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1. Introduction

Four local authorities and their housing association partners have agreed a common framework for assessing priority for housing applicants within the Oxfordshire Sub-Region. The districts covered are:

Oxford City
South Oxfordshire
Cherwell
Vale of White Horse

The partnership is refereed to as Oxfordshire HomeChoice.

This common framework uses a Banding schemes as a means of assessing priority from applicants for social housing across all four Districts.

2. The Legislative Framework

Legislation states that a Council’s Allocation Policy should aim to meet housing needs in the District and be framed to ensure that reasonable preference is given to the following groups:

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

The Allocations Policy may also be framed to take into account:

- the financial resources available to an applicant to meet their housing costs
- any behaviour of a person (or household member) which affects his suitability to be a tenant
- any local connection an applicant has with the District

Subsequent amendments contained in the 2002 Homelessness Act also require Authorities to:

(a) seek to maximise the choice available to applicants;
(b) support the principle of recognising local connection as a determinant of priority;
incorporate mechanisms to reflect the higher needs of certain vulnerable categories of applicants;

offer some limited support for the principle of assisting key workers;

be constructed so as to minimise homelessness and the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation;

be kept simple and easy for applicants to understand and use.

The Council’s Allocations Policy takes into account the legal and regulatory framework governing allocations of housing. The Allocations Policy is framed to take into account the scarcity of affordable housing in the district against high levels of demand.

Priority on the Council’s Housing Register is determined by a Banding scheme.

3. The Housing Register

The Council will maintain a Register of all people seeking accommodation in the district and who are eligible for an offer of social housing. People who are currently tenants of The Vale Housing Association are eligible to join the Register but in general will only be considered eligible for properties that are not owned by The Vale Housing Association.

Anyone over the age of 16 can join the Housing Register but in general will not be eligible for non-supported housing until they reach the age of 18.

Certain classes of people subject to immigration control are ineligible for allocation of housing, and therefore are ineligible to join the Housing Register.

New legislation implemented in January 2003 as part of the Homelessness Act 2002 states that a Council can choose to restrict allocations of social housing to those persons who are deemed to be eligible for an offer of housing. The Vale of White Horse District Council will not permit people deemed to be responsible for unacceptable behaviour to join its Housing register.

For further guidance on exclusions from the Housing Register, see Appendix >>

Some applicants who are eligible to join the Housing Register may not be allowed to participate in Choice Based Lettings. This will usually be for reasons of public protection and community safety. Such decisions will be made in conjunction with the relevant agencies, including Thames Valley Police, Probation, Mappa, etc. Such applicants will remain eligible for an offer of accommodation based on their relevant priority but its location will be restricted and subject to advice from the above agencies.

All applicants to the Housing Register must complete an application form and provide the Council with proof of ID for all household members and proof of residence. The
Council may require additional documentary evidence depending on the applicant’s circumstances. Applicants who do not provide the necessary proofs will not be permitted to join the Housing Register. Applicants must inform the Council of any changes of address and changes to their circumstances which will affect their application. Applicants will be required to re-register on an annual basis.

In most circumstances, applicants and household members can only be registered on one application at a time. There may be exceptions to this, such as when children live with different parents at different times.

Partner’s applications will usually be joint applications. Dependents, family members or other adults who are not a partner of the applicant cannot usually be a joint applicant.

Adults will not normally be permitted to join an application in circumstances which results in them needing a larger property, unless there are overriding reasons to do so.

4. Priority within the Bands/ Date Order

Applicants within each band will be put in date order as follows:

When an applicant is placed in Band 1, they will usually be ordered according to the date they were put into that band (called the ‘effective date’). This will ensure that those with urgent needs will have those needs met in the order in which they arose.

When an applicant is placed in Bands 2 to 5, they will usually be ordered according to the date they originally applied to go on the Housing Register (called the ‘registration date’). This will ensure that those who have had a need for housing over a longer period will have their waiting time taken into account.

5. Change of circumstances and Movement within the Bands

If an applicant is moved into a different priority group due to a change in circumstances, their application will retain its registration date unless they are placed into Band 1, in which case the date used will be the date that they were placed in that band. This is to ensure that those with immediate housing priority are considered in the order in which they were placed into Band 1.

Where two applicants with the same effective date in Band 1 bid for the same property the applicant with the earliest registration date will be given priority for an offer of accommodation.

6. Time Limited Priority

In certain cases priority will be time limited. For example, a decision to grant a high band on the grounds of an urgent social or welfare need might be for a limited period. This will normally be six months. In all cases the applicant will be given a reasonable amount of time to bid for alternative accommodation, and the length of time may be adjusted according to the availability of suitable accommodation. Priority will be re-assessed at the end of the period.
Applicants awarded Exceptional status will be reviewed regularly. Applicants who do not bid when there are properties available for them may have their award of Exceptional Status removed.

7. Compound needs

Where applicants in Bands 3 or 4 have compound needs (that is, they qualify for more than one category in the band) they will usually be upgraded to the next band. Compounding is not available for those placed in Bands 2 or 5. The reason is that Band 1 is reserved only for the most urgent need cases and Band 5 categories do not reflect housing needs.

Those applicants in Band 3 with a category of ‘Homeless and not in a Priority Group’ cannot compound this category to move up to Band 2 because the assessment of their homelessness takes into account all other relevant circumstances. If they have additional needs then this would be reflected in a decision to award either an Exceptional Need category (Band 1) or a Priority Homeless category (Band 2).

8. The Priority Order

The successful applicant for each property will normally be the one who is eligible for the size and type of property being offered and who is in the highest band. Where there is more than one applicant in that band, priority will be by date (see below).

However, the councils and their housing association partners reserve the right not to offer the property to the person highest on the short-list, if the property offers a better match with the needs of another high priority applicant.

