



allocations policy 2010 - 13

a choice based lettings scheme for social housing
in the Bradford District

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1 executive summary

1.1 introduction

1.1.1 This policy outlines the principles and operational approach to be taken for the allocation of social housing throughout the Bradford District. Social rented stock constitutes 15.3% of housing in the Bradford district. This means there are upwards of 55,000 people currently living in social rented accommodation. Social housing is provided by 23 active Registered Social Landlords (Housing Associations) including the original large scale voluntary stock transfer landlord Incommunities (formerly Bradford Community Housing Trust)

1.2 how the policy responds to statutory guidance

1.2.1 The Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) together with additional advice in the form of a Code of Guidance provides the framework. It establishes that each local authority should publish an allocation scheme that must give reasonable preference to certain groups in housing need e.g. households with a particular need for accommodation on medical or welfare grounds. It also highlights that local authorities and registered social landlords must balance need and customer choice.

1.2.2 The guidance has changed significantly since the inception of Homehunter in 2002 from being focussed on the need to assess clients under relevant legislation and subsequently housing people in housing need in permanent accommodation to a stronger emphasis now on early intervention and prevention. In turn this approach opens up new choices and options for people in need and joins up homelessness and worklessness areas. In the current climate where demand for social housing is at an historic high, the existing system is no longer able to offer appropriate access to social housing or accommodate a wider range of housing options for people in housing need.

1.3 contractual services and the housing options approach

1.3.1 Bradford District Council went through a public procurement exercise and 'purchased' new homelessness services in 2009. The service specifications of these include a housing options service, new allocations systems, a rent guarantee service and complementary services for people with disabilities. This contract was awarded to Incommunities in February 2009 and branded as 'open moves'. The new allocations policy is part of this new approach which links worklessness to housing access and firmly places prevention of homelessness at the heart of housing sustainability. "homes" is the choice based lettings (CBL) component of open moves, which will replace Homehunter and operate the allocations policy and process.

1.4 the main ethos and core principles of the policy

1.4.1 This allocations policy offers a more needs based approach, recognising this via four defined 'bands' of housing need. This is a significant departure from the initial Homehunter allocations policy which had only two bands and placed greater emphasis on waiting time rather than housing need. Properties on the system will be allocated across the four bands, thereby opening up choice and ensuring a better equity of property access and types. The new systems will retain their 'choice base' by advertising property in such a way as to allow service users to see what is available in their allocated bands. In addition, the incorporation of needs assessments within the registration process will achieve the right balance between meeting need and giving choice.

1.5 a housing options approach

1.5.1 homes will include a greater range of tenures including high quality private sector rented properties, low cost home ownership options and social housing lettings from other Registered Social Landlords alongside access to housing support services for those tenants who require additional help to maintain tenancies. Bradford Council retains the strategic responsibility for negotiating nomination agreements with all Registered Social Landlords in the Bradford District in order to maximise social housing opportunities through the homes internet based allocations process.

1.6 the needs of local people and links to Bradford's wider economic & regeneration priorities

1.6.1 The allocations policy recognises that a proportion of the Bradford district is rural. To support these communities the policy identifies the needs of "local people" in rural areas and awards appropriate preference to applicants with local connections. The incorporation of rural lettings policies complements wider regeneration priorities, helping to support and sustain defined rural parts of the District.

1.6.2 The policy also takes into account economic, environmental and regeneration priorities by reflecting priorities arising from the Big Plan and the District Sustainable Community Strategy.

