

**Borough of Poole**  
**Housing and Community Services**  
**Housing Register and Allocations Policy**

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## **1. Introduction**

1.1 In 2004 the Council commissioned Poole Housing Partnership to manage its housing stock. Poole Housing Partnership are an organisation at arms length from the council, commonly known as an ALMO (Arms Length Management Organisation). The Council maintains a statutory responsibility for homelessness and for assessing and meeting the housing needs in the Borough.

1.2 The Council works closely with its partner Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), voluntary agencies and private landlords to meet these responsibilities. In addition the Council has links with a range of organisations involved in providing care and support for vulnerable people. For ease of reference, the term RSL when used in this document refers to both RSL's and to PHP, which is not, in fact, an RSL, but an ALMO.

## **2. Choice Based Lettings - Home Choice**

2.1 All allocations made from 16<sup>th</sup> February 2004, have been made through Home Choice, the Borough of Poole's Choice Based Lettings Scheme. Details of how the scheme works can be found at appendix a.

## **3. Administration and General Notes**

3.1 The Borough of Poole opposes all forms of unfair discrimination. All housing applicants will be treated fairly irrespective of their gender, colour, ethnic origin, marital status, disability, age, sexual orientation or religious belief.

3.2 All applicants must complete an official Housing Register Application Form.

3.3 Applicants are expected to provide all required information at the time of application, or upon request. Failure to provide information requested will delay the application process and therefore hold up any potential allocation.

3.4 Applicants will be advised in writing whether or not they have been included in the Housing Register, together with the date of registration. They will be included on the Housing Register if they appear to be a Qualifying Person under the Housing Act 1996 (amended by the Homelessness Act 2002). Applicants will be suspended pending the completion of the assessment of eligibility.

3.5 Applicants will be provided with information about their position on the list upon application and will be updated regularly on housing register issues and news via the Home Page newsletter.

3.6 Applicants are required to re-register every 12 months and provide the necessary proof of address, children living at home, staying access (if any) for each member of the household.

3.7 Applicants under the age of 18 will not be considered for housing until such time as they reach the age of 18 unless they have a guarantor and sufficient priority on the Housing Register. The only exception to this is for allocation of temporary accommodation where 16/17 year olds have been accepted as homeless. In this instance a guarantor will be required.

3.8 Out of borough general needs applicants who are not eligible for reasonable preference will be subject to an annual quota of a maximum of 10 properties.

3.8.1 Applicants who do not live or work within the borough of Poole will be dealt with as out of borough applicants. To be deemed working in Poole the applicant must work 26 hours per week or more and in permanent employment.

3.8.2 This quota does not apply to applications for elderly persons dwellings.

3.9 Applications from people who are residing in HM prison will be deferred until their release.

3.10 An applicant is entitled to see, free of charge, information about their application on the Register. Applicants requiring copies of documentation held on their file will be charged £10.

3.11 Applicants have the right to see information held in a computerised format provided that the request is made with reasonable notice.

3.12 The authority must inform the applicant upon request, that they hold information in any format and provide a copy of the information upon request.

3.13 Information contained on files is confidential and cannot be disclosed to any third party, so is the fact that someone is on the Housing Register.

3.14 Disclosures to other housing officers, doctors, social workers, or registered social landlord staff can be appropriate if assessment of need or allocations will be speeded up as a result or if there is a particular need for support, or risks which must be identified and can be mitigated through shared information.

3.15 Applicants have the right to request information to help them assess:

- How their application is going to be treated under the allocations scheme
- Whether accommodation suitable for them is likely to become available and how long they might have to wait for it

3.16 Information on, for example, the number, type and location of social rented and low cost homes in the Borough and the trends for availability will be available in reception areas, on the website, and on request - and will be regularly updated.

3.17 To support the needs of hard to reach groups application forms and guidance notes will be made easy to read and understand and the process for applying for properties under the Home Choice scheme will be made simple. Large print and audio will be provided on request.

3.18 Information regarding the Housing Register process and Home Choice will be made available in translated and easy to read formats upon request.

3.19 Disabled people including blind, deaf, those with physical disabilities, learning disabilities, mental ill-health, the elderly and other applicants deemed in need of assistance will be given support with the application and bidding process. When a priority status is issued the Priority Panel or Housing Resources Officer will identify a person who will assist the applicant with applying for properties, if this is required.

## **4. The Assisted List**

4.1 It is recognised that some people may not be in a position to submit their own Home Choice coupons, and who may have very specific needs when considering suitable properties.

4.2 In most cases people in such a position will be identified via their Housing Register application form. In most cases, we will consider whether the applicant can be supported by someone appropriate before they are added to the Assisted List. People considered to be appropriate to provide assistance will be a professional person, such as a Social Worker, Housing Officer, Housing Adviser etc or a family member, or representative.

4.3 There may be other instances where an applicant may be in need of this type of assistance. Application forms include a question relating to an applicant's potential difficulty in applying for properties themselves and asking if they have a social worker etc. who could help them. It may be that they receive support from a relative or a friend who could be contacted. It may also be decided that an applicant should be referred to the Priority Panel.

4.4 Applicants will be notified in writing of any person who will be applying for properties on their behalf, and how to contact them.

4.5 The main purpose of maintaining the Assisted List will be to monitor the progress of people requiring assistance and to ensure that coupons are being submitted on their behalf when suitable properties in their areas of choice become available.

4.6 Training will be provided to relevant teams giving details of the Home Choice scheme and where to find the properties on the Loop. All Home Choice properties will be advertised on the loop and social work teams advised to look at this each week and assist their clients to apply.

4.7 Properties will be advertised in as many locations and through as many sources as possible.

## **5. Eligibility**

### **Immigration Status**

5.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 sets out categories of people who are NOT ENTITLED TO APPEAR ON THE HOUSING REGISTER. They are known as Non Qualifying Persons.

These are as follows: -

- a) Persons subject to Immigration Control, and not otherwise re-included by regulations.
- b) Persons from abroad who are not Qualifying Persons (as prescribed by the Secretary of State)

5.2 If there is any uncertainty about an applicants immigration status the council will contact the Home Office Immigration and Nationality Directorate. Before doing so, the applicant will be advised that an inquiry will be made; if at this stage the applicant prefers to withdraw his or her application, no further action will be required.