Applicants will be able to bid to be considered for three social rented properties and any number of shared ownership or private rented properties in any one advertisement cycle. Applicants can delete bids and add new ones in the course of the cycle.
Short-lists will be created with the following priority order:

**Priority Order:**

1. Applicant Type (only if an applicant type preference is specified for property)
2. Parish/Village connection (only if a parish connection preference is specified for property)
3. Mobility Level (only if a mobility level preference is specified for the property)
4. Band – Band priority order is: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.
5. District Connection (only if there is a preference for a district local connection for the property)
6. Size of household (only if a preference to larger families is specified for the property) – larger household has priority
7. Regional Connection (applicants with a connection to any of the four district council areas get preference)
8. Effective Date (when Band 1 applicants are compared)
9. Registration Date (when Bands 2 to 5 are compared)

**9. Priority for Adapted Properties**

Properties that have been designed or adapted for use by people with physical disabilities are in short supply. When an adapted property becomes available for letting, the Council will aim to ensure those who will benefit most from the adaptations are given priority. We will do this by identifying four levels of access and mobility. Each accessible property will be identified on a scale of one to four. When applicants are awarded priority on grounds of their disability they will be told which of these levels of access and mobility they can apply for.

When short-listing priority will be given to applicants whose mobility level matched that of the property.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>Level access into and throughout property (e.g. ground floor flat or bungalow)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>Built to Mobility Standards as defined within Building Regulations, i.e. level threshold, wider doorways, convenient socket and switch heights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>Some adaptations for disabled people included, e.g. walk in shower, stairlift, ramps, adapted kitchen etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>Built or adapted to meet full wheelchair standard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**10. The Banding Scheme**
Once accepted as eligible by one of the Councils to join their Housing Register, applicants will be placed in one of the five bands, which have been designed to reflect broad categories of housing need. The Banding scheme enables the Councils and their partner housing associations to meet their legal responsibilities for housing and also provide a fair and easily understood way of selecting applicants to receive offers of accommodation.

Some applicant’s circumstances may make them eligible to be placed in more than one band. In this case, they will normally be placed in the highest band for which they are eligible. However, if one of the categories is in Band 5, their Band position will remain as Band 5.

11. The Priority Bands and Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Band 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.1 Exceptional circumstances</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where there is an immediate risk to health and safety, complex needs, ‘place of safety’ cases or other emergency needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This category is intended to be reserved for only the most urgent cases. This includes cases where rehousing is needed to protect the health or safety of the applicant or a member of their family, where there are complex needs, ‘place of safety’ cases etc. This could include the immediate threat of domestic violence and any other “life and limb cases”.

The award of Exceptional Circumstances priority will normally be time limited (to 3 or 6 months) and priority will be reviewed at the end of the period.

Awarded in accordance with the allocations policy and protocols of the district scheme registering the applicant.

**1.2 Under-occupying by two or more bedrooms**

Council or housing association tenants in the sub-region with an assured or secure tenancy, who will be giving up permanent accommodation with at least two bedrooms more than they require

 Applicants should check whether they are eligible for any incentive schemes to assist with the cost of removals and associated expenses being operated by their landlord or local council.
**1.3 Decants and other housing management moves**

Council tenants or tenants of partner housing associations in the sub-region who need to move quickly because refurbishment or repairs are due to be carried out, which cannot be done with the tenant living there and who have been awarded ‘decant’ status in accordance with the protocols of one of the councils.

Council and housing association tenants in the sub-region living in properties due for sale or demolition.

*Awards of this priority will be time limited. Transfer applicants would normally qualify for this status 6 months before they are required to vacate the property. At the end of the six months the district scheme may decide to make a direct offer, if the applicant has not been successful in bidding for a suitable property. This would not prevent an applicant from registering for a transfer at any time before this and being assessed on their current circumstances.*

*If there is only a need to move temporarily while works are carried out to the tenant’s property, then they will normally be restricted to only being considered for properties within their existing district.*

**1.4 Successor tenants**

These fall into two categories

- Legal successors other than spouses or civil partners
- Policy successors ie. Applicants who would have been entitled to succeed to the tenancy but for the fact that one succession has taken place already.

In both instances priority will be awarded where:

- they are occupying a property with adaptations for a disabled person which they do not need, or
- they are occupying a property larger than they would qualify for under the allocation policy, or
- where occupying the property gives the benefit of facilities and or services for which they would otherwise not qualify.

Legal successors will qualify as transfer applicants and policy successors will be classified as general applicants for the purposes of the allocations policy.

**1.5 Prohibition/demolition notices**

Households where a statutory notice of prohibition or demolition has been issued by the Environmental Health department and it is not possible to remedy the defects in a reasonable time.

**1.6 Statutory overcrowding**

Households where the level of overcrowding exceeds the statutory limit.
## Band 2

### 2.1 Urgent social or welfare needs

Applicants assessed as having an urgent need to move on social or welfare grounds.

*Awarded in accordance with the allocations policy and protocols of the district scheme registering the applicant.*

Includes:

- serious harassment cases
- multiple needs not already covered by other band categories
- applicants who need to move to give or receive care or support

*(See matrix at Appendix 3 for more detail)*

### 2.2 Urgent health or disability needs

Applicants assessed as having an urgent need to move because of a health problem or disability.

*Awarded in accordance with the allocations policy and protocols of the district scheme registering the applicant.*

### 2.3 Under-occupation by one bedroom

Council or housing association tenants in the sub-region with an assured or secure tenancy, who will be giving up permanent general needs accommodation with one bedroom more than they require.

### 2.4 Move-on

Applicants who have been assessed as ready to move on from supported accommodation, including:

- applicants from voluntary sector hostels, foyers and supported lodgings
- Care leavers: applicants who are former "relevant children" as defined by the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2002.