2 introduction

- 2.1.1** This document is the Housing Allocations Policy for use throughout the Bradford district. open moves **homes** is a choice based method of allocation and enables the Council to fulfil its statutory responsibility for meeting housing need throughout the Bradford District. Incommunities as a local large scale voluntary transfer (LSVT) organisation acts as the managing agency for the Local Authority and subscribes to this policy as a method of good practice.
- 2.1.2** Incommunities' existing good practice is reflected in this Policy and is disseminated to other housing organisations, locally and nationally as a model of good practice.
- 2.1.3** The **homes** Allocations Policy also works in partnership with other District Housing Associations and the voluntary sector and is overseen by a multi-agency Steering Group, which is chaired by the Local Authority.
- 2.1.4** The Allocations Policy is subject to monitoring on a quarterly basis by the Local Authority. Annually the policy will be reviewed to ensure it is operationally fulfilling its aims and objectives. A full strategic and operational review will be undertaken 3 years from the date of initial implementation. In the interim any amendments that are required will be subject to approval by the Group Chief Executive in liaison with the Assistant Director of Housing and Regeneration, CBMDC.
- 2.1.5** As a choice based lettings policy it exhibits all of the following attributes:
- Property advertising
 - Marketing information published for each property
 - An emphasis on the customer making the application and expression of interest
 - Customer choice
 - Ranking of applications in line with the policy criteria which determines priority
 - Compliance with Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 and Homelessness Act 2002
 - Disability equality duty, under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 s49A
 - Provision of comprehensive service information.

2.2 objectives of the allocations policy

2.2.1 The main emphasis of the policy is on achieving the right balance between meeting housing need, giving choice to customers and creating sustainable communities.

2.2.2 it aims to do this by the following:

- Ensuring the lettings process is as transparent as possible, by making lettings in accordance with the lettings scheme.
- Maximising choice wherever possible, by ensuring the majority of properties are advertised and encouraging customers to make expressions of interest in those properties.
- Ensuring all customers seeking homes receive good quality information and services to assist them in making informed choices about their future home. It will be the responsibility of the Incommunities Strategic Housing Needs team to ensure the responsibility is shared amongst all its partners in order to optimise customer awareness and understanding of the policy process.

2.2.3 incommunities and its partners work together to:

- Maintain a changed lettings culture from one of gate keeping and signposting to one of customer choice and empowerment
- Develop increased customer commitment towards the home they occupy through self-selection
- Inspire new markets and interest in social housing to tackle long-term voids, reduce turnover and increase take up in low demand areas
- Encourage existing customers to remain within social housing by offering an improved option to transfer by offering wider mobility options
- Address imbalances in communities and encourage further social cohesion
- Improve service provision for vulnerable groups and extend choice and assistance in maintaining a successful tenancy
- Improve product information and change market perception of social housing
- Encourage further take up of social housing within Asian communities and other minority groups
- Improve access to social housing by utilising customer friendly and community bases as access points
- Administer an integrated Disability Housing Register which recycles existing adapted stock back to those clients with disabilities or complex health needs.

2.2.4 through its lettings policy Incommunities aims to reflect the 6 principles of landlord services to the customer:

1. Easy to use
2. Easy to understand
3. Accessible to all users
4. Reflect tenant priorities
5. Efficient and effective
6. Monitored with feedback

2.2.5 it also aims to encourage customers to consider a variety of options including

- Social rented accommodation
- Mutual exchange
- Right to buy
- Shared ownership
- Home buy
- Home swap/mutual exchange
- Private rented accommodation.

2.2.6 other facilities available include:

- Garages
- Access to housing related support.

2.3 how the allocations policy works in conjunction with other strategies

2.3.1 the homelessness strategy

- By enabling the local authority to fulfil its legal duties to prevent homelessness and accommodate and support those threatened with homelessness
- Encouraging alternative routes for customers seeking re-housing
- Reducing the use of temporary accommodation in Bradford.

2.3.2 the big plan

2.3.3 This policy acknowledges the importance of wider District priorities especially those arising from the Big Plan, the District Sustainable Community Strategy and the Local Development Framework (LDF). The policy seeks to address and compliment, in particular, Transformational Priorities and shared outcomes in relation to sustainability, cohesion and inclusion.

2.3.4 transformational priority: regenerating the city and major towns
Ensuring that local lettings policies are considered to meet local

circumstances within recognised regeneration areas. The opening up of tenure choice on the new system will support wider access and complement the work of larger regeneration schemes which involve capital redevelopments in social and private housing markets

2.3.5 transformational priority: improved education outcomes

The new policy improves access for families and young people in need, ensuring that homes are safe, secure and of a good standard, providing a platform from which to undertake schooling and further education. Vulnerable families and young people will receive appropriate housing support to help them maintain their homes. Through the new Trailblazer programme work in primary schools it will raise awareness at an early age of work and housing/homelessness issues.