5.3 Where there is reason to believe that the applicant may be an asylum seeker, they will be referred to the National Asylum Support Service.

5.4 Section 160A(6) of the Housing Act 1996 provides that none of the provisions relating to the eligibility of tenants with respect to their immigration status, is to affect the eligibility of an applicant who is already a secure or introductory tenant or an assured tenant of housing accommodation allocated to him by a housing authority. It is therefore, the case that where such a tenant applies for an allocation the council does not need to question eligibility and an allocation can be made regardless of immigration status or habitual residence.

### **Unacceptable Behaviour**

5.5 Persons who are considered ineligible for an allocation in accordance with s.160A (7) of the Act will not be eligible to join the housing register. This section of the act refers to those whose unacceptable behaviour makes them ineligible to be a tenant.

5.5.1. Each case will be considered in accordance with Section 160A of the Housing Act 1996, (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) and the prevailing Code of Guidance, which states that the Council must be satisfied that the applicant is guilty of behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable to be a tenant. Examples of behaviour considered to be unacceptable are as follows;

- Applicants who have a history of rent arrears
- Applicants who have a history of behaviour which has caused nuisance and annoyance
- Applicants who have been convicted for using a dwelling for immoral or illegal purposes, or committing an arrestable offence in the locality

- Applicants who have committed domestic violence causing a partner or other family member to become homeless
- Applicants who have caused a property to deteriorate due to waste, neglect or default
- Applicants who have gained a tenancy through false statement or information given on application
- Applicants who have paid or received premium (received a financial or other benefit) in connection with a mutual exchange
- Applicants who have been evicted from a dwelling within the curtilage of a building held for non-housing purposes due to conduct such that given the nature of the building it would not be right for occupation to continue

5.5.2 Each case will be considered individually by the Housing Needs Assessment Officer, and their circumstances will be considered in line with Section 160A and the Code of Guidance. In each case, the following will be considered;

- Is the applicant (or a member of their household) guilty of behaviour under one of the above grounds such that the court would have considered it reasonable to grant a possession order had they been a secure tenant of the housing authority at the time?
- Was the behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable to be a tenant?
- In the circumstances at the time of application, are they then unsuitable to be a tenant of the authority because of that same behaviour?

5.5.3 Applicants who are advised that they come into any of the above categories will not be included on the Housing Register and this will be confirmed in writing.

5.5.4 The eligibility criteria relates both to new housing applicants and to persons who are already included on the Housing Register. The test of unacceptable behaviour as described at 5.5 will also be applied at the stage of consideration for an allocation.

## **6. Removal from the Housing Register**

6.1 An applicant will be removed from the Register under the following circumstances:

- a) No reply is received within 4 weeks of the date of re-registration.
- b) Failure to notify Housing and Community Services of any change in their circumstances within four weeks of the change taking place.

6.2 It is an offence if an applicant knowingly or recklessly gives false information to the authority or knowingly withholds information which the authority has

reasonably required him or her to give in connection with the exercise of its functions under part 6 of the Housing Act 1996.

6.3 A person guilty of a summary offence will be liable to a fine not exceeding £5000. They will also be removed from the Housing Register.

6.4 The authority is also entitled to seek possession of a tenancy granted as a result of a false statement by an applicant/tenant or someone acting at an applicant/tenant's instigation.

6.5 Prior to removing from or not including a person on the register the authority will:

- a) Request information from the applicant in order that a decision can be made.
- b) Specify a period of not less than 28 days for the applicant to respond.

6.6 Any notification of removal or non-inclusion on the Register will be made in writing and sent to the last known address of the applicant or held at the Housing Reception for collection.

6.7 Applicants will be advised of their rights to a review of the decision to not include or remove them from the Register, see Appendix E.

## **7. Reasonable Preference and Time Credits**

### **Reasonable Preference Groups**

7.1 Applicants who are assessed as falling within the reasonable preference groups in accordance with s167 (2) of the 1996 Act will be awarded reasonable preference by way of time credits which will accelerate their position on the housing register and give them a reasonable head start when bidding for properties through Home Choice.

7.2 Reasonable Preference groups are as follows;

- i) Applicants with a need to move on medical grounds
- ii) Applicants with a need to move on welfare grounds
- iii) Applicants who are homeless within the definition of the Act
- iv) Applicants who are owed a duty by any housing authority under section 190(2), 193(2), 195(2) of the 1996 Act (or under Section 65(2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985) or who are occupying accommodation secured by any housing authority under section 192(3)
- v) Applicants who are occupying insanitary or overcrowded accommodation
- vi) Applicants who need to move to a particular locality to avoid hardship

7.3 Time credits will be awarded as follows;

- i) Applicants with a need to move on medical grounds – 2 years credit
- ii) Applicants with a need to move on welfare grounds – 2 years credit
- iii) Applicants who are homeless within the definition of the Act , Applicants who are owed a duty by any housing authority under section 190(2), 193(2), 195(2) of the 1996 Act (or under Section 65(2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985) or who are occupying

- accommodation secured by any housing authority under section 192(3) – 1 years credit
- iv) Applicants who are occupying insanitary or overcrowded accommodation – 2 years credit
  - v) Applicants who need to move to a particular locality to avoid hardship – 2 years credit
  - vi) Applicants who have moved into the private rented sector to avoid homelessness – 1 year

NB – vi is an additional category added by the Council to assist with the prevention of homelessness.

7.4 Applicants who fall into more than one reasonable preference group will be awarded cumulative preference in order that their needs are recognised. For example, if an applicant falls within the homelessness and medical groups, they will be awarded a total of 3 years time credit.

7.5 Applicants will be notified in writing of any decision made by the Housing Needs Assessment Officer within seven days of the decision being made.

7.6 If an applicant disagrees with a decision of the Housing Needs Assessment Officer they can appeal for a review, in writing within 21 days of the date of the decision, to the Senior Housing Needs Assessment Officer. Further supporting information will be required at this stage.