*Applicants will be awarded this band category in accordance with the protocols of one of the councils, when the council is satisfied that the applicant is ready to move to secure independent housing and that ongoing support will be in place where this is needed to sustain the tenancy.*

*Quota arrangements may be used to ensure a minimum supply of vacancies suitable for those ready to move on from supported housing.*

### 2.5 Priority homeless

Applicants found to be homeless, in a priority need group and where a duty to offer housing has been accepted by one of the district councils under sections 193 or 195 of Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996.

### 2.6 Overcrowding by 2 or more bedrooms short

Families assessed as being two or more bedrooms short of their needs.
2.7 Band 3 upgrade

Any applicant who qualifies for two or more compoundable categories in Band 3.

**Band 3**

3.1 Significant social or welfare needs

*Applicants assessed as having a significant level of social or welfare need arising from their housing situation.*

Awarded in accordance with the allocations policy and protocols of the district scheme registering the applicant.

*(See matrix at Appendix 3 for more detail)*

3.2 Significant health or disability needs

*Applicants assessed as having a significant level of housing need as a result of health problems or a disability.*

Awarded in accordance with the allocations policy and protocols of the district scheme registering the applicant.

3.3 Unsatisfactory housing: Level 1

*Applicants living in sub-standard accommodation that a qualified officer has assessed as a category 1 hazard, where repair is not possible or it is not practical in a reasonable timescale.*

*Applicants living in homes lacking the use of one or more of the following:*

A kitchen, a bathroom, an inside WC, running water, electricity.

*Applicants whose existing housing is of a low standard will have their need assessed against the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (known as HHSRS). In the most urgent cases, or where an inspection is needed, the assessment will be carried out by an Environmental Health Officer or other qualified officer.*

*A Category 1 Hazard is a defect where the consequences could include serious harm to applicants. For example: accommodation lacking any bathroom facilities, cooking facilities, or a water supply. The band category will not be awarded, if it is possible for repairs or other remedial action to be carried out within a reasonable timescale. Where a landlord has been served with an improvement notice but remedial work has not been carried out, the district scheme may decide to award priority at its discretion.*

3.4 Overcrowding by one bedroom short

*Families assessed as being one bedroom short of their needs*

3.5 Insecure tied accommodation
## HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY

Applicants who are living in accommodation tied to their employment and who have received a formal notice to quit from their employer and where the loss of employment is through no fault of the applicant. This category includes members of the armed forces in married quarters and agricultural workers.

*Priority category will only be given where there is clear documentary evidence that the employer is terminating the employment and the use of the accommodation in the near future.*

There is new government guidance (August 2008) for local councils on registering the housing needs of those being discharged from the armed forces. Applicants will be considered as having a connection to a district where their employment is based. In order to be given priority for Insecure Accommodation there must be less than twelve months to the date of discharge.

### 3.6 Insecure private rented accommodation

Tenants of private landlords where the landlord is taking action to recover possession of the property and has demonstrated a real intention to proceed to eviction.

*Before priority for Insecure Accommodation can be given documentary evidence of the date of eviction will be needed by the district scheme, depending on the type of tenancy or licence held. The landlord must have shown a real intention to proceed with an eviction. Evidence of a Court Order for Possession may be required.*

### 3.7 Homeless and not in a priority group *

Applicants who have No Fixed Abode (NFA) or who are given a Non-Priority Homeless decision.

*This category is not compoundable

*This category is given where a formal assessment has been carried out under the homelessness legislation and the applicant is found to be homeless but not in a defined priority group. The category will also be given without a formal assessment, where it is clear that the applicant has No Fixed Abode. This includes those living in projects providing temporary accommodation for single homeless people.*

This category does not include applicants who have been assisted to access the private rented sector through a rent deposit scheme.

This category is not compoundable with other factors. Those who are homeless and have other priority needs will be assessed in accordance with the Homelessness legislation and, if they qualify, will be given a band 2 priority.

### 3.8 Band 4 upgrade

Any applicant who qualifies for at least two categories in Band 4.

### Band 4

#### 4.1 Moderate social or welfare needs
**HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY**

Applicants assessed as having a moderate level of social or welfare need arising from their housing situation.

Awarded in accordance with the allocations policy and protocols of the district scheme registering the applicant.

*(See matrix at Appendix 3 for more detail)*

### 4.2 Moderate health or disability needs

Applicants assessed as having a moderate level of housing need as a result of health problems or a disability.

Awarded in accordance with the allocations policy and protocols of the district scheme registering the applicant.

### 4.3 Unsatisfactory housing: Level 2

Applicants living in sub-standard accommodation that is deemed to have a category 2 hazard and where repair is not possible or it is not practical in a reasonable timescale.

A category 2 hazard can include minor defects such as persistent damp and condensation problems or the lack of a fixed heating system.

The band category will not be awarded, if it is possible for repairs or other remedial action to be carried out within a reasonable timescale. Where a landlord has been served with an improvement notice but remedial work has not been carried out, the district scheme may decide to award priority at its discretion.

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### Band 5

#### 5.1 Adequately housed

Applicants who are adequately housed

Applicants with no immediate need for rehousing

Applicants sharing where the accommodation is of sufficient quality and there is no overcrowding

Applicants who do not qualify under any other category or who have been temporarily allocated to Band 5 pending investigation of their circumstances.

This category includes applicants who may have a low level of housing need but where the circumstances do not give rise to any exceptional problems. This includes:

- formal and informal house-sharing arrangements where the size and standard of the accommodation is adequate for the needs of those living there
- those living with family or friends where the size and standard of the accommodation is adequate for the needs of those living there
- families living in flats where the internal accommodation is adequate for the family’s needs but where there is no private garden.

#### 5.2 Sufficient financial resources
Applicants who have sufficient income or other financial resources to buy or rent private sector housing

Guidelines for assessing the financial resources of applicants are included as appendix 2 to this document. Such rules will be applied flexibly to account for an applicant’s ability to access their funds etc.