2.3.6 transformational priority: improved skills at all levels

The new policy seeks to improve housing mobility for jobs and training through transfers and wider tenure options. There will be improved access for working people and those in education through linkages with the wider Housing Options developments. The use of central and estate based employment, social enterprise, training and higher education services alongside housing access will support individuals to develop skills and access employment opportunities.

2.3.7 big plan priorities: safer and stronger communities

The new policy will have the capacity to recognise the differing needs of communities both large and small. Importantly, it will offer a greater range of tenure options, support and low cost home ownership initiatives which will particularly assist those in more rural areas where social housing is limited. The flexibility to further support this via selective use of local lettings and local connections will strengthen those same areas where limited housing has led to population reductions and economic poverty. Access to mixed housing tenures will make communities more sustainable and support greater diversity across the district.

2.3.8 shared outcome: sustainability

The Big Plan is seeking to develop a deeper understanding of sustainability in its broadest sense across district partners. The revised policy will support social sustainability through building resilience, security and mobility for families, leading to more settled and sustained communities. Through its integration of support for people vulnerable to homelessness and worklessness, and through its contribution to regeneration, the policy will also be contributing to economic sustainability.

2.3.9 shared outcome: cohesion and inclusion

All Big Plan partners are committed to supporting the cohesion of communities and the inclusion of vulnerable people in economic, social

and cultural opportunities. The revised policy is designed to meet a wider range of housing and related work needs and give people choices which will encourage more settled, mixed and cohesive communities and combat major causes of exclusion.

2.3.10 local development framework

This allocations policy compliments the work progressed as part of the local development framework (LDF). This lays out the approach to the delivery housing development priorities and planning needs for the Bradford district's future.

2.3.11 supporting people strategy

The allocations policy promotes the effective use of supported housing by assisting customers to access supported accommodation. It also supports this strategy by enabling customers to move on from supported accommodation to independent tenancies.

2.3.12 empty properties strategy

The lettings policy will work in partnership with the Landlord Accreditation Scheme to provide options for customers requiring re-housing.

2.3.13 Bradford domestic violence policy

The Allocations policy supports this policy by:

- Recognising the housing needs of women and men who need to move because of domestic violence
- Enabling customers with rent arrears that have experienced domestic violence to be re-housed.

2.3.14 learning disability valuing people strategy

The Allocation Policy must work in conjunction with the Valuing People Strategy by assisting:

- Customers who need to move as a result of the learning disability
- Young people in transition
- People with learning disabilities living with older carers.

2.3.15 every child matters change for children

This is a new approach to the well being of children and young people from birth to the age of 19. Its main aims are for every child, whatever their background or circumstances, to:

- Be healthy
- Be safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic wellbeing.

2.4 allocation in relation to vulnerable groups

This policy is committed to assisting vulnerable people access suitable homes. During the allocation process there should always be recognition of vulnerable groups and pro-active work to assist them with accessing and sustaining accommodation and to promote their social inclusion.

2.4.1 definition of vulnerable groups

Anyone who comes into the criteria of being at “risk to themselves and/or others who may have difficulty in accessing, maintaining or sustaining a tenancy”. This includes the following groups:

- People experiencing homelessness
- Rough sleepers
- People with mental health issues
- People with physical health issues
- Clients registered as disabled or assessed as having complex health needs under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- Those at risk of violence
- Offenders/ex-prisoners
- Refugees
- Those with specific language needs
- People with learning disabilities
- Teenage parents
- Older persons – unless they are able to cope independently
- Care leavers
- Those with a lack of social skills
- Sex workers
-

2.4.2 Please note this list is not exhaustive and it is recognised that certain individuals can have multiple needs involving a combination of the above and/or other issues.

2.4.3 The needs of vulnerable groups are met through the Single Pathway to Supported Housing.

2.5 single pathway to supported housing

2.5.1 The aims of the service are to assist service users who need support to sustain a tenancy. Service users can be referred by any source, self-referrals, housing offices or existing support agencies and need to complete a referral form. Service users will be assessed by officers of the Tenancy Support Team if the referral is made by the service user or through a Local Management Team to confirm that this is the correct route for the service user and that all the options have been explained to the service user.

