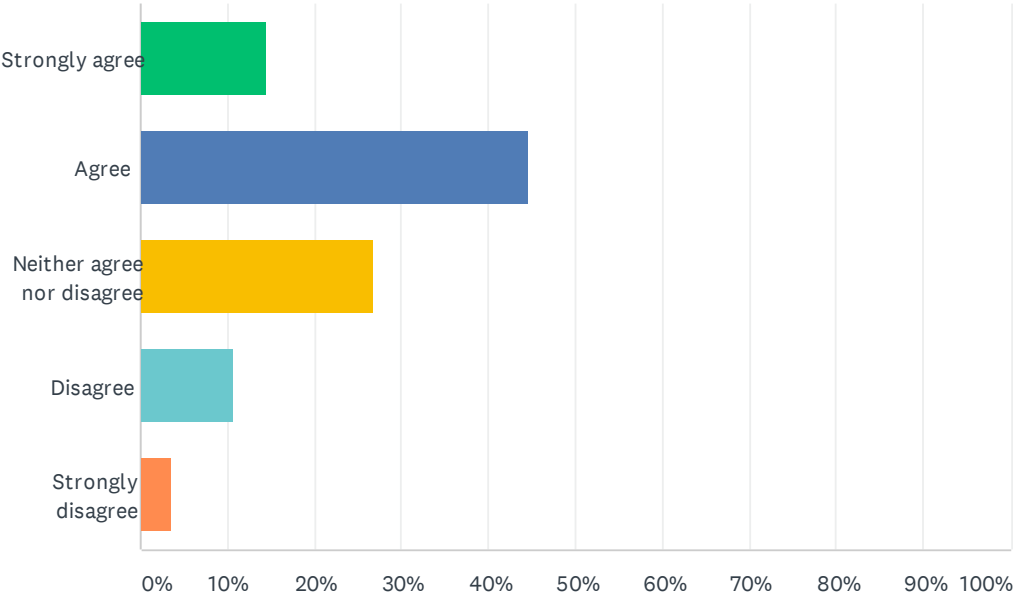
Answered: 228 Skipped: 4



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly agree	5.26%	12
Agree	39.91%	91
Neither agree nor disagree	42.11%	96
Disagree	10.53%	24
Strongly disagree	3.07%	7
Total Respondents: 228		

Q10 Do you agree with the inclusion of 4.2 of special rules for armed forces?

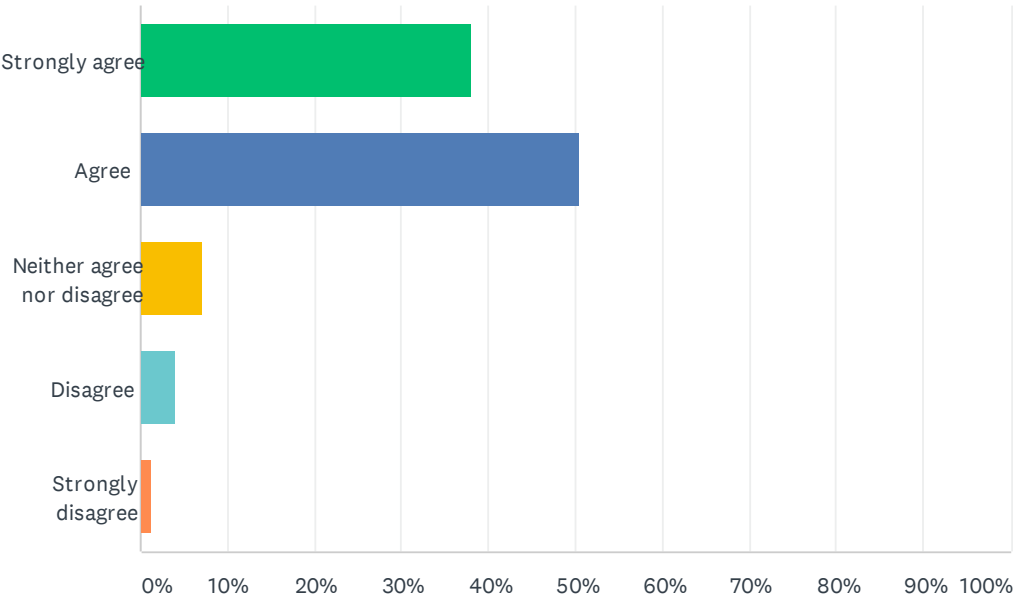
Answered: 227 Skipped: 5



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly agree	14.54%	33
Agree	44.49%	101
Neither agree nor disagree	26.87%	61
Disagree	10.57%	24
Strongly disagree	3.52%	8
Total Respondents: 227		

Q11 Do you agree that before applicants can be offered a property they must be verified?

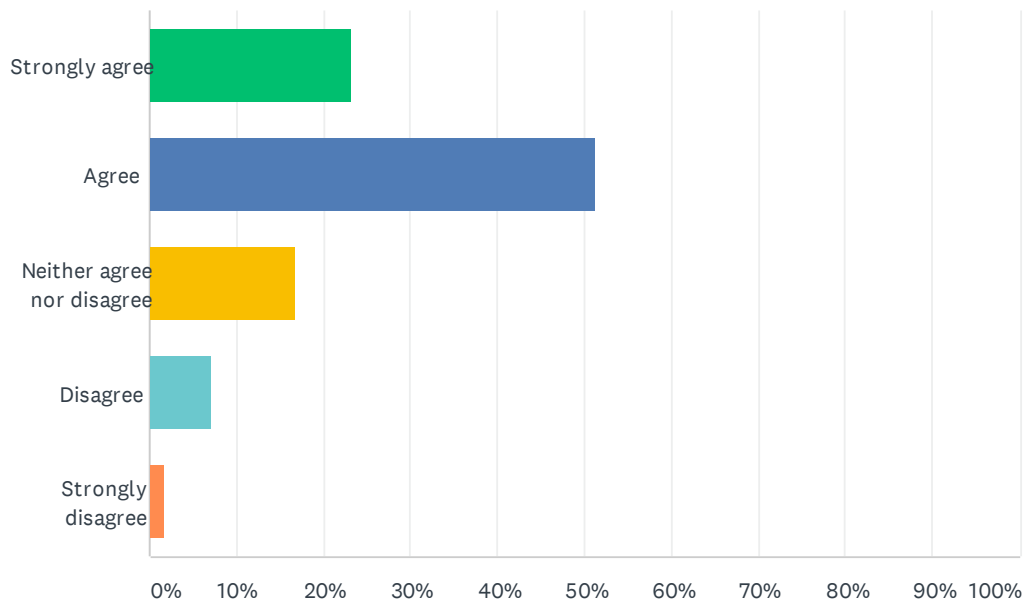
Answered: 228 Skipped: 4



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly agree	38.16%	87
Agree	50.44%	115
Neither agree nor disagree	7.02%	16
Disagree	3.95%	9
Strongly disagree	1.32%	3
Total Respondents: 228		

Q12 The banding table has been updated to reflect the different needs of medical and welfare. Previously these were joined and now are separate bandings to signify their difference needs, do you agree that these should be separate bandings?