7.7 A summary of reasonable preference time credits is shown at appendix F.

## **8. Additional Preference and Priority Status**

8.1 People within the reasonable preference groups who have an immediate need to be re-housed will be considered for additional preference which will be awarded by way of priority status. This will award them sufficient priority to be placed in a position to be considered for a property, which they will be expected to bid for through Home Choice.

8.1.1 Priority status will be time limited according to the length of time it is considered it would usually take for a suitable property to become available.

8.1.2 Applicants who refuse two suitable offers within their Priority Status time limit will have their priority status reviewed and potentially removed.

8.1.3 Homeless applicants who refuse one suitable offer of accommodation will have their priority removed, and where it is determined that the offer of accommodation was suitable under the provisions of the Council's statutory homelessness obligations, the duty to them will be discharged.

8.2 Priority status Groups include;

- i) Applicants with an immediate need for re-housing on medical grounds
- ii) Applicants with an immediate need for re-housing on welfare grounds
- iii) Applicants accepted as Homeless on the 12 month anniversary of the acceptance of their application
- iv) Applicants who are statutorily overcrowded in their accommodation
- v) Applicants who are occupying accommodation which has a category one hazard under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System

vi) Applicants who need to move to avoid significant hardship

8.3 We will also award priority status to the following;

- i) Applicants who are under-occupying Council or Housing Association accommodation
- ii) Applicants who are transferring from a one bedroom general needs property to a one bedroom sheltered housing property

### **Medical Priority**

8.4 Applicants who state on their application form that they have a medical condition which is affected by their housing will be asked to provide a letter from their GP or other support source. Our Housing Needs Assessment Officer may visit the applicant at home to establish how that medical condition is affected by their housing situation in real terms and a report will then be considered by the Priority Panel, comprising of Social Workers, Occupational Therapists, the Senior Housing Needs Assessment Officer, Housing Officers, a Health Visitor, care managers and mental health representatives. The Housing Resources Team will provide advice to assist the panel in determining the time limit which should be attached to Priority status.

### **Welfare Priority**

8.5 Applicants who state on their application form that they have an immediate need to move on welfare grounds will be asked to provide evidence to be considered by the Housing Needs Assessment Officer and their case will be presented to the Priority Panel for consideration.

### **Homeless Priority**

8.6 Persons who have been accepted as homeless under the Housing Act 1996 or the Homelessness Act 2002 will receive priority status 12 months after their acceptance date. Priority status will be time limited for 6 months. See Section 9.

### **Statutorily Overcrowded**

8.7 Persons who are occupying accommodation where they are statutorily overcrowded will be visited by a Housing Standards Officer and considered for priority status based on their assessment. Priority status will be time limited according to the type of accommodation required.

### **Category One Hazards**

8.8 Persons who are occupying accommodation where their accommodation is in serious disrepair will be visited by a Housing Standards Officer and considered for priority status based on his/her assessment. Priority status will be time limited according to the type of accommodation required. Category 1 hazards relating to overcrowding will be dealt with separately under 8.7.

### **Need to move to avoid significant hardship**

8.9 Applicants who state on their application form that they have an immediate need to move to avoid significant hardship will be asked to provide evidence

to be considered by the Housing Needs Assessment Officer and their case will be presented to the Priority Panel for consideration.

### **Under-occupation**

- 8.10 Persons who are currently under-occupying a Housing Association or Poole Housing Partnership property in Poole will receive priority status to move to smaller accommodation. Priority status will be valid for an unlimited amount of time. Those who currently occupy one bedroom general needs accommodation who wish to be considered for sheltered accommodation will also receive priority status.
- 8.11 Applicants will be notified in writing of any decision made by the priority panel, or by a Housing Standards Officer within seven days of the decision being made. This notification will include advice and information about the time limit of the priority status, if awarded.
- 8.12 If an applicant disagrees with a decision of the Priority Panel they can appeal for a review, in writing within 21 days of the date of the decision, to the Housing Needs and Resources Manager. Further supporting information will be required at this stage.
- 8.13 At the end of the time limit of priority status, if no offer has been made or accepted, or no suitable properties have become available, the Housing Needs Assessment Officer will decide whether the time limit should be extended. This decision will be made based on information about bids history and property availability. Applicants will be notified of this decision in writing and will have the right to appeal the decision.

### **Emergency Allocations**

- 8.14 In all cases where an urgent allocation is requested, the Priority Panel is responsible for making recommendations to the Housing Resources Team. The Housing Needs and Resources Manager will sign off any resulting allocations.
- 8.15 Where possible, cases should be presented to the Priority Panel, which meets every four weeks. However, in instances where the situation is so urgent that it requires immediate consideration, the Senior Housing Needs Officer, as chair of the Priority Panel, will consult with panel members on the detail of the case and a recommendation will be made within 48 hours. This consultation is to be carried out over email and the result is to be reported to the next Priority Panel.
- 8.16 In all urgent cases, there is an expectation on the applicant, or their representative, to provide the information required to reach a decision.
- 8.17 Where a 48 hour decision period is not suitable due to the urgency of the case, the Senior Housing Needs Officer, Housing Resources Officer and relevant Housing Officer will meet to discuss the case and will make a recommendation to the Housing Needs and Resources Manager.
- 8.18 Cases considered to be urgent and serious enough to require an allocation to be made outside of the Council's normal policy and procedure are defined as follows;

- a) threats to life
- b) racial or homophobic harassment
- c) extreme anti-social behaviour
- d) vulnerable witnesses
- e) any other significant and/or immediate need for a move to more suitable, alternative accommodation

8.19 Landlords will be expected to demonstrate that they have taken reasonable steps to deal with urgent cases before referring for an emergency allocation.

8.20 Where a suitable allocation is identified and the property held within a Housing Association or Poole Housing Partnership's stock, the Housing Resources Team will liaise with the RSL and will share any appropriate information, with the applicants agreement.

8.21 The Housing Resources Team will carry out risk assessments and consultation with the Community Safety team, Police and Probation as well as existing and potential landlords where appropriate, to assess the appropriateness of any resulting allocation.