2.5.2 The service offers a single point of referral combined with intensive housing management for those who need it.

2.5.3 Service users are able to access floating support services with visits to their own home that:

- Help customers manage their money
- Help customers complete forms and claim benefit
- Help customers deal with issues like getting a job or training, running their own home, caring for their health needs
- Help and support, if customers are being harassed or abused or have mental health, alcohol or drug dependence problems
- Help customers get involved in what's going on where they live.

2.5.4 People are placed in accommodation near to where they have support or connections and they are given up to 5 choices about where they want to be re-housed. Service users will be made 1 offer of housing unless there is a good reason why the offer is unsuitable.

2.5.5 People applying for housing through the Single Pathway will not be able to bid for housing through homes and their application will be deferred if they choose the Single Pathway.

2.5.6 the single pathway objectives are:

- To identify and assess need on the membership form
- To work in partnership with supported housing providers and non-statutory agencies. Support agencies offer a care and support service to their clients and assist them maintain their tenancies
- To give supported tenancies; tenancies are allocated to Single Pathway who allocate properties to individuals. Clients receive intensive housing management from About Turn or Homesplus and match client specific support from independent support providers who provide appropriate support in line with supporting people requirements

2.5.7 supported housing is provided by the following organisations and agencies:

- Single Pathway – About Turn/Homesplus
- UK Borders Agency
- Mental health team support providers
- Learning disabilities support services
- Social Services.

2.5.8 All the above support providers sign a Support Management Agreement and maintain its terms and conditions in providing appropriate support to vulnerable tenants.

2.5.9 A Lettings Support Group (for vulnerable groups) is established. This group meets on a quarterly basis to review the needs of vulnerable groups, to co-ordinate tenancy and to monitor outcomes. The group will comprise:

- The housing options service
- The able living team
- Tenancy support co-coordinator(s)
- homes team
- Housing trust manager(s) or housing officers
- Sheltered housing managers or officers
- Tenancy enforcement manager(s) or officers
- Equality and diversity officers from relevant housing providers and the local authority
- Tenant representative where applicable
- Voluntary sector representative where applicable

2.6 offender tenancy support service

Offender and Substance Misuse Housing Needs and Coordination Service

Lead organisation: Incommunities

2.6.1 which other organisations are involved in the project?

The scheme is funded by West Yorkshire Probation and DIP/Compass. Incommunities works collaboratively with both services to develop a tailor made scheme which supports the needs identified by offenders both for housing and support.

2.6.2 project objectives:

The Offender Housing Needs Housing Support Coordination service is based in the heart of the Choice Based Lettings (CBL) and Strategic Housing Needs Team. The service provides a vital access point to all

housing options for vulnerable offenders and drug users. The scheme takes a multi-agency approach and comprises a partnership between West Yorkshire Probation Service, Incommunities and DIP/Compass. It was set up because it is widely recognised that getting offenders into stable, appropriate accommodation reduces the risk of them offending and acts as a springboard for offenders with chaotic lifestyles to access mental health, drug and alcohol services. This prevents the vicious circle of homelessness leading to both crime and addiction. The services therefore reduce the likelihood of returning to criminal activity. This is beneficial not only to the offender but also the wider community in the Bradford and Keighley district

2.6.3 project activities

tenancy ready work

- Advice on how to use allocations system (CBL and wider Housing Options)
- Registration onto the allocations system
- Review of suspended and excluded offenders, providing a fresh start
- Assisted bids
- Addressing arrears/debts
- Signposting to specialist agencies
- Accompanied viewings
- Accompanied sign-ups
- Acting as the single point of contact within housing.
- Working alongside probation staff to integrate housing needs with sentence plans

resettlement work

- Ensuring housing benefit is up and running
- Ensuring relevant application for furniture grants are completed
- Setting up utilities
- Assistance with budgeting
- Providing interim support, both practical and emotional, until further appropriate floating support can be secured
- Provide regular contact with clients / home visits

additionally

- Reviews and monitoring on a three monthly basis (if any problems have occurred in between reviews we will intervene)
- Crisis intervention
- Maintaining current tenancies
- Homeless prevention work
- Holding case conference