5.3 Nil priority

Applicants who are the subject of sanctions because of their behaviour

Applicants may be awarded nil priority because there is evidence of anti-social behaviour and in accordance with the protocols of the council scheme they are given lower priority than other households on the housing register.

12. Priority for Local Connection

As part of the allocations policy priority will also be given to applicants who have one or other type of local connection as defined below. Property adverts will identify what type of local connection priority is being given.

Sub-regional connection

For all property vacancies advertised within the sub-region preference will be given to those with a sub-regional connection over applicants who have connections elsewhere.

A Sub-regional connection is defined as a connection to any one of the four district council areas in the Oxfordshire sub-region.

For a minimum of ten per-cent of general needs vacancies arising in each district, equal priority will be given to any applicant who has a sub-regional connection (ie. a connection to one of the four district areas).

Vacancies in Sheltered Housing and properties designed or adapted for the use of disabled people will be advertised as open to all applicants with a sub-regional connection, but preference may still be given to applicants with a strong connection to the district where the vacant property is located. This reflects the importance for elderly and disabled people to remain close to relatives and other support networks.

District Connection

Most housing vacancies will be advertised as giving priority to those applicants with a district connection.

The following rules will be used to define District Level Connection (and therefore the Sub-regional connection as well):
A district connection is established by way one or more of the following:

1. The applicant or joint applicant is permanently resident in the district and that residence is of their own choice.

2. The applicant or joint applicant was previously resident in the district as a matter of choice and the period of residence was either:
   - At least six out of the last twelve months or
   - Three out of the last five years.

3. The applicant or joint applicant is employed in the district for a minimum of fifteen hours per week and the employment is not of a short-term nature.

4. The applicant or joint applicant has family associations with the district.

   Family association will normally be defined in relation to close relatives (i.e. parents, children or siblings) and where there is no estrangement. However, other family associations may be taken into account (e.g. Grandparents, grand children and step relations) where there is evidence of frequent contact, commitment or dependency.

   To qualify the relatives must live in the district now and have been continuously resident for a minimum of five years.

A district connection is not established where the applicant is:

- in prison within the district or
- detained in the district under the Mental Health Act.

Parish connection/ Section 106 Sites

For some village housing schemes there are planning restrictions requiring that vacancies should go in the first instance to people who have a connection with the village or parish. Each of the districts has its own local policy, which is described in its housing allocations policy.

13. Calculation of overcrowding and under-occupation

The following rules will be used to decide whether a household has either too many or too few bedrooms available for its use when assessing priority.

- Each couple or a single parent will require their own bedroom.

- Each additional adult (aged eighteen and over) will require their own bedroom.

- Two children may share a bedroom unless:
Children of opposite sex have to share and the oldest child is aged seven or more.

Children of the same sex have to share and the oldest child is between ten and fifteen and the age gap is ten years or more.

Children of the same sex have to share and the oldest child is sixteen or over and the age difference is five years or more.

Where the household includes a pregnant woman the baby will count in the bedroom need calculation once it has been born.*

(*Where a woman is pregnant, the baby can be counted for the purpose of the bedroom eligibility table see Appendix 1, at three months pregnancy with documentary evidence.)

The rules will assume the optimum use of the accommodation available, if this is different from actual use. Spare rooms not in use as bedrooms may be counted as bedrooms for the purposes of the calculation.

The optimum use rule will only apply to rooms over which the applicant family has control. For example, where a family is sharing and a spare room that could be a bedroom is used for other purposes by the host family.

Maximum bedroom requirement can be overridden following a decision by a Panel to take account of any health or welfare need issues (eg a live-in carer, need for couples to have separate bedrooms, behavioural issues, step-siblings sharing etc).

14. Property size eligibility

The table at appendix 1 shows the size of property that different sizes of household may place bids for.

For Applicants Requiring Specialised Dwellings

Properties designated as designed or adapted for people with specific needs will only be offered to applicants where a household member has such a need. However, where there is no person on the Register with such a need, the property will be allocated to a person without the special need who has the most priority.

For Applicants who require Carers

Where an applicant can only live in independent accommodation if they have a full-time carer they will be eligible for an additional bedroom. Applicants will need to provide documentary evidence of the need for a full time carer.

Hard to Let Properties

Where a social landlord and the council agree that a property is hard to let the eligibility criteria for that particular property may be amended. Properties would not
15. Homebuy and other Low Cost Home Ownership Options

Partner housing associations and private developers offering subsidized forms of home ownership will be able to advertise their properties via the Homechoice web site and Property Newsletters. These properties will be listed separately from properties for rent. Registered applicants may apply by bidding in the same way as for rented properties.

Applicants registered with any of the four district schemes may bid for any properties for sale across the sub-region. The short-list will be prioritized in the same way as for rented vacancies. However, the housing association or developer will be supplied with the contact details of all qualifying* applicants and those selected to proceed to purchase may not necessarily be those highest on the list.

*Qualifying applicants are those who are eligible to register with any of the four district housing registers and who have been assessed as having sufficient income and savings to proceed to make a purchase on the terms on offer.

Applicants bidding for Shared Ownership will be allowed 1 bedroom more than those applicants under 60 requiring general needs accommodation.

16. Private Renting

From time to time there may be opportunities to advertise privately rented properties, with the agreement of the landlord. These are most likely to be properties being made available for lettings with the help of rent deposit assistance from the local authority. Such vacancies will normally be restricted to applicants from the district council area where the property is located.

17. Mutual Exchanges

The adverts will appear in the Housing Options section of the web site and property newsletter.

The Oxfordshire Homechoice service will provide an opportunity for qualifying secure or assured tenants to make an offer of a mutual exchange to other qualifying tenants. The service is intended to help those living in, or wishing to move to, the area covered by the four district council areas covered by the partnership. The service is not available to private or tied tenants and owner occupiers.

It will do this by providing an opportunity to advertise on the Oxfordshire Homechoice web site. In addition some exchange offers may be included in the published property newsletters.