8.22 Applicants who disagree with any decision made within the terms of this policy may request a review of the decision within the terms of the review policy, as set out in Appendix E of this policy.

## **9. Homeless Applicants**

9.1 Households accepted as homeless and re-housed into bed and breakfast or temporary accommodation managed by the Council or a Housing Association will be registered on the Housing Register.

9.2 Persons who have been accepted as homeless under the Housing Act 1996 or the Homelessness Act 2002 will receive priority status 12 months after their acceptance date. Priority status will be time limited for 6 months when the application will be reviewed.

9.3 Applicants who have not received an offer of accommodation within the six month priority status time limit, will be made one direct and final offer in either the East or West of the Borough.

9.4 The Council will discharge its duties under the terms of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002), to those applicants upon the acceptance of an offer made through HomeChoice, or upon the direct offer. Applicants have the right of a review of the suitability of any accommodation offered. Decisions will be made in accordance with the prevailing Code of Guidance for Homelessness.

9.5 Housing and Community Services reserve the right to alter the time limits for Homeless Applicants Priority status at any time, according to changes in demand.

## **10. Transfer Applications**

10.1 Transfer applicants who are moving to smaller accommodation will be considered for properties with one extra bedroom than their established need.

There may be instances where it is not acceptable to offer this however, as a result of the requirement to make the best use of housing stock or as a result of a contravention of this policy. Eg, an applicant releasing a 4 bedroom house may wish to move to a 2 bedroom house but has no children under 14, and so cannot be allocated this property as a result of the eligibility criteria for this particular type of property.

10.2 Mutual exchange applications will be considered by landlords as appropriate.

## **11. Home Visits**

11.1 Applicants will not normally be visited at their home address. It is expected that applicants will provide sufficient information for their eligibility to be assessed at the point of application.

11.2 Applicants who state that they have a medical condition which is directly affected by their housing may be visited at home by the Housing Needs Assessment Officer who will prepare a report to be assessed at the Priority Panel.

11.3 Applicants may request a home visit to discuss their application or receive advice and assistance regarding the application process at any time.

## **12. Allocation of Accommodation**

12.1 When an empty home is available several factors will be considered in deciding who it should be allocated to, including:

- What size household the property is suitable for
- Whether there are any restrictions on who can be offered the property
- Who is in the highest position on the shortlist of bidders for this type of property
- Whether we can free up another urgently needed property by transferring an existing tenant into this empty home
- Whether we can make best use of the housing in the area by transferring an existing tenant to this property, perhaps moving someone who has more bedrooms than they need to a smaller home

12.2 Allocations are made according to the annual Allocations Plan, copies of which are available upon request.

12.3 Properties will be advertised through the HomeChoice scheme. Applicants will be expected to apply for properties as and when a suitable property becomes available. The Housing Resources Team, with the exception of homeless applicants, will not consider applicants who have not applied to be considered for a property. See HomeChoice Guidance notes, appendix a.

12.4 Through HomeChoice, the Housing Resources Team will sometimes state which groups of applicants will receive priority for that allocation. The Allocations Team reserves the right to make decisions regarding this priority according to demand, the type of accommodation and changes in need profiles.

12.5 Applicants will be prioritised according to when they joined the register and allocations will be made in date order. Time credits awarded are considered at this time.

12.6 Applicants with Priority Status will receive priority for allocations and therefore will be considered ahead of those on the date order list.

12.7 Allocations from the Housing Register will normally be by way of offering properties to the applicant with the highest priority, either by virtue of their Priority status, or by the age of their application. In exceptional circumstances an offer of accommodation will be made to applicants who do not have the highest priority but are in urgent need of re-housing, or will release a suitable property for others in need. The Housing Needs and Resources Manager will make this decision.

12.8 General Needs allocations to people living outside of Poole who do not fall within reasonable preference groups will be limited to a maximum of 10 per year.

12.9 One property per year will be allocated to households who have been approved by Children and Families Services as foster carers or those who want to adopt.

12.10 It is necessary to allocate a percentage of properties each year by direct allocations, to homeless households only. This percentage is reflected in the Allocations Plan.

12.11 Move on quota's from Supported Accommodation will be reflected in the Allocations Plan.

### **Serious Offenders**

12.10 Serious offenders will not be excluded from the housing register or an offer of accommodation without an appropriate assessment of their eligibility in the first instance, which will take MAPPAs guidance into account, but will only be re-housed once a multi-agency risk assessment is carried out in line with the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPAs) and there is suitable and safe accommodation available.

### **Council Employees with a Residential Obligation**

12.11 Council employees who retire from a post with a residential obligation who, on retirement, can demonstrate a housing need in accordance with the Allocations Policy will be considered for priority re-housing into suitable accommodation, provided their employment with the Borough of Poole commenced before the 1<sup>st</sup> November 2001. Where the employment commenced after 1<sup>st</sup> November 2001, the retiring employee will be considered for accommodation within the terms set out in this policy.

12.12 Employees will be required to take reasonable steps to ensure that they can occupy their own property before consideration is given to allocating them a property.

12.13 Council employees with a residential obligation who terminate or have their employment terminated for reasons other than retirement, who apply to the Council for accommodation will have their cases dealt with through the homelessness

provisions or, if they have a current housing application, through the normal provisions of the allocations policy.

12.14 Where it is the Council's decision that a retiring employee with a residential obligation does not demonstrate a housing need, the employee will be advised of this in writing. If the employee wishes to appeal against this decision, this must be in writing to the Head of Housing and Community Services in accordance with Appendix E.

### **Reciprocal Arrangements**

12.15 Reciprocal arrangements will be considered by the Priority Panel, or by establishing demand for the resulting vacancy through HomeChoice. Only in cases where a housing need and consequentially, a need to move to Poole, has been established, will such arrangements be considered.

12.16 Applicants considered at the Priority Panel, if eligible, will be awarded Priority Status in accordance with existing policy, and their priority will be time limited. The Local Authority who nominate the applicant for consideration will be required to agree the terms of any resulting reciprocal on the basis of the length of time the agreement will stand for and the sort of accommodation that will be offered.