2.7 about turn project

2.7.1 about turn was launched in February 2004, by Bradford West City Community Housing Trust, in partnership with Bradford Council. The project forms a new approach to dealing with anti-social behaviour

(ASB) and social exclusion. Based upon the “floating support” model, the project seeks to reduce ASB, promote social inclusion and prevent revolving door homelessness. This project is now been rolled out to be available in each of the Management Trusts.

- The project takes on families previously excluded from social housing because of their chaotic lifestyles and ASB
- The project is centred upon a floating support model, which uses needs assessment, care planning, advice and compliance with tenancy conditions
- The project aims to avoid revolving door homelessness
- The project employs one Tenancy Compliance Officer (TCO) who acts as the unifying point of reference for a wide range of agencies including mental health agencies, drugs, rehabilitation agencies, West Yorkshire Police, criminal justice organisations, as well as statutory departments of the Council
- The TCO’s aim is to provide a very personal service (intensive housing management) to develop the client’s independence and positive self-expression at the same time as providing clear boundaries in an attempt to create a successful tenancy – to turn the client’s life around
- Presenting issues such as anti-social behaviour of clients and their children are tackled by the project
- The Project contributes to the community cohesion and social inclusiveness agenda

3 access and acceptance

3.1 who can become a member

homes promotes and operates an open membership scheme to any person/s regardless of sex, race, or tenure who are:

- Capable of maintaining a home
- 18 years or older, or are 16-17 and have appropriate support to maintain a home or a guarantor
- Not suspended as per suspension policy

3.1.1 applicants will be subject to:

- **a financial assessment** (see financial assessment procedure)
Customers with the financial ability to resolve their own housing situation will only be considered for low demand properties. Applicants will be subjected to an assessment of capital assets to determine eligibility for the scheme. The exceptions would include sheltered or extra care housing and also customers supported via the able living team requiring very specialist adapted and accessible accommodation that is not available in the open market.
- **Bradford district local connection** (see local connection procedure)
A person has a local connection with an area if they have lived in and/or have been in permanent employment in the area for 6 out of 12 months, or 3 out of 5 years, have family associations in the area or there are special circumstances which result in a local connection with the area, i.e. fleeing domestic violence or at risk of violence from their last settled accommodation, or those leaving the armed forces who have family associations and/or who have resided in the Bradford district as above.

3.2 board members, employees, former employees and close relatives

3.2.1 Schedule 1 of the Housing Act 1996 places restrictions on the way that lettings are made to staff working for the RSL and Board Members involved in the governance of the organisation.

3.2.2 Incommunities board members, Incommunities staff and former Incommunities board members and staff or their close relatives are entitled to join the scheme and be registered in the normal way. They will also, where applicable, be given priority in the normal way.

3.2.3 However if they are successful in their bid, prior to a formal offer of accommodation being made, approval of the offer from a panel of board members will be sought as a matter of course.

3.2.4 Each RSL within the Incommunities Group will have in place procedures for seeking approval for re-housing which will reflect the need to handle personal information in a confidential and sensitive manner.

3.2.5 housing the friends of staff and members of tenants groups

3.2.6 The Tenant Services Authority (TSA) does not outline specific guidance about housing friends or acquaintances of RSL staff, but inevitably there will be occasions where such instances will occur.

3.2.7 In order to ensure Incommunities is able to demonstrate transparency and confidence in staff integrity, staff will be fully briefed to ensure they are not involved in handling applications from such people. In all instances the Head of Operations will be required to sanction offers. Staff will be expected to be vigilant, and where applications are received from friends they will be required to notify their line manager as a matter of course and to distance themselves from the case.

3.2.8 For the avoidance of doubt a member of staff must not work on the registration, granting of priority, verification or offer a property to anyone who is a friend or acquaintance.

3.2.9 No offer of a tenancy can be made without prior approval of the Executive Director.

3.3 eligibility for housing

3.3.1 who is eligible?