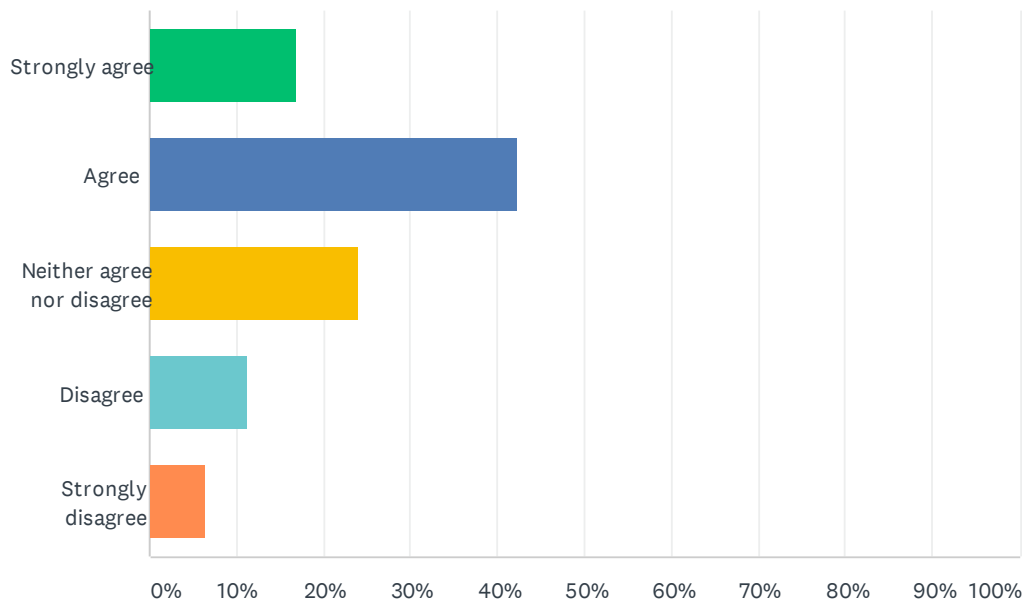
Answered: 228 Skipped: 4



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly agree	23.25%	53
Agree	51.32%	117
Neither agree nor disagree	16.67%	38
Disagree	7.02%	16
Strongly disagree	1.75%	4
Total Respondents: 228		

Q13 Do you agree with the additional bedroom need criteria? (see section 4.42-4.47)

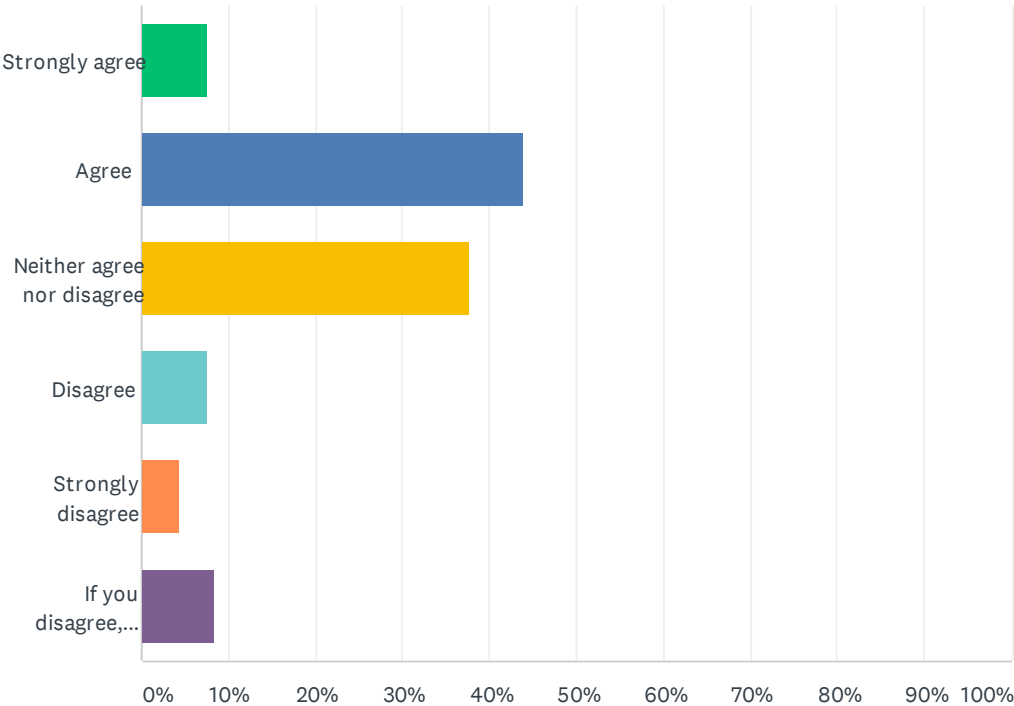
Answered: 229 Skipped: 3



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly agree	17.03%	39
Agree	42.36%	97
Neither agree nor disagree	24.02%	55
Disagree	11.35%	26
Strongly disagree	6.55%	15
Total Respondents: 229		

Q14 Do you believe this reflects the equalities act?