Applicants will be responsible for ensuring the accuracy of the details in their adverts and for ensuring that they are eligible to offer a mutual exchange.
Some landlords may in addition keep exchange books at their offices.

**18. Allocations of Housing - The CBL Scheme and Nominations to Registered Social Landlords**

As an LSVT Authority, the Council does not own any housing stock. Allocations of housing will be made in accordance with the Council’s Allocations Policy. Nominations to Registered Social Landlords (RSL’s) will be made in accordance with letting agreements between the Council and it partner RSL’s.

The main aim of the Council’s Allocation Policy will be to assist those in the greatest degree of housing need. To meet this objective, it is envisaged that the majority of properties will be made available to applicants in Bands A plus to Band B.

The actual number of allocations made to applicants in certain bands will be limited by quota. A quota system will allow flexibility in allocating to those in the greatest degree of housing need, while enabling the Council to work with its partner RSL’s to help facilitate, for example, the development of balanced communities.

The exact quotas of properties available to each Band will be reviewed on an annual basis. The actual split of quotas of property available to each band will be based on the supply of accommodation available to the Council in previous periods, and information on new developments. The Council will reserve discretion to adjust quotas to take into account particular trends, which have not been anticipated.

When a property becomes vacant, the Council will, in discussion with the RSL, decide to which Band the property will be made available. The intention will be to balance the requirement to meet housing need with the interests of making best use of the housing stock and the creation of balanced communities.

The Council may visit housing applicants to verify their circumstances and ensure that an offer of housing is suitable for their needs. If as a result of this visit it is found that an applicants’ address and/or circumstances have changed or that an applicant has misrepresented their housing circumstances or withheld information they may be bypassed for an offer of accommodation.

The Council may adopt targets to ensure that certain groups of applicants have a chance of being rehoused in accordance with the Council’s strategic objectives. This will be achieved by labelling some properties as available to certain categories of applicant only. Restriction to either applicant type and band may be used in this way.

Applicants will be able to bid for a maximum of three properties in any one cycle.

**19. Sub-Regional Allocations**

The Council and three other Oxon Authorities will facilitate sub-regional allocations as part of its Allocations Policy.

Each year, a percentage of general needs properties available to let will be made available for sub-regional lettings. In the first year of operation, this will be 10%.
This amount can be varied each year by the steering group which oversees the operation of sub-regional lettings in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing.

The number of properties to be made available will be calculated using the previous three years voids figures. Properties will be representative of size, type and location of voids during the previous 3 years. The manager responsible for allocations in each district will usually select properties.

Certain types of properties may be excluded from the sub-regional scheme, as follows:

- properties with 4 or more bedrooms
- properties in locations which very rarely become available
- properties on section 106 sites.

This is to enable the districts to meet local demand for particularly scarce properties.

All sheltered properties will be advertised through the sub-regional scheme as will all disabled (level 3 and 4) properties. Districts will be allowed to exclude such properties where there is a high local need for such a property.

General needs properties will be let on a reciprocal basis, i.e., the number of households moving into a district through sub regional CBL will be equal to the number leaving that district. Achieving reciprocity will be managed using advert labelling if necessary.

Reciprocity will be monitored. If one Authority are rehouses a higher number of applicants than those leaving, it reserves the right to reduce the number of vacancies available for sub-regional bids.

20. Homeless Households and the CBL scheme

Homeless households who are placed in insecure Temporary Accommodation will be allowed to participate in CBL. However their priority will be time limited to 6 months during which they will be expected to make a bid. This period of time will be extended should a property not become available in their area of choice or their bid is not successful.

Homeless households who do not place a bid when a suitable property is advertised will at some point after the 6 months be made a permanent offer of accommodation under Part 6 of the 1996 Act. This will mean that the Council has discharged its duty to that applicant under the relevant Acts. Applicants will be advised of their rights to request a review of the suitability of this offer by a Senior Officer of the Council not involved in the original offer.

If the offer is found to be suitable, no further offers will be made to them as a homeless applicant, and their priority will be reduced according to their housing circumstances.

Should a homeless applicant be made a permanent offer of accommodation prior to an allocation of second stage Temporary Accommodation, this offer will be seen as a
final offer of accommodation under Part 6 of the Act, and will mean that the Council has discharged its duty to that applicant under the Homelessness Act 2002. Applicants will be advised of their rights to request a review of the suitability of this offer by a Senior Officer of the Council not involved in the original decision, regardless of whether they accept it or not. If the offer is found to be suitable no further offers will made to them as a homeless applicant and their priority will be reduced according to their housing circumstances.

Homeless applicants who have been placed in secure Temporary Accommodation (i.e. social housing that is suitable for their needs and in their area of choice) that is not specifically designated as Temporary Accommodation and so can be converted to a secure or Assured Tenancy will be placed in Band C as their housing needs have been met. Their tenancy will be converted to a permanent tenancy after a period of 12 months under Part 6 of the Act. This will mean that the Council has discharged its duty to that applicant under the Homelessness Act 2002. Applicants will be advised of their rights to request a review of the suitability of this offer by a senior officer of the Council not involved in the original decision, regardless of whether they accept it or not.

21. Allocations Outside the CBL scheme

Local Lettings Schemes

The Council is committed to support and sustain communities through the allocation of housing. The Council retains discretion to develop local lettings schemes to address identified issues in particular locations. The details of such schemes will be agreed by the Council and the relevant Social landlord.

Direct Match Properties

Some properties will be allocated outside the Choice Based Lettings Scheme by making a Direct Match to these properties.

The following list contains examples of where a direct match may be made; this list is not exhaustive.