1. British Nationals who are habitually resident in the Common Travel Area
2. EEA Nationals: any person who is a national of any of the countries in the European Economic area and is habitually resident in the CTA; or is a worker, or has a right to reside in the UK;
3. Persons subject to immigration control who have been granted:
 - i. Refugee status
 - ii. Exceptional leave to remain, provided there is no condition that they have no recourse to public funds
 - iii. Indefinite leave to remain, provided they are habitually resident in the CTA and their leave to remain was not granted in the previous 5 years on the basis of a sponsorship given in relation to maintenance and accommodation (or where the sponsor[s] has died)
 - iv. Persons subject to immigration control who are nationals of a country that has ratified the European Convention on Social and Medical Assistance or the European Social Charter provided they are habitually resident in the CTA and are lawfully present in the UK.

3.3.2 While the decision on being eligible for 'leave to remain' is being considered asylum seekers are ineligible for housing. As such they cannot make an application on homes while their asylum application is being considered.

3.3.3 who is ineligible?

Any applicant who does not satisfy the above criteria

- Someone who is not allowed by law to be allocated social housing (e.g. someone subject to immigration control)
- An applicant (or a member of the applicant's household) who is guilty of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make him/her unsuitable to be a tenant.

3.3.4 The behaviour which can be regarded as unacceptable for these purposes is behaviour by the applicant or a member of his/her household that would have entitled a social landlord to a possession order. The behaviour must be considered serious enough to make an applicant unsuitable to be a tenant. This is considered in more detail below.

3.3.5 the three elements identified in the guidance:

1. Unacceptable behaviour – i.e. behaviour which is of a nature and seriousness that, had the applicant been a secure tenant at the time, his landlord would have been entitled to possession on one of the fault grounds
2. Reasonableness – i.e. that it has been satisfied that the balance between the interests of the applicant and the interests of the public would not have led to the possession order being suspended
3. Applicability – the applicant remains unsuitable to be a tenant at the time of his/her application notwithstanding any lapse of time since the unacceptable behaviour.

3.3.6 In all cases where ineligibility for allocation is being considered, in reaching the decision on whether or not to treat an applicant as ineligible it is a requirement to have acted reasonably and it will be necessary to consider all circumstances relevant to the particular applicant.

3.3.7 If an applicant deemed in the past to be ineligible, considers his/her unacceptable behaviour should no longer to be held against him/her as a result of changed circumstances, the applicant can request a review of the earlier decision. If the review is in the applicant's favour then the applicant can make a new application.

3.3.8 All applicants are looked at on an individual basis. Account must be taken of the amount of time, which has elapsed since the occurrence,

whether or not there has been any effort to redress the issue and whether there have been any problems in the intervening time. Only then can the decision be made and the reasons for it recorded.

3.4 the membership form

3.4.1 All customers have to complete a Membership Form, and accept the terms and conditions of homes. The website is a secure site to ensure confidentiality and data protection is preserved at all times.

3.4.2 Once a customer becomes a member an acknowledgment will appear on screen and the following details provided:

- Membership username
- Membership password
- Membership date

3.4.3 Customers can register on the homes website via the various access points throughout the Bradford district (see attached list in appendix), or via any computer. The principles of the allocations policy require customers to register or be assisted to register, on the day they first enquire via the access point. The homes allocations policy operates on the principle of being a paperless application system to ensure waiting time is not lost and equal access principles apply to all. Therefore a paper/postal application form should only be used in exceptional circumstances, as follows:

- The applicant is in an institution including prison/juvenile detention centre and have no one to advocate or assist on their behalf.
- The applicant is in hospital
- The applicant is in respite/residential care pending permanent accommodation
- The applicant cannot get assistance to register on line due to a disability such as a hearing impairment/speech impairment, which prevents them from gaining assistance via the helpline or at any other access point
- There are language barriers

3.4.4 the questions on the membership form are there to:

- Identify the current housing need of customers
- Highlight direct urgent need
- Meet the needs of statutory homeless people
- Recognise and identify reasonable preference groups
- Identify vulnerable groups
- Enable verification checks to be carried out
- Enable eligibility for housing to be established
- To identify customers' housing requirements in terms of:
 - House type required
 - Household size
 - Adaptations required
 - Establish applicants' eligibility criteria.