Answered: 228 Skipped: 4



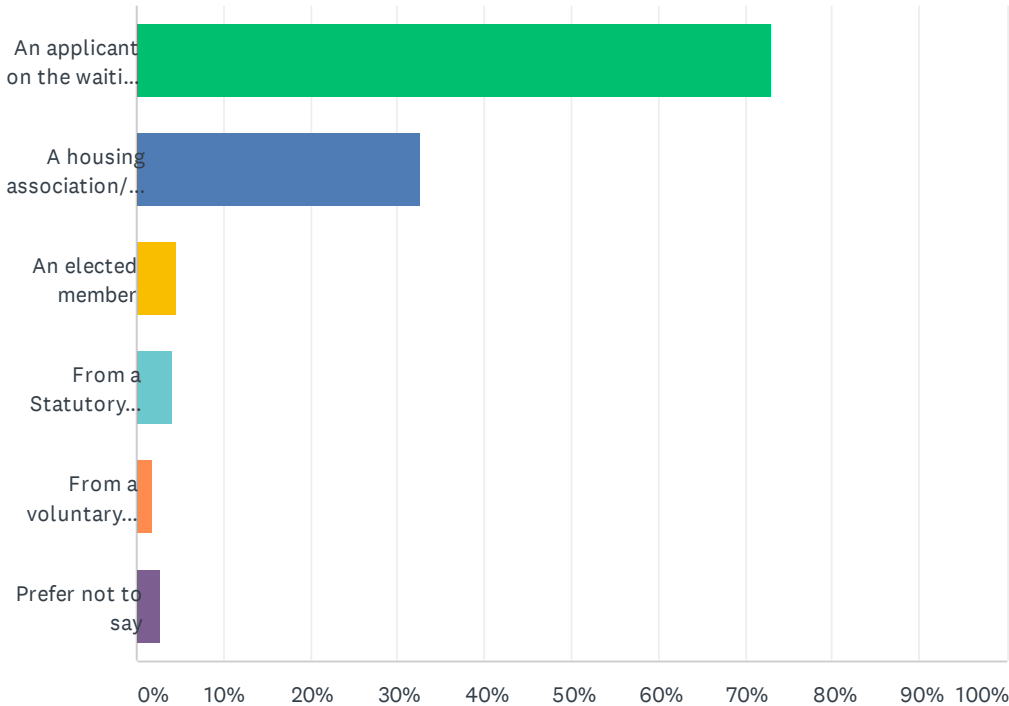
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly agree	7.46%	17
Agree	43.86%	100
Neither agree nor disagree	37.72%	86
Disagree	7.46%	17
Strongly disagree	4.39%	10
If you disagree, please explain why?	8.33%	19
Total Respondents: 228		

Q15 Any other comments?

Answered: 106 Skipped: 126

Q16 Are you:

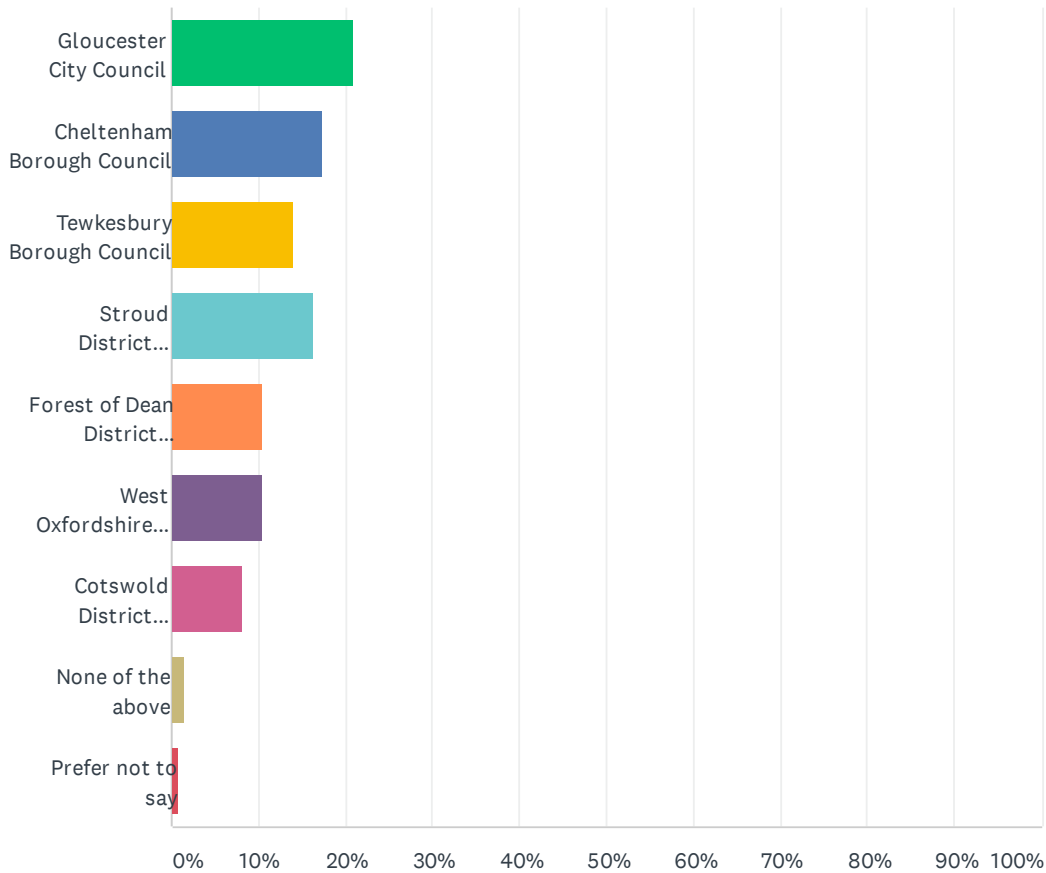
Answered: 215 Skipped: 17



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
An applicant on the waiting list	73.02%	157
A housing association/council tenant	32.56%	70
An elected member	4.65%	10
From a Statutory organisation	4.19%	9
From a voluntary organisation	1.86%	4
Prefer not to say	2.79%	6
Total Respondents: 215		

Q17 Please specify which local authority area you have a connection to:

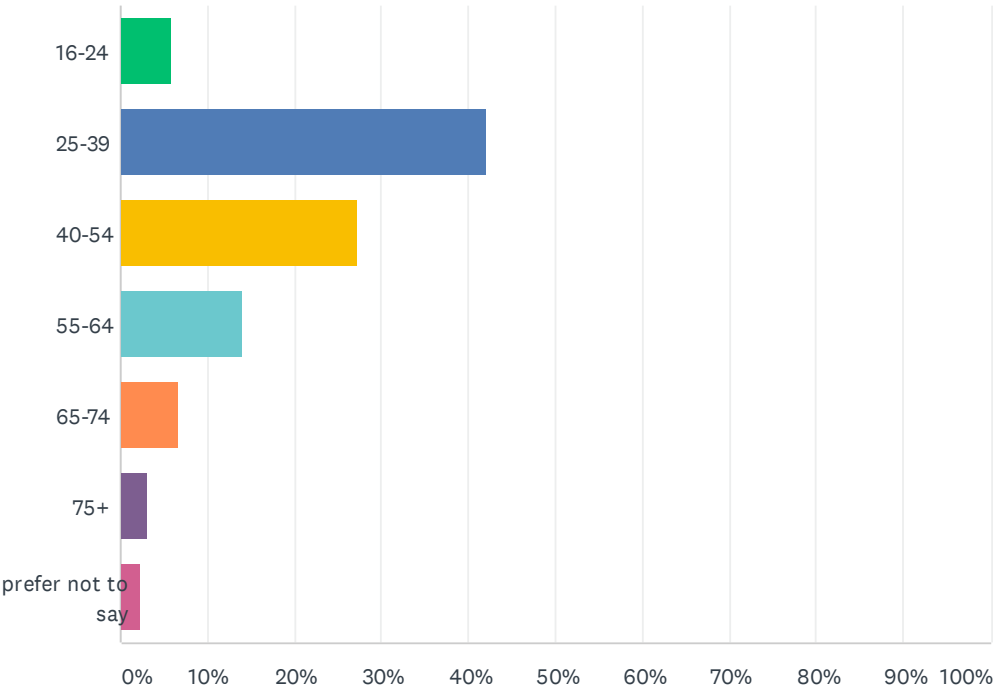
Answered: 220 Skipped: 12



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Gloucester City Council	20.91%	46
Cheltenham Borough Council	17.27%	38
Tewkesbury Borough Council	14.09%	31
Stroud District Council	16.36%	36
Forest of Dean District Council	10.45%	23
West Oxfordshire District Council	10.45%	23
Cotswold District Council	8.18%	18
None of the above	1.36%	3
Prefer not to say	0.91%	2
TOTAL		220

Q18 What age are you?

Answered: 221 Skipped: 11

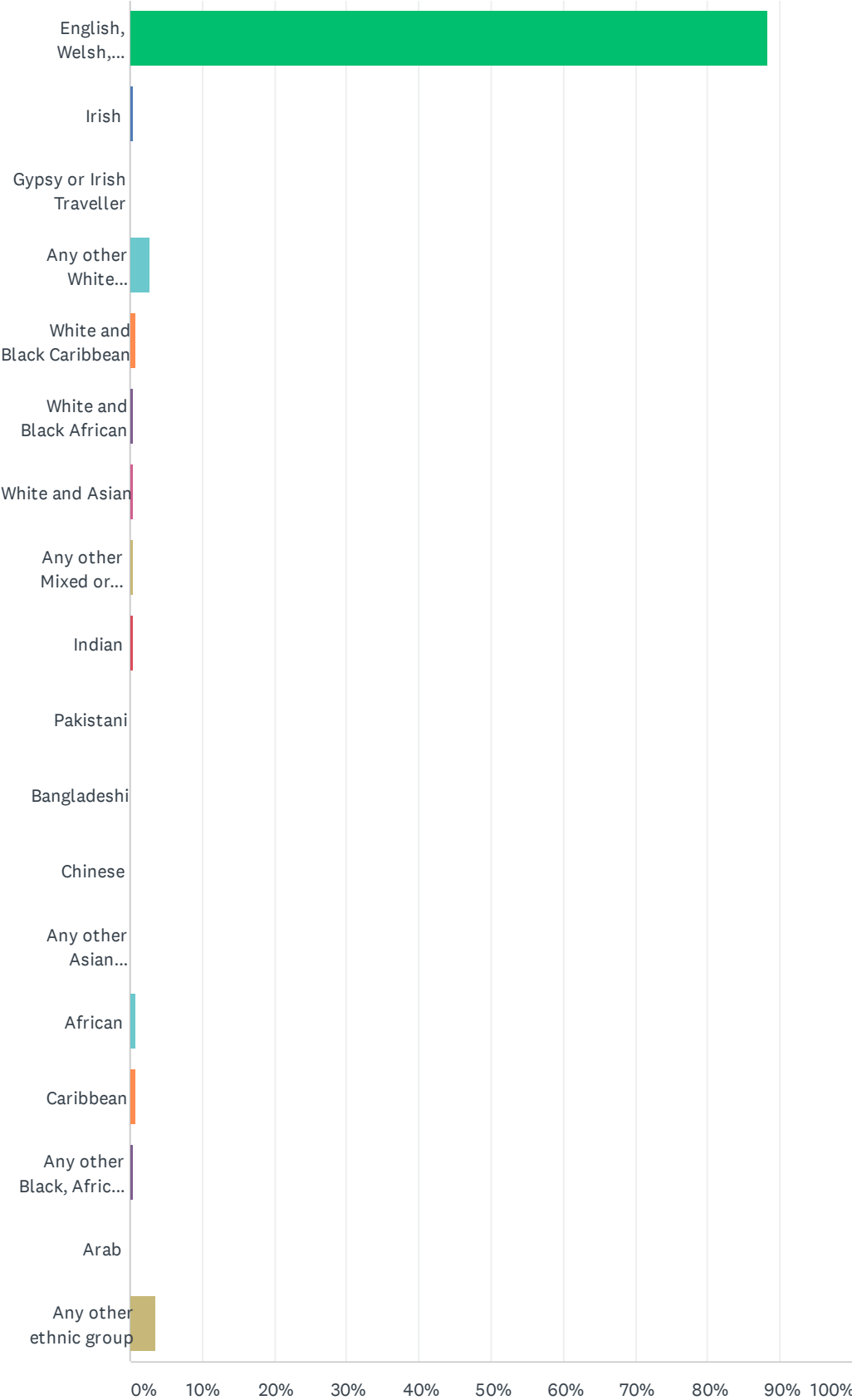


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
16-24	5.88%	13
25-39	42.08%	93
40-54	27.15%	60
55-64	14.03%	31
65-74	6.79%	15
75+	3.17%	7
prefer not to say	2.26%	5
Total Respondents: 221		

Q19 What is your ethnic group?

Answered: 220 Skipped: 12

Homeseekerplus policy consultation



Homeseekerplus policy consultation

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British	88.18%	194
Irish	0.45%	1
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0.00%	0
Any other White background	2.73%	6
White and Black Caribbean	0.91%	2
White and Black African	0.45%	1
White and Asian	0.45%	1
Any other Mixed or Multiple ethnic background	0.45%	1
Indian	0.45%	1
Pakistani	0.00%	0
Bangladeshi	0.00%	0
Chinese	0.00%	0
Any other Asian background	0.00%	0
African	0.91%	2
Caribbean	0.91%	2
Any other Black, African or Caribbean background	0.45%	1
Arab	0.00%	0
Any other ethnic group	3.64%	8
TOTAL		220

Q20 If you would like a response to your input into this consultation, the
please provide your details below:

Answered: 100 Skipped: 132

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Name	100.00%	100
Company	0.00%	0
Address	0.00%	0
Address 2	0.00%	0
City/Town	0.00%	0
State/Province	0.00%	0
Postal Code	0.00%	0
Country	0.00%	0
Email Address	97.00%	97
Phone Number	82.00%	82