• properties built or designated as being suitable for certain groups only, such as applicants with a disability

• properties allocated to a particular client group where that client needs to be offered social housing outside Choice Based Lettings, i.e. applicants who are homeless and in temporary accommodation that can be made a permanent tenancy

• where the Council wishes to make an allocation to an applicant who has been awarded Exceptional Status, i.e. an applicant who is ready to leave hospital and has no where to live

Such properties will still be advertised for information purposes but applicants will not be able to submit bids.
Section 106 Exception Sites

Nominations to S106 Exception Sites will be made within the Banding/Application Date as defined in the Choice Based Lettings Allocations Policy. However local connection as specified in the property advert will be strictly adhered to.

22. Key Workers

The Council will fulfil its commitment to assisting key workers by making 5% of vacancies per year available for this group. Such properties will be advertised as being available to key workers in the first instance. They will only be available to applicants who are not key workers if there are no bids form key workers.

23. Area Preference

Applicants for housing may express as many or as few area preferences as they so choose. The Council will seek to provide advice and information on the availability of stock in a particular area in the previous year to inform applicant choices. The wider a person’s choice of areas, the greater will be their prospects of re-housing.

24. Removal from the Housing Register

Applicants may be removed from the Housing Register if they

- are or become ineligible for an offer of social housing
- ask to be removed
- do not renew an application when they are asked or do not contact us when requested
- are re-housed from the Housing Register
- change their address and do not tell us

25. Reviews

An applicant has the right to request a review of any decision to

- remove them from the Housing Register
- deem them ineligible for an offer of accommodation because of unacceptable behaviour.

Applicants must ask for a Review within 21 days of being notified of a decision. The Review will be conducted by someone senior to the person who made the original decision.

26. Offences

It is an offence under Section 171 of the 1996 Housing Act for anyone seeking assistance under Part 6 to

- knowingly or recklessly give false information to the Council
• knowingly withhold information which the Authority has reasonably required them to provide.

A person found guilty of such an offence is liable on summary conviction to a fine.

Applicants who obtain tenancy by means of a false statement can have action taken against them.

27. Personal Information and Data Protection

Applicants on the Housing Register have the right to see any entry relating to them that is held on the Council's computerised systems. Applicants can also obtain copies of their paper file subject to any relevant charges. Where there is third party information held on file, the Council will seek their permission before disclosing documents to the applicant.

Personal information provided to the Council as part of an application for housing will be processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. Information provided will be used to process their application and may be passed to third parties involved in assessing their application and offering them accommodation.

28. Equal Opportunities

The Council will comply with the requirements of the Race Relations Act, Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1999.

The Council is fully committed to equality in housing allocations and will oppose any form of discrimination on the grounds of sex, sexuality, marital status, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, disability, age or religion.
APPENDIX 1 – PROPERTY SIZE ELIGIBILITY

Applicants will be eligible to apply for properties with the following sizes dependent on the size and make-up of the family.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of household</th>
<th>Number of bedrooms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Studio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Person</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two adult household (not couple)</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applicant(s) &amp; one dependant child</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applicant(s) &amp; two dependant children</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applicant(s) with three dependant children #</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applicant(s) with four dependant children #</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applicant(s) five dependants #</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applicant(s) with 6 dependant children #</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applicant(s) with 7 or more dependant children #</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes

1. *A parlour house has a separate dining room that could be converted for use as a bedroom.

2. # Dependent on size and makeup of the family. Preference usually given for larger families.

3. ( ) 2 bedroom properties, usually flats, will be made available to single people and couples depending upon the prevailing policy of the district scheme, which will reflect demand for two bedroom flats, houses and bungalows from families across the sub-region.

4. Applicants in Band 1 categories for Under-occupation, Succession and Decants may be permitted to bid for properties larger than they are entitled to in the above table, provided they will be moving to a smaller property than the one they currently occupy.
5. Where a woman is pregnant, the baby can be counted for the purpose of the bedroom eligibility table, at three months pregnancy with documentary evidence.
APPENDIX 2 - GUIDELINE CALCULATIONS FOR AFFORDABILITY

Applicants will be given Band 5 priority, regardless of their housing circumstances, if there is evidence to suggest that they have sufficient income or assets to resolve their housing problem through the private housing market. Each case will be considered on its merits and where there would otherwise be hardship, priority may be awarded in accordance with the policies and protocols of the district scheme.

Since the Housing Register is open to all, the purpose is to ensure that priority is given to those who cannot otherwise afford to find suitable housing for themselves in their local area. The following guidance will be used to assess whether applicants can be classed in any of the above categories.

Definition

In general, applicants will be regarded as having sufficient financial resources, if the combination of their income, savings, and realisable assets would create sufficient funds for them to find suitable private housing in their local housing market. The price of suitable housing will vary according to the household’s needs and location within the district.

There are three separate tests that can be applied:

1. Are they able to buy a suitable home in their area using a reasonable proportion of their income. Normal lending multipliers and local house price indices will be used.
2. Are savings or other realisable assets sufficient for them to afford to rent suitable private rented housing without this causing financial hardship.
3. Is the household income sufficient to rent a suitable home in the private rented sector without this causing financial hardship. The household will not be expected to use more than 30% of net disposable income on rental payments.
4. Whether suitable private sector housing of the size and type the household needs exists in the local housing market.

Verification

Applicants can be asked to provide evidence of their income, savings and assets in order to verify the affordability assessment. If applicants fail to provide sufficient evidence then their registration may not be able to proceed.
APPENDIX 3 - PROCEDURAL GUIDANCE

1. Exclusion from the housing register
2. Suspension and other temporary measures
3. Health and Disability housing needs: priority assessment matrix
4. Social and Welfare Need: priority assessment matrix

These notes are provided to ensure a consistent approach is taken to assessing applicants within each of the housing registers making up the Oxfordshire Homechoice sub-regional scheme.

It is accepted that practice may differ in each local authority scheme but the intention is that local practice will follow the principles established in these guidance notes.