12.17 Applicants who are not awarded priority by the Priority Panel can request that their application is further considered through advertising on Home Choice. This will allow us to establish potential demand for the resulting vacancy. If there is a significant demand, the Housing Needs and Resources Manager will decide whether the reciprocal can proceed and terms will be confirmed as a result, as outlined in paragraph 12.16.

### **Council Officers**

12.18 Council owned properties which are not designated for the purposes of social housing generally, ie those properties held for a specific employment purpose, will only be let to officers of the Council who require a tenancy as a requirement of the job, such as caretakers and Sheltered Housing Officers.

12.19 In this regard, specific properties at Bob Hann House above the offices on this site are allocated by Personnel and Training Services and are specifically available for members of staff who require a tenancy as a result of relocation.

### **Sheltered Housing**

12.20 Allocation of Council Sheltered Housing stock will be made in accordance with Poole Housing Partnership's Professional Boundaries Policy.

## **13. Identifying the right size of home for an applicant**

13.1 The size of property that may be offered is outlined in the table at Appendix B.

13.2 Single applicants who are separated from their own children and who require overnight staying access with their children on a weekly basis shall be

considered for two bedroom multi-storey flats above the first floor, provided that the arrangement is backed by a Residence Order.

13.3 If a Residence Order is not obtainable, the following evidence of a requirement for the staying access will need to be provided;

a) A letter from one or both of any solicitors involved in the matter confirming that overnight access on a weekly basis is required OR

b) A letter from the parent with whom the children normally live confirming that a housing applicant will have overnight access on a weekly basis.

Access must have taken place on a regular basis for at least six months ie weekly

c) If either of these two requirements are not satisfied, further evidence will be required.

13.4 If the application is from a household expecting a child, they will normally be considered for a property meeting their current need until the baby has been born and this has been verified, see Appendix D.

13.5 Allocation of temporary accommodation will be made in accordance with appendix c.

13.6 Allocation of private sector tenancies, or tenancies made available through Housing Associations and Poole Housing Partnership will be made in accordance with this policy.

13.7 For households or families with disabilities and adaptation needs, it will not always be possible to allocate properties strictly in accordance with the criteria at Appendix B. If this situation arises, recommendation will be sought from Occupational Therapists and those recommendations will be considered by Priority Panel. The Senior Housing Needs Assessment Officer will then make recommendations to the housing resources team.

#### **14. Circumstances where allocations may be made outside of this policy**

14.1 Some properties may be designated for letting only to certain types of applicant. For example, sheltered housing schemes are usually let to people aged 60+. Very Sheltered/Extra Care Housing will usually be let to older people with care/support needs.

14.2 The original Planning Permission for a development may specify that homes can only be let to certain types of applicant.

14.3 In order to maintain an appropriate provision of temporary accommodation for homeless households, it may be necessary to allocate properties outside of the Home Choice scheme.

#### **15. Local Letting Plans**

15.1 Section 167 (2E) of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) enables Housing Authorities to adopt Local Lettings Policies and Plans. The Code of Guidance states that these lettings plans could

enable a Housing Authority to allocate to specific groups of people, whether or not they fall into the reasonable preference categories. However, it does also state that reasonable preference categories must be taken into account overall and that local lettings plans should not discriminate either directly or indirectly on any equality grounds.

15.2 The Council, in accordance with Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002), has a clear Allocations Scheme which is required by law to allocate all secure, assured and introductory tenancies. The Council is reluctant to make allocations which do not comply with that scheme unless there is clear and robust justification for doing so.

15.3 Sites which the Council will consider appropriate for Local Lettings Plans are as follows;

- Sites with provision of a specific nature (ie Eco Homes developments, Live Work etc..)
- Sites where the location of the scheme presents limitations in terms of the type of nominations which can be accepted
- Sites where there are issues with hard to let properties
- Sites where management issues are of significant impact

15.4 RSL's should identify the requirement for Local Lettings Plans upon commencement of the development and should begin discussions with the Housing Resources Team at this time to allow proposals to take shape.

15.5 RSL's will be required to provide clear justification and evidence for requesting a Local Lettings Plan, along with the detail of the plan, at least six months in advance of nomination requests. In considering the detail of the plan, the RSL will need to show that consideration has been given to the following factors;

- Meeting identified housing needs
- Assisting the Borough in dealing with its Homelessness Duties
- Steps which the RSL can take to mitigate risks

15.6 The Council will consider the request and will work with the RSL to reach agreement one month from the original request.

15.7 The final decision in terms of Local Lettings Plans will be made by the Head of Housing. All decisions will be made in accordance with the principles of the Local Lettings Plan protocol.

15.8 The detail of Local Lettings Plans will be publicised through HomePage, the Housing and Community Services newsletter, at the earliest opportunity.

15.9 Where an RSL can provide evidence of a particular scheme or estate where difficulties are experienced with demand and therefore, lettings, the Council will consider requests for Local Lettings Plans which directly deal with this, within the guidelines set out in 14.3

15.10 Where an RSL can provide evidence of a particular scheme or estate where management issues are having a significant impact on the quality of life of their tenants, the Council will consider Local Lettings Plans as set out in 14.3.

15.11 Once Local Lettings Plans are agreed, properties will be advertised through Home Choice, showing specific details according to the plan. The Housing Resources Team will then make nominations according to the plan.

## **16. Supported Housing**

16.1 Some properties link accommodation with support services to enable residents to move on to independent homes in the future. These Supported Housing schemes usually provide accommodation specifically for certain needs e.g. young vulnerable people, people with mental illness, older people with care/support needs.

16.2 Vacant properties in Supported Housing Schemes will only be let to people with the relevant support needs. Priority will be decided on the basis of who is in the most need of the specialist support services at the time a vacancy occurs.