	Property Size etc.	Property conditions (this only applies to the district where the Notice is made)	Homelessness (this only applies to the district where any duty is owed)	Medical needs	Welfare needs	General
EMERGENCY BAND	Existing Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire social housing tenants willing to move from family accommodation to non-family social housing property within the partnership area.	Where Environmental Health has inspected the property and requires immediate vacation of the property because of an imminent risk of harm due to disrepair, major defects or grossly inadequate facilities.		The applicant assessed as immediate need of re-housing on medical grounds.	The applicant assessed as immediate need of re-housing on welfare grounds where there has been a major incident and there is proven threat to life or limb.	
GOLD BAND	Existing Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire social housing tenants willing to move to smaller family sized accommodation if this has been agreed with your local authority to release a property of higher demand or limited availability. or There is major overcrowding in the current property - lacking 2 or more bedrooms or Environmental Health has inspected the property and has served a Prohibition Notice	Where Environmental Health has inspected the property and has served a Prohibition Order or Suspended Prohibition Order on the landlord that repairs have to be undertaken but the landlord is unable/unwilling to comply.	The applicant has made a homelessness application under part VII of the housing act 1996, as amended to one of the Homeseekerplus local authorities and the full s193 statutory homeless duty to secure accommodation for the applicant has been accepted by that authority.	Urgent medical need or long-term disability that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation.	Exceptional circumstances where the current property has a critical long-term detrimental effect on their welfare.	A young person owed leaving care duties under section 23C of the Children Act 1989 and in a housing need or Move-on from supported accommodation funded County Council commissioned services and where a local connection was agreed at point of referral
SILVER BAND	There is overcrowding in the current property - lacking 1 bedroom		A Prevention or relief duty has been accepted or The applicant remains assessed as eligible for assistance and homeless but has either has been found either Non-priority, Intentionally homeless.	Significant medical need that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation.	Significant welfare need that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation.	Right to move
BRONZE BAND	All other Applicants					

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BAND	Property size etc	Property conditions (this only applies to the district where the Notice is made)	Homelessness (this only applies to the district where any duty is owed)	Medical needs	Welfare needs	General
EMERGENCY	Existing Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire social housing tenants willing to move from family accommodation to non-family social housing property within the partnership area.	Where Environmental Health has inspected the property and requires immediate vacation of the property because of an imminent risk of harm due to disrepair, major defects or grossly inadequate facilities.		The applicant assessed as immediate need of re-housing on medical grounds.	The applicant assessed as immediate need of re-housing on welfare grounds where there has been a major incident and there is proven threat to life or limb.	
GOLD Page 137	Existing Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire social housing tenants willing to move to smaller family sized accommodation if this has been agreed with your local authority to release a property of higher demand or limited availability. Or: There is major overcrowding in the current property - lacking two or more bedrooms. Or: Environmental Health has inspected the property and has served a Prohibition Notice	Where Environmental Health has inspected the property and has served a Prohibition Order or Suspended Prohibition Order on the landlord that repairs have to be undertaken but the landlord is unable/unwilling to comply.	The applicant has made a homelessness application under part VII of the housing act 1996, as amended to one of the Homeseekerplus local authorities and the full s193 statutory homeless duty to secure accommodation for the applicant has been accepted by that authority.	Urgent medical need or long-term disability that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation.	Exceptional circumstances where the current property has a critical long-term detrimental effect on their welfare.	A young person owed leaving care duties under section 23C of the Children Act 1989 and in a housing need. Or: Move-on from supported accommodation funded County Council commissioned services and where a local connection was agreed at point of referral
SILVER	There is overcrowding in the current property - lacking one bedroom		A Prevention or relief duty has been accepted. Or: The applicant remains assessed as eligible for assistance and homeless but has either has been found either Non-priority, Intentionally homeless.	Significant medical need that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation.	Significant welfare need that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation.	Right to move
BRONZE	All other applicants					

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Equality and Rural Impact Assessment Form

When completing this form you will need to provide evidence that you have considered how the 'protected characteristics' may be impacted upon by this decision. In line with the General Equality Duty the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard for the need to:

- a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- b) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- c) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

This form should be completed in conjunction with the guidance document available on the Intranet or by contacting the Corporate Support Team ext. 2607.

1. Persons responsible for this assessment:

Names: Caroline Clissold

Date of assessment: 7th October 2021

Telephone: 01594812309

Email: caroline.clissold@publicagroup.uk

Page
2

Name of the policy, service, strategy, procedure or function:

HomeseekerPlus, choice based lettings policy

Is this a new or existing one? Existing – with minor updates

3. Briefly describe it aims and objectives

HomeseekerPlus is a choice based lettings (CBL) scheme run by seven local authorities in partnership with social housing landlords operating within Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire. Local Authorities are tasked with ensuring that all affordable and social rented accommodation made available through its Choice Based Lettings scheme is allocated fairly, transparently and to those in the highest housing need. The HomeseekerPlus policy was therefore created to provide the framework for making those decisions and to ensure that all of its partners were acting in a consistent way. The policy explains who is eligible and who qualifies to apply on HomeseekerPlus and sets out how applications will be assessed and awarded a subsequent Emergency, Gold, Silver or Bronze banding based on housing need.

Due to legislative and other changes the policy is in need of a refresh. It is considered good practice for the partnership to consult the public and associated stakeholders on the new policy.

4. Are there any external considerations? (e.g. Legislation/government directives)

Housing Act 1996, Part 6 -

SI 66a of the Act states that 'Every local housing authority must have a scheme (their 'allocation scheme') for determining priorities and as to the procedure to be followed in allocating housing accommodation.'

The Localism Act 2011 introduced significant amendments to Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996, Section 166a including, amongst others, but notably:

- To include assurance that certain categories of applicants are given reasonable preference.
- The requirement for an allocation scheme to contain a statement of the authority's policy on offering a choice of accommodation or to opportunity to express preferences about their accommodation (section 166a (2))

5. What evidence has helped to inform this assessment?

Source	✓	If ticked please explain what
Demographic data and other statistics, including census findings	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Recent research findings including studies of deprivation	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Results of recent consultations and surveys	✓	Proposed changes to the HomeseekerPlus policy went out to consultation to the public and our internal and external stakeholder in spring 2021 for 8 weeks. The results of this consultation have been incorporated into the revised policy
Results of ethnic monitoring data and any equalities data	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Anecdotal information from groups and agencies within Gloucestershire	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Comparisons between similar functions / policies elsewhere	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Analysis of audit reports and reviews	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Other:	<input type="checkbox"/>	

6. Please specify how intend to gather evidence to fill any gaps identified above:

No gaps identified

7. Has any consultation been carried out?

Yes

Details of Consultation

Proposed changes to the HomeseekerPlus policy went out to consultation to the public and our internal and external stakeholder in spring 2021 for 8 weeks. The results of this consultation have been incorporated into the revised policy. Full details of the outcome of this consultation are attached – Annex D.