1. EXCLUSION FROM THE HOUSING REGISTER

Applicants will be refused registration or removed from the register, if they are not eligible to be registered. Applicants not eligible to be registered are:

1.1 Immigration and Habitual Residence

Anyone subject to immigration control, within the meaning of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996, is ineligible for assistance with housing unless s/he is of a class prescribed by regulations made by the Secretary of State.

Other people from abroad, who are not subject to immigration control, have to be habitually resident in the Common Travel Area (CTA), in order to be eligible.

Note: This restriction does not apply to people who are already secure tenants of a Council or Assured tenants of a Registered Social Landlord (RSL).

1.2 Unacceptable behaviour

An applicant can be ineligible if the local authority is satisfied that an applicant or a member of their household, has been guilty of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable to be a tenant and, in the circumstances at the time of the application, the person is still unsuitable to be a tenant by reason of that behaviour.

A three stage test will be applied:

1. Has the applicant or a member of the household been guilty of unacceptable behaviour?
2. Was the unacceptable behaviour enough to entitle a landlord to obtain a possession order?
3. At the time of the application, is the applicant still unsuitable to be a tenant by reason of their behaviour, or the behaviour of a member of their household?

The test can be applied where there is evidence of anti-social behaviour or in cases of serious and persistent rent arrears.
Applicants have a statutory right to be informed in writing of this decision and to have the decision reviewed.

Applicants who are not eligible to be registered will be excluded rather than suspended, as this gives them the opportunity to exercise their statutory right to a review of the decision, if they think they have been treated unfairly. However, applicants may be temporarily suspended while an investigation into their eligibility is carried out (See next section).

A decision to exclude an applicant will be in accordance with the procedures set out by the council.

2. SUSPENSION AND OTHER TEMPORARY MEASURES

2.1 Applicants may be suspended from being able to place bids for a given period. They will be informed of the reason for this and for how long the suspension will last.

Suspension pending review outcome

2.2 Suspension may be used where:

- there is a need to investigate or verify eligibility or priority status and it would be unfair on other applicants to consider an applicant for an offer of accommodation until the review is complete,

- where supporting documentation has been requested and has not yet been received, or

- pending the outcome of an event or meeting that will have a bearing on the assessment of their application.

Applicants with rent arrears and other housing debts

2.3 Applicants who have not been excluded from the register for persistent rent arrears will not normally be suspended from active bidding, however, they will be informed that the existence of arrears (or other housing related debts) may mean that a council or housing association may not be prepared to offer them a tenancy without an agreement to repay the amount owing.

2.4 Applicants with rent arrears equivalent to several months of rent may be disqualified from being considered for an offer of accommodation until an agreement has been reached on repayment of the arrears. Disqualification may take the form of being overlooked on a short-list or by being suspended from bidding for a period. Applicants will be informed when either suspension or ‘skipping’ takes place.

2.5 Housing debts will include current rent arrears, former tenancy arrears, and other charges, such as repair costs, cleaning costs and mortgage repayments.
2.6 In order to be considered for an offer, applicants with large debts, where it would be difficult for them to discharge the whole amount, will need to provide evidence that they have agreed a repayment plan with the current or former landlord and have kept to that plan for a reasonable period of time (a minimum of six months).

2.7 Applicants will not be refused an offer, where there is evidence that they were not responsible for the debts accruing in the first place or a financial assessment has concluded that they genuinely could not afford to meet the rent.

**Misleading or fraudulent information**

2.8 Where there is a suspicion that information provided by an applicant is inaccurate or misleading, then the applicant may be suspended until accurate information is available. If it is discovered that there was an intention to mislead, then the applicant may be given Nil Priority pending a new application.

**Refusals**

2.9 No limit is placed on the number of times applicants may refuse properties offered to them. However, where there is evidence that an applicant is refusing successive offers without good reason, the council may suspend them from bidding for a limited period.

**Applicants not bidding**

2.10 Applicants who have been awarded a high priority on housing need grounds (Bands 1 and 2), but who are not placing bids on suitable properties as they come up, will have their priority reviewed on a periodic basis. This will be to assess whether they are receiving sufficient support, need to be considered for a direct offer, or should have their priority changed.

3. **HEALTH AND DISABILITY HOUSING NEEDS: PRIORITY ASSESSMENT MATRIX**

3.1 This matrix sets out the guidelines for assessing the housing need of an applicant, or a member of their household, where there is reason to believe their health is being adversely affected by their current housing circumstances. In all cases the assessment will focus on the extent to which existing housing exacerbates the problems being experienced and the extent to which these problems could be alleviated by a move to alternative more suitable accommodation.

3.2 The assessment will be made based on the evidence gathered from the applicant, occupational therapists and other health and social care professionals. Account will also be taken of whether the resultant housing problem has already been dealt with elsewhere in the Allocations Scheme, for example where additional priority has already been awarded for overcrowding and this is the source of the medical issues.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exceptional Need Band 1</th>
<th>Where there is an immediate high risk to the health of the applicant or other household member, complex needs, 'place of safety' cases or other emergency needs.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urgent Need Band 2</td>
<td>There is a high risk of serious harm to an applicant or member or their household while their housing circumstances remain the same. The accommodation is totally unsuitable to meet the needs of the household and it is assessed as being unreasonable for them to continue to live in the property on a permanent basis. Only an urgent move to alternative accommodation will significantly reduce the risk and meet the households housing requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is a risk to the safety of others living in the home, or in the vicinity, resulting from the mental illness of the applicant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Need Band 3</td>
<td>There is a significant effect on the health or well-being of an applicant or a member of their household while they continue to live in their current accommodation (or their housing circumstances remain the same). The accommodation is only considered reasonable to occupy in the short term because there is a significant risk to the health or safety of the applicant or a household member while their circumstances remain the same and they continue to live in the property. A move in the near future to more suitable accommodation will have a significant impact on resolving the health issues identified. The mental health of the applicant or household member could be significantly improved by a move to alternative accommodation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Need Band 4</td>
<td>There is an identified effect on the health or well-being of an applicant or a member of their household while they continue to live in their current accommodation/or their housing circumstances remain the same and it cannot be easily or quickly adapted to meet their needs. There is some risk of deterioration in the health of the applicant or a member of their household, which will make it difficult for them to manage their existing home at some point in the future. A health problem is directly exacerbated to some degree by the existing accommodation and requires some priority to be given over someone else living in the same circumstances, whose health is not affected in the same way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Need Band 5</td>
<td>There is some impact on the health or well-being of the applicant from living in the existing accommodation but it would be reasonable for the applicant to take steps to remedy the problem themselves without the</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
need to be rehoused.