16.3 Supported Housing applications will be dealt with by the Housing Brokerage Service which will make referrals for the following Supported Housing Schemes;

### **Brokerage Schemes**

Ability Housing Association	Mansel Close
ARK Supported Housing	Arne Avenue
Bournemouth Churches HA/Hyped	Amica House Millennium House Robert Gabriel House
Carr-Gomm Society	Kingland Road
Dearsley	Millfield
Knightstone Housing Association	Cornelia Lodge
PAS Ltd	Dale Valley Road Twynham Avenue
Raglan Housing Association	Quay Foyer
Stepping Homes	Laurel Villa Bay View
Stonham Housing Association	Blandford Road Bridge Corner House Heath House Oakmead Road Tatnum Lodge Wimborne Road

## **17. Making offers to applicants**

17.1 The appropriate landlord will contact successful applicants in writing. Details of the property will be provided and advice on what the applicant should do next.

## **18. Refusal Policy**

18.1 Applicants who unreasonably refuse two offers of suitable general needs accommodation in a twelve-month period may have their application suspended for twelve months.

18.2 Applicants who unreasonably refuse four offers of suitable sheltered accommodation in a twelve-month period may have their application suspended for twelve months

18.3 Applicants with priority status who unreasonably refuse two offers of suitable accommodation, will have their priority status removed with the exception of homeless applicants. See 18.6.

18.4 Any notification of suspension from the Register will be made in writing and sent to the last known address of the applicant or held at the Housing and Community Services Reception for collection.

18.5 Applicants will be advised of their rights to a review of the decision to suspend them from the Register, see Appendix E.

18.6 Homeless applicants who refuse one suitable offer of accommodation will have their priority removed, and where it is determined that the offer of accommodation was suitable under the provisions of the Council's statutory homelessness obligations, the duty to them will be discharged.

## **19. Customer service standards**

19.1 The following standards of service apply:

<b>Service</b>	<b>Standard</b>
i) Initial assessment of applications for housing	7 working days
ii) Reply to letters, e-mails and enquiries	10 working days
iii) Return of telephone call	1 working day
iv) Interview appointment	10 working days
v) Review of decision	56 days
vi) Customers satisfied they are being kept informed	85%
vii) Customers satisfied with the application process	85%

### **Home Choice Performance Indicators**

19.2 The following performance indicators will be monitored by the Council and will be reported to the Nominations and Lettings Forum annually.

## Nomination Performance

### RSL Indicators

Indicator	Target 2007-8
i) Percentage of all lettings made available to the Council	100%
ii) Percentage of requests for re-nominations made within 3 days of Refusal	90%

### Borough of Poole and RSL Indicators

Indicator	Target 2007-8
i) Percentage of nominations made within 10 days of Request	90%
ii) Percentage of re-nominations made within 2 days of request for a new nomination following refusal	80%
iii) Percentage of lettings accepted on first nomination	80%
iv) Percentage of BME lettings	4%
v) Percentage Refusal Rate	17.5%
vi) Percentage of applicants satisfied with the Home Choice scheme	85%

## 20. Information

20.1 A summary of the allocation scheme is available free of charge from Housing and Community Services, Civic Centre, Poole. Dorset. BH15 2RU

20.2 The full allocation scheme is available for inspection at the Housing reception, Civic Centre, or on the Council's website [www.boroughofpoole.com](http://www.boroughofpoole.com)

## 21. Advice and assistance

21.1 Information and advice on the housing register and allocations will be available free of charge from Housing and Community Services. Assistance will also be available there for those who need help with making an application.

## 22. Consultation on the allocation scheme

22.1 The Council will provide a draft of any new allocation scheme or proposed alteration to the scheme to all RSL partners inviting them to comment.

22.2 Other agencies including social services, Supporting People, Primary Care Trust and appropriate voluntary organisations will also be given the opportunity to comment.

22.3 The Council will consult with Housing Register applicants on any proposed changes, through the Housing Register newsletter, Home Page.

### **23. Legislative context**

- Housing Act 1996 Part 6
- The Allocation of Housing (Procedure) Regulations 1997 (S.I. 1997 No. 483)
- The Allocation of Housing (Reasonable and Additional Preference) Regulations 1997 S.I.1997/1902
- The Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Review Procedures) Regulations 1999 S.I.1999/71
- Homelessness Act 2002
- Code of Guidance on the Allocation of Accommodation (ODPM, effective from 31 January 2003)

### **24. Strategic links**

- Borough of Poole Housing Strategy 2005-8
- Borough of Poole Homelessness Strategy

## **Home Choice**

1.1 From 16<sup>th</sup> February 2004, all properties available for the Council to allocate have been advertised so that applicants can place bids for properties they wish to be considered for. This is the only way that applicants will be considered for properties through the Housing Register, however, the Council reserves the right to make direct allocations in accordance with its Allocations Policy.

### **Advertising**

1.2 Information about properties available will be updated weekly on a Tuesday by 12 noon. The following sources of advertising will be used;

- Website – [www.boroughofpoole.com/homechoice](http://www.boroughofpoole.com/homechoice)
- Home Choice Phone Line – 0870 240 6883
- Lettings Lists at Housing Reception and various locations throughout the Borough including most of the local libraries (see Appendix F)

1.3 Properties will be advertised by road name and area. Applicants are asked to respect the privacy of the families living in those properties by not approaching them to request private viewings. Anyone who is found to be approaching occupiers of properties advertised through Home Choice will have their application suspended for 6 months.

### **Bidding**

1.4 Adverts will give information about eligibility for each property type; We will give information about who is eligible for each property to allow applicants to make informed choices about which properties they will realistically have a chance of successfully bidding for.

1.5 When an applicant receives confirmation that their application has been registered they will receive Home Choice coupons. These coupons show an applicants reference number, which is our way of identifying them.

1.6 These coupons must be used when bidding for properties.

1.7 Each property is given a code which must be stated when an applicant is completing a coupon. Applicants should use one coupon each time they want to bid and use the space provided to state the property codes of the properties they have chosen. Applicants can bid for as many properties as they wish each week.

1.8 Coupons must be returned to Housing and Community Services by post, or by using the email link at [www.boroughofpoole.com/homechoice](http://www.boroughofpoole.com/homechoice) by 12 noon on the Monday after the property has been advertised. **No late bids can be considered.**

## **Informing Applicants of Successful bids**

- 1.9 It is not possible for us to notify everyone who applies as to whether their bid has been successful or not. Only the successful applicant will be notified by way of a provisional offer notice, which will be sent by the landlord. It is important that applicants reply to these notices as soon as possible to indicate whether they are still interested in the property.
- 1.10 Applicants who have successfully bid for a property will not be considered for other properties they may bid for in the following weeks. If they are not able to take up the original tenancy offered they will be able to start bidding again, but only once that decision has been reached.