NO please outline any planned activities

8. What level of impact either directly or indirectly will the proposal have upon the general public / staff? (Please quantify where possible)

Level of impact	Response
NO IMPACT – The proposal has no impact upon the general public/staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
LOW – Few members of the general public/staff will be affected by this proposal	<input type="checkbox"/>
MEDIUM – A large group of the general public/staff will be affected by this proposal	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
HIGH – The proposal will have an impact upon the whole community/all staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments: e.g. Who will this specifically impact?	
All members of the community that are registered for social housing consideration on HomeseekerPlus	

9. Considering the available evidence, what type of impact could this function have on any of the protected characteristics?

Negative – it could disadvantage and therefore potentially not meet the General Equality duty;

Positive – it could benefit and help meet the General Equality duty;

Neutral – neither positive nor negative impact / Not sure

	Potential Negative	Potential Positive	Neutral	Reasons	Options for mitigating adverse impacts
Age – Young People			✓	The proposal is inclusive to people of different age groups, but it is not specific to age	
Age – Old People			✓	The proposal is inclusive to all ages	
Disability			✓	The proposal is inclusive to people with disabilities but is not specific to disability	
Sex – Male			✓	The proposal is inclusive to all gender groups, but it is not specific to gender	
Sex – Female			✓	The proposal is inclusive to all gender groups, but it is not specific to gender	
Race including Gypsy and Travellers			✓	The proposal is inclusive to people of all races, but it is not specific to race	
Religion or Belief			✓	The proposal is inclusive to people of all religions, but it is not specific to religion	
Sexual Orientation			✓	This proposal is inclusive to all types of sexual orientation, but it is not specific to sexual orientation	
Gender Reassignment			✓	The proposal is inclusive to all gender groups, but it is not specific to gender	
Pregnancy and maternity			✓	The proposal is inclusive to people who are pregnant and/or on maternity, but it is not specific to this group	
Geographical impacts on one area			✓	The proposal is inclusive to the whole of Cotswold district	
Other Groups			✓	This proposal is inclusive to all other groups that are not mentioned	

Rural considerations: ie Access to services; leisure facilities, transport; education; employment; broadband.			✓	The proposal is inclusive to the whole of Cotswold district	
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10. Action plan (add additional lines if necessary)

Action(s)	Lead Officer	Resource	Timescale
NA			

11. Is there is anything else that you wish to add?

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NA

Declaration

I/We are satisfied that an equality impact assessment has been carried out on this policy, service, strategy, procedure or function and where an negative impact has been identified actions have been developed to lessen or negate this impact. We understand that the Equality Impact Assessment is required by the District Council and that we take responsibility for the completion and quality of this assessment.

Completed By:	Caroline Clissold	Role:	Housing Manager	Date:	7 th October 2021
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Reviewed by Corporate Equality Officer Group:		Date:	
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Please forward an electronic copy to the Corporate Support Team – corporatesupport@fdean.gov.uk

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COTSWOLD
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Council name	COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	CABINET - 1 NOVEMBER 2021
Report Number	AGENDA ITEM 10
Subject	COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMUNITY HOUSING FUND (CHF)
Wards affected	ALL
Accountable member	Cllr Lisa Spivey Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness Email: lisa.spivey@cotswold.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Anwen Hughes, Strategic Housing Manager Email: Anwen.Hughes@cotswold.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To update Cabinet on the role of Community-Led Housing Enabler and seek Cabinet approval for proposals for the allocation of the CHF small grants fund.
Annexes	None
Recommendation(s)	<i>a) That the Council agree to authorise the determination of allocations from the Council's CHF small grants fund to an Allocations Panel, to consist of the Group Manager for Commissioning, the Strategic Housing Manager, the Community-led Housing Enabler/Housing Enabling Officer, and the Chief Finance Officer, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness</i>
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver good quality social rented homes. • Help residents, businesses and communities access the support they need to achieve their ambitions
Key Decision	NO



COTSWOLD
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cllr Lisa Spivey, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness• Chief Finance Officer



1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1.** The Council was allocated £882,272 of Department of Communities and Local Government funding via the Community-Led Housing Fund in 2017. The purpose of the fund was to diversify the delivery of affordable housing by enabling local community groups to be directly involved in the planning and delivery of affordable housing in the neighbourhood. The fund was also aimed at helping build collaboration, skills and supply chains at a local level to promote the sustainability of this approach to housebuilding and increase the overall supply of affordable housing. The fund was to enable capital investment, technical support and revenue to be provided to make more schemes viable and significantly increase community groups' current delivery pipelines.
- 1.2.** It was resolved at Cabinet on the 16th February 2017 that the Council's Community Housing Fund (CHF) allocation be allocated to a new earmarked reserve for Community Housing. Under 'Community Capacity Building', a budget of £150,000 for the 'small grants fund', identified in Appendix B to the report, was also approved as a revenue grant to be allocated to community groups to support their community-led housing projects. Cabinet resolved that the Head of Planning and Strategic Housing, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, be authorised to amend the project plan and budget to reflect amendments to legislation and Government policy, and/or to respond to local or national opportunities.
- 1.3.** A seminar for Members, parish councils, community groups and individuals was held to promote the opportunity of community-led housing and offer support through the Council's Community-led Housing Enabler (CLHE). Two community-led housing groups have been established in the District and are actively looking for sites to deliver schemes.
- 1.4.** Parish Councils have been further encouraged to bring forward opportunities for affordable housing through the provision of additional information, however positive interest has been extremely low.
- 1.5.** Opportunities for developing small Council-owned rural sites have also been identified and parish needs surveys have been undertaken to establish the level of local housing need. These opportunities are now being considered for development by the Housing Delivery Programme Manager.