The health or well-being of the applicant would not be improved by a move to alternative accommodation.

EXAMPLES:

Some typical scenarios are listed below. These are for illustration only and the list is not exhaustive.

URGENT NEED: BAND 2

- Someone cannot be discharged from hospital because of the unsuitability of their home circumstances
- Someone cannot manage the stairs in the property and has to sleep downstairs in a room with a gas appliance
- Someone cannot get access to toilet or bathing facilities in the home
- The home cannot be adapted to provide safe access or internal mobility for a wheelchair
- It is not possible to adapt the home at reasonable cost to facilitate the provision of necessary care and support
- A consultant psychiatrist has assessed that the existing home has a major detrimental effect on the mental health of someone and they cannot return there
- Features of, or the condition of the property have a severe detrimental effect on the physical health of someone and they cannot live there

SIGNIFICANT NEED: BAND 3

- Someone has significant difficulty in managing stairs in their current property (even after adaptations) and has difficulty in accessing toilet and bathing facilities
- Someone cannot manage stairs in the home and has to sleep in an unsuitable downstairs room
- The current home is a significant contributory factor in someone’s poor mental health
- Features of, or the condition of the property have a significant detrimental effect on the physical health of someone

MODERATE NEED: BAND 4

- Someone has significant difficulty in managing stairs in their current property (even after adaptations) and has difficulty in accessing toilet facilities
- Someone has difficulty in using bathing facilities in the home, which cannot be improved at reasonable cost with adaptations
- The current home is a contributory factor in someone’s poor mental health
- Features of, or the condition of the property have some detrimental effect on the physical health of someone
LOW NEED: BAND 5

- The impact of the home on the health or mobility of someone can be sufficiently alleviated by alteration to the property at reasonable cost or with the help of grants
- The condition or layout of the home is not a factor in someone’s health or mobility problems

4. SOCIAL AND WELFARE NEED:
   PRIORITY ASSESSMENT MATRIX

4.1 This matrix sets out the guidelines for assessing an applicant, or a member of their household’s, housing need where there is reason to believe they have exceptional social and welfare circumstances, not covered elsewhere in the Allocations Scheme, where it would be considered appropriate to recognise additional priority for an applicant to move. Where an applicant’s circumstances are considered exceptional and a social and welfare assessment is undertaken priority can be awarded in order to recognise housing needs that arise as a result of (but not exclusively):

- Violence or the threat of violence
- Harassment by neighbours or others
- The need to safeguard children
- The need to move to independent living
- The effects of isolation
- Other factors related to the environment around a home

4.2 Account will be taken of whether the resultant housing problem has already been dealt with elsewhere in the Allocations Scheme.

4.3 Where a priority category has already been awarded for the same factors, then no additional priority will be given under this category. For example, if the applicant has already been assessed as statutorily homeless or has been given priority under the health/disability category for the same problem.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exceptional Need Band 1</th>
<th>Where there is an immediate high risk to the safety of the applicant or a member of their household, “place of safety” cases or other emergency welfare needs.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Urgent Need Band 2      | Violence  
There is a need to move to recover from the effects of violence or to avoid further violence  
**Harassment**  
The applicant is a victim of serious harassment and moving is the only realistic remedy  
**Safeguarding children**  
There is a need to safeguard children and moving is the only realistic remedy  
**Independent living**  
There is an urgent need to move to independent accommodation and clear evidence of this need  
**Isolation**  
There is an urgent need to move in order to receive essential care and support from a relative  
There is an urgent need to move in order to be able to give essential care and support to a relative  
The applicant or a member of their household is incapable of living independently and needs supported housing  
**Environment**  
The environment around the home has a serious detrimental effect on the quality of life of the household |
| Significant Need Band 3 | Violence  
There is threat of violence and a move is the only realistic remedy  
**Harassment**  
The applicant is a victim of a significant level of harassment and moving is the only realistic remedy  
**Independent living**  
There is a significant need to move to independent accommodation and clear evidence of this need  
**Isolation**  
The existing home limits the care and support that can be provided to the applicant or someone in their household  
The applicant or a member of their household experiences significant difficulty in living independently and needs to move to supported housing  
Isolation has a significant impact upon the welfare of the applicant  
**Environment**  
The environment around the home has a significant detrimental effect on the quality of life of the household |
| Moderate Need Band 4    | Harassment  
The applicant is a victim of harassment and moving is the only realistic remedy  
**Independent living** |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Isolation</td>
<td>The applicant or a member of their household experiences some difficulty in living independently. Isolation has some impact upon the welfare of the applicant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>The environment around the home has some detrimental effect on the quality of life of the household.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>A move to other accommodation would have no impact on the threat of violence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harassment</td>
<td>A move to other accommodation would have no impact upon the level of harassment being experienced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation</td>
<td>The existing home has no impact on the ability of relatives or services to give or receive care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Environmental factors have no significant impact upon the quality of life of the household.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Low Need Band 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>A move to other accommodation would have no impact on the threat of violence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harassment</td>
<td>A move to other accommodation would have no impact upon the level of harassment being experienced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation</td>
<td>The existing home has no impact on the ability of relatives or services to give or receive care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Environmental factors have no significant impact upon the quality of life of the household.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>