## **Feedback on Allocations made**

- 1.11 Information about each property allocated will be made available on the HomeChoice webpage and on our notice board at the Housing Reception. This is a simple way of checking to see what an applicant's position is for such a property simply by looking at the band the successful bidder was in, and at the date that their application was registered. No personal information about successful bidders will be made available.

## **Banding**

- 1.12 Each property will be given a band to give an indication of who is likely to be considered;
- Green Band – People who have been on the Housing Register for over 10 years and people with Priority status.
  - Amber Band – People who have been on the Housing Register between 2 and 10 years
  - Red Band – People who have been on the Housing Register for less than 2 years.
- 1.13 Properties will be matched to these bands according to the estimated demand for them.

## **Access to Home Choice**

- 1.14 To ensure that everyone wishing to be considered for a Housing Association or PHP property has access to, and is able to use the Home Choice scheme, the Council has taken the following steps;
- 1.15 Information will be provided by the following means;

- **Large print and audio tapes** – these will be available on request
- **Translation** of leaflets, application forms and guidance notes – the three main languages for translated material will be:
  - Portuguese
  - Bengali
  - Chinese
- (We will arrange translation into other languages where necessary.)
- **General information** will be provided at various community, religious and advice centres.

1.16 Some applicants may not be in a position to submit their own coupons, and may have very specific needs when considering suitable properties.

1.17 In most cases people in such a position will be identified through the Priority Panel which meets every 4 weeks to consider applications with the most serious requirements for an urgent move. A professional person, such as a Social Worker, Housing Officer, Housing Adviser etc. will be allocated to each case who will be proactive in submitting coupons on behalf of that applicant.

1.18 There may be other instances where an applicant may be in need of this type of assistance. Application forms include a question relating to an applicants' potential difficulty in applying for properties themselves and asking if they have a social worker etc. who could help them. It may be that they receive support from a relative or a friend who we could keep in contact with. We may also decide that an applicant could need to be referred to the Priority Panel.

1.19 Applicants will be notified in writing of any person who will be applying for properties on their behalf, and how to contact them.

1.20 The main purpose of maintaining the Assisted List will be to monitor the progress of people requiring assistance and to ensure that coupons are being submitted on their behalf when suitable properties in their areas of choice become available.

## Appendix B

### Match of Family Type to Property Size

<b>Elderly Persons Dwellings</b>	
Single people over 60 years	Bedsits - ground floor
Single people over 60 years	Bedsits - first floor
Single people or couples over 60 years or with a medical requirement for ground floor accommodation	One bedroom ground floor flats and bungalows
Single people or couples over 60 years	One bedroom first floor flat
Couples only over 60 years	One bedroom bungalows at Selby Close/Cynthia Close
Couples over 60 years or single people with an identified need for two bedrooms	Two bedroom ground floor flats
Couples over 60 years	Two bedroom first floor flats

<b>General Needs</b>	
<b>MULTI-STOREY FLATS (COUNCIL OWNED TOWER BLOCKS)</b>	
Single persons and couples without children	One bedroom flats
Parent(s) with one child or two children of same sex plus couples with a medical requirement for two bedrooms	Two bedroom ground floor and first floor flats
Couples (couples is defined as two people wishing to cohabit) with medical requirements for two bedroom accommodation  Couples (couples is defined as two people wishing to cohabit) without children.  Parents with one child or two children of same sex over eight years.  Single persons who have staying access to their children on a weekly basis, provided that a Residence Order backs the arrangement.  Single people sharing and in need of support, provided the necessary care and support packages are in place on the recommendation of the Priority Panel.	Two bedroom second floor and above

<b>Flats</b>	
Single Persons	Bedsits
Single persons. Couples without children	One bedroom flats
Parent(s) with one child or two children of same sex Couples with a medical requirement for 2 bedrooms	Two bedroom ground floor and first floor flats
Couples (couples is defined as two people wishing to cohabit) without children or couples with one or two children of same sex over five years old.	Two bedroom second floor and above
Parent(s) with two or more children	Three bedroom ground or first floor flats
Parent(s) with two or more children over 5 years	Three bedroom second floor and above
<b>Bungalows</b>	
Singles/couples with medical requirement for bungalow	One bedroom
Couples without children with medical requirement for two bedrooms.  Parent(s) with one or two children of the same sex with a requirement for a bungalow  Parents(s) with one or two children of the same sex with requirement for bungalow designed or adapted for disabled people.	Two bedroom   Two bedroom bungalow for disabled people
Parent(s) with two or more children with a requirement for a bungalow designed or adapted for disabled people	Three bedroom bungalow for disabled people
<b>Maisonettes</b>	
Parent(s) with one child or two children of the same sex	Two bedroom ground floor
Parent(s) with one child or two children of the same sex over five years	Two bedroom second floor  NB: Maisonettes have no first floor access
Parent(s) with two or more children	Three bedroom ground floor
Parent(s) with two or more children over 5 years.	Three bedroom second floor
<b>HOUSES</b>	
Parent(s) with one child or two children of same sex	Two bedroom
Parent(s) with two or more children	Three bedroom
Parent(s) with four or more children	Four bedroom

***Properties with gardens will not normally be offered to people who only have children aged over 14 years unless a medical or social requirement for a garden exists***

## **Allocation of Temporary Accommodation**

### **1. Definition of Temporary Accommodation**

1.1 Temporary Accommodation can be provided through a variety of means. For the purposes of this policy, it is defined as accommodation which may be allocated to households who have been accepted as homeless under the terms of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002).

### **2. Allocation of Accommodation**

2.1 Unlike general needs allocations, temporary accommodation is not advertised through Home Choice and is not subject to the provisions of the Allocations Policy.

2.2 Applicants will be allocated temporary accommodation in order for the Council to fulfil its duty to provide accommodation as a result of their homeless application.