2. MAIN POINTS

2.1. Small Grants Fund



- 2.1.1.** As part of the Council's Affordable housing delivery programme, the Council is working to promote innovative alternative methods of providing rural affordable housing such as encouraging community-led housing approaches. This includes working with Community Land Trusts through the Council's Community-Led Housing Enabler and identifying opportunities for the Council to directly deliver rural housing, including through the use of its own land. The allocation of small revenue grants to community groups will support this objective by providing both a start-up grant to assist groups in forming, gaining membership and incorporating and a pre-development grant to progress their project to the planning application stage.
- 2.1.2.** Two grants will be made available to community-led housing groups and established organisations to bid for, firstly a start-up grant of up to £1,000 and secondly a pre-development (second stage) grant of up to £10,000. The initial start-up fund is for new groups to help them get established and can pay towards the costs of incorporation, legal advice, capacity building, publicity or general costs such as meeting room hire. The second stage grant is aimed at established incorporated groups/organisations that are at the site and planning stages of their housing development project. It is aimed at helping fund up-front costs which may be incurred in trying to bring housing projects forward. This could include the appointment of consultants, financial feasibility appraisals, solicitor's fees, setting up a website or planning application fees.
- 2.1.3.** The levels of the Council's 'small grants' have been set according to similar programmes offered by other local authorities and community hubs and the Start-Up Support Programme, now closed, that was funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and delivered by Community Led Homes. Other grant funding streams are also available to community-led housing groups from time to time.
- 2.1.4.** An Allocations Panel will be created to assess and determine these grant applications from community groups. The panel will comprise the Group Manager for Commissioning, the Strategic Housing Manager, either the Community-led Housing Enabler or the Housing Enabling Officer and the Chief Finance Officer, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness, as the sums involved are below the threshold that requires a Cabinet decision.
- 2.1.5.** In line with the ethos of community led housing, applications to the community housing fund will only be considered where they can demonstrate that they meet the following criteria:
- That the community must be integrally involved in key decisions throughout the process;
 - Community groups play a long term role in ownership, management or stewardship of the homes;



- Benefits to the local area and/or specified community must be clearly defined and legally protected in perpetuity.

2.2. Community-Led Housing Enabler role

- 2.2.1.** The current fixed term contract post of Community-led Housing Enabler, funded from the Council's Community-Led Housing Fund grant, is due to become vacant following the current job-share post holders' successful application for the permanent Housing Enabling Officer post (job-share) for the Council within Publica.
- 2.2.2.** The current fixed term contract post of Community-led Housing Enabler was due to end in March 2022. Officers will now consider opportunities for how the Community-Led Housing Enabler role can be taken forward and a report for Cabinet will be presented at a later date for consideration.
- 2.2.3.** In the interim, the new Housing Enabling Officer will continue to support existing community-led housing groups in the District. New enquiries/opportunities for community-led housing will be directed to GlosHub, Gloucestershire's one-stop resource for supporting all types of community led housing. <https://www.gloshubs.org.uk>
- 2.3.** The Council's small grant fund along with support from the Housing Enabling Officer and GlosHub will continue to provide a good opportunity for the Council to work with local communities and community organisations to develop community capacity and the possible development of community-led housing.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1.** None. It was agreed at Cabinet on the 16th February 2017 that the Council's Community Housing Fund (CHF) allocation be allocated to a new earmarked reserve for Community Housing. This fund can only be used to support Community-led housing projects in the District.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1.** The grant application form includes a declaration to abide by the grant allocation's terms and conditions (Annex A) and forms part of the grant agreement.



5. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 5.1.** There is no financial risk to the Council associated with the awarding of the grant as the money will be funded solely from the grant-funded Community Housing Fund held by the Council.
- 5.2.** There is a minimal risk of mis-use of grant funds by community groups. The grant application form has been reviewed by the Counter Fraud team and includes appropriate checks to ensure the grant is spent in accordance with the agreed terms and conditions. Grant recipients will be required to provide a grant expenditure report and obtain quotations for services to ensure value for money.
- 5.3.** There is a risk that groups will not be able to progress projects and not contribute to the delivery of affordable housing in the District. However, support and advice will be provided by the Community-led Housing Enabler/GlosHub to community group members to minimise this risk.

6. EQUALITIES IMPACT (IF REQUIRED)

- 6.1.** An equalities impact assessment was completed for the previous Cabinet Report and no adverse effects on any groups were identified. In order to monitor this, grant applicants are required to complete the section on *Equalities* and indicate which (if any) groups will particularly benefit from their project and provide details. A further Equalities Impact Assessment has therefore not been deemed necessary for this report.

7. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS (IF REQUIRED)

- 7.1.** We are keen to see grant project proposals that show a commitment to good design, use of innovative housing construction products such as modern methods of construction (MMC), and make use of innovative funding mechanisms. This includes proposals that aim to reduce fuel poverty for tenants and improve the energy efficiency of homes.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 8.1.** Alternative funding options have been considered. The government has recently announced another year's funding for the Community Housing Fund (2021/22) and community organisations are encouraged to apply for revenue grant funding from May 2021.



- 8.2. However, the 2021/22 CHF fund is for established community organisations for projects that have made substantial progression towards the site and planning stages of a project. It has been made clear that group's applying for projects in Local Authority areas that still have CHF available are expected to apply to the Local Authority for grant funding first.

9. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 9.1. The following documents have been identified by the author of the report in accordance with section 100D.5(a) of the Local Government Act 1972 and are listed in accordance with section 100 D.1(a) for inspection by members of the public:
- 9.2. Report *Community-led Housing Fund* to Cabinet dated 16th February 2017 and associated minutes
- 9.3. These documents will be available for inspection at the Council Offices at Cirencester during normal office hours for a period of up to 4 years from the date of the meeting. Please contact the author of the report.

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Council name	COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	CABINET – 1 NOVEMBER 2021
Report Number	AGENDA ITEM 11
Subject	COMMUNITY FUNDING FOR THE 2022 QUEEN'S PLATINUM JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	<p>CLlr Mike Every Email: mike.every@cotswold.gov.uk</p> <p>CLlr Jenny Forde Email: jenny.forde@cotswold.gov.uk</p>
Accountable officer	<p>Joseph Walker Email: joseph.walker@cotswold.gov.uk</p> <p>Jacqueline Wright Email: jacqueline.wright@cotswold.gov.uk</p>
Summary/Purpose	To consider the Motion “Community Funding for the 2022 Queen’s Platinum Jubilee Celebrations” put to Council on 22 September 2021.
Annexes	None
Recommendation(s)	<i>That Cabinet agrees that it is appropriate to signpost community groups to either their local Town or Parish Council for small value contributions to the 2022 Queen’s Platinum Jubilee Celebrations or to Crowdfund Cotswold for larger projects that require a financial contribution in excess of £500.</i>
Corporate priorities	Helping residents and communities access the support they need for good health and wellbeing
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	None



COTSWOLD
DISTRICT COUNCIL



1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Councillor Julia Judd, seconded by Councillor Stephen Hirst, put a Motion to Council at its meeting of 22 September 2021 as follows

Motion - Community Funding for the 2022 Queens Platinum Jubilee Celebrations

Council notes that the May Bank Holiday Weekend 2022 will be moved to Thursday 2 June 2022 and an additional Bank Holiday will see a four – day weekend to celebrate Her Majesty The Queen's Platinum Jubilee – the first time any British monarch has reached this historic milestone.

This will also mark the first truly large community gathering since 2019 owing to the Covid-19 pandemic, so could arguably be considered a double celebration. There is likely to be a strong appetite from communities to celebrate this unique milestone.

There is no recent parallel for such an event, the closest being the Armistice commemorations and town and villages will benefit from a long lead time to plan, agree the format and issues such as road closures, refreshments and even catering.

This council therefore resolves to set aside specific community funding to support communities to run special events over the weekend, enabling them to kick-start their plans to organise a one off never to be forgotten event.

- 1.2 Cllr Judd was invited to introduce the Motion to Council and proposed a level of funding of £500 per Ward Member. The full financial implication of the motion was therefore £17,000.
- 1.3 In light of the financial implications, Council agreed that this Motion would be considered by Cabinet at its meeting in November 2021. Council did not debate the desirability of this Motion.
- 1.4 The Council does not have a budget allocated for this purpose. Without further investment, the £17,000 funding for implementation of the Motion would need to be found from within the existing community grant or other budgets.

2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1 Buckingham Palace is encouraging Town and Parish Councils, and communities more widely, to plan communal celebrations of this Royal milestone. Much of the activity and material associated with such celebrations will be secured free of charge through the good graces of participating residents, and it reasonable to think that our Town and Parish Councils, as



Precepting Authorities, will be able to meet some of the cash costs arising. There will be an opportunity for them to increase their precepts for the 2022/23 financial year over the coming months.

- 2.2** Government guidance is clear that typically such communal celebrations can be run with little or minimal regulatory intervention, helping to keep costs and complexity down. That said, if in some instances such local events were of a scale to require road closures or Temporary Event Notices, the Council will be involved as a regulatory body. Currently the Council does not charge for those road closures that fall within its purview. Temporary Event Notices attract a low tariff of £21 and will only be required in specific circumstances. This is unlikely to affect many events. It is likely that regulations are more of a perceptual barrier than a real one, which could be addressed through positive communications.
- 2.3** The Motion proposes a small grant scheme to be allocated on a Ward Member basis. It should be noted that other funding avenues already exist, which may be able to support Jubilee activities. As mentioned, this type of activity will often be supported from Town or Parish Council funds. Gloucestershire County Council has launched a 'Build Back Better' Ward Councillor funding scheme which is a flexible funding mechanism that can support local activity around the District. At the time of writing, resources remain in this scheme and could support community events, particularly in recognition of the Jubilee being an opportunity for community activity post-Covid. Community groups may also be able to access funding from other local or indeed national Grant giving bodies, subject to criteria, for example, the National Lottery 'Awards for All' Grant Scheme has awarded Grants for such a purpose. As discussed further in the report below, the Council's own 'Crowdfund Cotswold' can also support community activity.
- 2.4** In 2020, the Council agreed that its community-facing Grants budgets would be managed through an on-line crowdfunding platform, operated by Spacehive. These budgets, while not committed to specific projects, are allocated to an existing process. The local branding for this approach is Crowdfund Cotswold. Ward-based grant schemes are contrary to this Policy and are not viewed as being as efficient in allocation of monies and allocations may sit unused.
- 2.5** To date, one complete round of project funding campaigns has been completed, which resulted in projects to the value of over £270,000 being supported, leveraging three times the direct Grant investment of the Council. A wide range of community projects were supported across the District. At the time of writing, the second round is in progress, project ideas have been submitted by community groups and are being verified by our partner Spacehive, before the groups launch their campaigns.
- 2.6** The Council has committed very publically to the investment of its community funds through the Crowdfund Cotswold process. Across the District, project creators are preparing complex and ambitious projects hoping for support from the 'pot'. Top-slicing



the Community Grants to fund a budget for a Platinum Jubilee scheme would reduce the scale of investment in Crowdfund Cotswold, and would run counter to the messaging used to promote Crowdfund Cotswold.

- 2.7 As a way forward, it is proposed that Cabinet considers signposting community groups to their local Town or Parish Council for small value contributions or to Crowdfund Cotswold for larger projects that require a financial contribution in excess of £500.
- 2.8 For events which would be appropriate for Crowdfund Cotswold, the next funding round will take place early in 2022. It will be announced and promoted in December this year, with workshops for applicants in January 2022 and a project deadline of March 2022. This means projects will campaign for financial support through the months of April and May leading through to the Jubilee celebration weekend. Funding is released immediately that the campaign target is hit. Where projects require confirmation of funding with a longer lead-in time, they will need to reach their target towards the start of the funding period. This can be achieved through ensuring that they submit all their project details on time, and encourage their current and prospective supporters to pledge on the platform as soon as the project goes 'live'. Preparatory costs incurred before events themselves will need to be met from other resources, but can be identified as part of the project to 'lever in' support.
- 2.9 Essentially the key action to incorporate support for Jubilee activities within the early 2022 round is a communications campaign, to ensure that communities are aware of this opportunity, and how it could assist in their plans.

3. CONCLUSIONS

- 3.1 The most appropriate bodies to support small scale events are local Town and Parish Councils.
- 3.2 For larger events, the Council has an existing approach to help finance community activity that can readily assist and welcome initiatives to commemorate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee through Crowdfund Cotswold.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 As referenced in section 1.3, there is currently no budget available to fund this motion. If Cabinet agrees to implement the motion, funding of £17,000 would either need to be top sliced from the existing community grant fund budget (reducing the scale of investment in 'Crowdfund Cotswold'), would need to be found from other revenue budgets or transferred from the Council's Earmarked Reserves.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no legal implications arising directly from this Report.



7. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 7.1** There are unlikely to be any risks associated with this approach beyond those of using the crowdfunding approach already adopted by the Council. The key risks in crowdfunding are that projects fail to meet their targets, and thus do not draw down investment. Evidence from the first round is that this is a low risk, and can indeed be seen as a measure of popular support for proposals. Given that the Council's funding is finite, there is a risk that demand might outstrip the available budget, but the crowdfunding approach goes some way to mitigating this by managing the Council's grant through a process that enables other funding to be raised simultaneously.

8. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 8.1** None identified. Whilst using Crowdfund Cotswold does require some basic ICT literacy, the on-line approach can be backed up by 'off-line campaigning and fundraising.

9. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1** The approach advocated in this Report does not predict the variety of event and activities that our communities might seek to deliver. It is reasonable to pre-suppose that activities are unlikely to have significant implications and the Crowdfund Cotswold approach encourages project creators to consider how they might contribute positively to addressing these declared emergencies.

10. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 10.1** The alternative options to the approach outlined would be either to rely on existing schemes to provide sufficient support to local communities, or to run a separate Grant scheme. The Report covers the disadvantages of this second approach.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1** None

(END)

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