2.3 It may not always be possible to allocate temporary accommodation on the basis of the match of family size to property type as set out in appendix b, but all reasonable endeavours will be made to make an appropriate offer.

### **3. Refusal and Request for a Review of Offers of Temporary Accommodation**

3.1 Refusal of an offer of temporary accommodation with no basis for the refusal will not be accepted and will result in the Council discharging its duty to the applicant as suitable accommodation has been made available, but not taken up.

3.2 Applicants should therefore seek appropriate advice before refusing any offer of accommodation and should note that there is a review mechanism which allows the opportunity for the suitability of the accommodation to be considered by senior officers of Housing and Community Services.

3.3 If an applicant considers that the offer of accommodation is unsuitable, they must ask for a review in writing within 21 days of the receipt of this letter and address it to:- the Council's Reviewing Officer, Housing and Community Services, Civic Centre, Poole Dorset BH15 2RU.

3.4 Before the review is undertaken, the applicant must decide whether they wish to move into the property they have been offered.

3.5 If the applicant moves into the property offered this will not affect the review in any way. If the review finds that the offer was not suitable you will be offered another property.

3.6 If the applicant decides not to move into the property and the review finds that this offer was suitable, they will not be offered another property.

**Verification of residence, children and staying access**

<b>1</b>	<b>POLICY</b>
1.1	Proofs must be provided for residence, children at home and staying access.
1.2	Applicants must provide proof and this must be in the form of official documents and dated within the last four weeks.
1.3	At point of allocation, all necessary proofs must be dated in last 12 months for applicants to be considered. If this is not the case the application may be passed over until necessary proofs are obtains.
<b>2</b>	<b>PROCEDURE</b>
2.1	<b>Proof of Address, of all applicants over the age of 16. This must be dated in the last 4 weeks.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Utility Bill</li><li>• Bank/Building Society Statement</li><li>• College/School letter</li><li>• Payslip with address</li><li>• Letter from Dept Work &amp; Pensions (benefit/pensions)</li><li>• Tenancy agreement</li><li>• Mobile telephone account</li></ul>
2.2	<b>Proof of Children under the age of 16. This must be dated in the last 4 weeks.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Child Benefit letter, with address as on the application, with most recent Bank Statement showing the credit .</li><li>• Child Tax credit</li></ul>
2.3	<b>Proof that you have staying access to a child/children. This must be dated in the last 4 weeks.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Residence Order</li><li>• Letter from the child's full time carer detailing the access arrangements and the length of time they have been in place. Proof that the child is living with that parent is also required – see 2.2 above.</li></ul>
2.4	<b>No Fixed Address</b> <p>Applicants will be contacted and arrangements made for them to see a Housing Adviser who will arrange accommodation or verify their homelessness</p>

## **REVIEW OF HOUSING REGISTER DECISIONS**

1. Applicants must request a review of the decision within 21 days of receiving the decision.
2. The review will be carried out by the Housing Needs and Resources Manager (or, in his/her absence or if more appropriate, a relevant senior officer) within 28 days of the date of the request. They may carry out the review alone or with legal or other expert advice as they see fit.
3. Applicants should supply as soon as possible their reasons for requesting a review, i.e the reason why they disagree with the decision. Applicants may also add to any grounds already stated and forward any new information or further documentation they wish to be taken into account.
4. Applicants should send written representations or documents which have a bearing on the review. If they wish to make oral representations this must be requested in writing.
5. The decision will be based on the facts as known to the Reviewing Officer at the date of review.
6. Representations from a person representing the applicant will be accepted if accompanied by signed authorisation.
7. The Reviewing Officer may decide to make further enquiries that may delay the decision but the applicants consent will be sought if enquiries will lead to a delay beyond the 28 days referred to in Condition 2.
8. Applicants will receive a statement of reasons with the decision and will be advised of the consequences of the decision.

## Appendix F

### Average Waiting Times for General Needs Accommodation

Unit Size	Average Waiting Time for Date Order Applicant	Average Waiting Time for Reasonable Preference Applicant	Average Waiting Time for Homeless or Prevention of Homelessness Reasonable Preference Applicant	Average Waiting Time for Cumulative Preference Applicant (x2 reasonable preference groups)	Average Waiting Time for Cumulative Preference Applicant (1x homeless and 1x reasonable preference group)	Average Waiting Time for Additional Preference (Priority) Applicant
1 bed	4 years	2 years	3 years	0 years	1 year	6 months
2 bed	4.5 years	2.5 years	3.5 years	6 months	1.5 years	6 months
3 bed	8.5 years	6.5 years	7.5 years	4.5 years	5.5 years	6 months
4 bed	4.5 years	2.5 years	3.5 years	6 months	1.5 years	12 months

**Please note that applicants with priority will always be considered ahead of applicants on the date order list.**

**Please note that these are average waiting times for allocations made to date order applicants over the last 12 months. (2006-7)**

**The greater number of Priority allocations made, the longer the wait for date order applicants.**

**Some areas of the Borough are in higher demand and lower supply than others, and those areas carry a longer waiting time.**

**Some properties are in higher demand and lower supply than others and also carry a longer waiting time.**

**LETTINGS LIST LOCATIONS**

**RECEPTION/DROP IN'S:** HCS Housing Reception, PHP Reception, Quay Foyer, Quay Advice centre, Knightstone HA Offices

**LIBRARIES :** Broadstone, Branksome, Canford Cliffs, Canford Heath, Creekmoor, Poole Central, Hamworthy, Oakdale, Parkstone, Rossmore

**SHELTERED HOUSING SCHEMES :** Derek Orchard House, Hinchliffe Close, Lake Avenue, Cinnamon Lane, Baiter Gardens, Willow Park, Woodstock Close, Vale Close, Davis Court, Bob Hann Close, Boyd Road, Belmont Court, Peel Close, Phylton Close, Ralph Jessop Court, Stanfield Close, Trinidad House, Cynthia Close, Dale Valley Road, Sherrin Close, Simmonds Close, Christopher Crescent, Millfield, Waterloo House, Selby Close, Knowlton Road, Puddletown Crescent, Stanley Pearce House