3.4.5 mandatory information that must be supplied by each applicant and by household members on the application includes the following details:

- Name
- Current address
- Date of birth
- National Insurance Number
- Numbers to be re-housed including numbers of adults/children
- Pregnancy
- Ethnicity
- Age
- Current circumstances
- Previous address details
- Disability or complex health needs.
- A housing history of the last five years including:
 - All addresses during the five years
 - Landlord details
 - Reason for leaving
 - Incidence of ASB
 - Rent arrears
 - Details of any current support worker/key worker/probation officer.

Applicants are required to provide details of their current employment status.

3.5 verification checks

3.5.1 It is the responsibility of the applicant to provide the above mandatory information. This information will also allow for verification and eligibility checks to be carried out.

3.5.2 All applicants are protected under data protection legislation.

3.5.3 From the information gained at the start of the registration process it is then the responsibility of the housing options team to begin the verification checks using the information available (please see also to Verification and assessment policy and procedure).

3.6 validation on rural lettings

3.6.1 Employment details will be verified by wage slips, employer confirmation or similar. The applicants' current and previous housing history will be validated by official documentation such as a lease/rental agreements, utility bills etc. and family connection will be verified by birth certificates, parish records etc.

3.7 risk assessment

3.7.1 In order to assess housing need every applicant will be subject to a risk assessment, which will be done as part of the assessment of housing need. This should be completed in a way that supports inclusion of all groups, maintains community cohesion and sustainability of tenancies.

3.7.2 If the applicant is considered a medium or high risk, this does not necessary deem them to be unsuitable for housing.

3.7.3 If the results of verification checks are not satisfactory, action can be taken as follows.

3.7.4 Address applicant support needs where necessary and refer to appropriate agencies. Where this is not feasible applicants may be offered a tenancy subject to specific conditions – subject to the landlord's discretion.

3.7.5 In extreme cases applicants may be classed as ineligible and not accepted for housing. This result will only occur if they fit the ineligible criteria (see section on ineligibility).

3.7.6 It is the responsibility of the landlord to ensure that all checks are satisfactory, and the customer meets the property criteria.

3.8 able living criteria (formerly the Disabled Persons Housing Service)

3.8.1 adapted/accessible homes

- 3.8.2** able living supported clients are assessed under the “able living policy and procedure”.
- 3.8.3** Clients will usually be registered disabled and the disabled person may be any permanent member of the household, for example they do not need to be 16 years and over to qualify to be on the housing register.
- 3.8.4** Incommunities takes positive action to recycle its homes that have been adapted to a major degree back to disabled clients requiring such homes. This protects the significant financial investment made by Incommunities into its stock, is environmentally friendly by recycling property and equipment and removes a significant burden from the Council and the Health Authority by not re-assessing or making disabled people wait for Occupational Therapy assessment before accessing housing.
- 3.8.5** The definition of a “major” adapted home is where more than £1000 has been invested converting, altering or amending the fixtures/fittings and/or the structure/fabric/access of the building in such a manner to render it suitable for a disabled person’s needs.
- 3.8.6** Adaptations are likely to consist of ramping, wet floor or level access showers, stair or through floor lifts, wheelchair accessible kitchens, extensions etc.
- 3.8.7** Such homes are let directly to supported able living clients by the able living team.
- 3.8.8** Supported able living clients do not need to “bid” or keep in regular contact with the Open Moves service as a named officer will locate property for them. The client’s details are held separately to the Open Moves system on a Disability Housing Register (DHR).
- 3.8.9** The client still has the choice to decide whether the property offered is suitable, but because of the specialist circumstances attached, it is more appropriate for able living to direct clients to appropriate accommodation than the service user try to locate it.
- 3.8.10** Participating RSLs will also refer such adapted homes to able living for suitable disabled clients. A proportion of these homes will not appear on the open moves website for general applicants to bid for, but will be ring-fenced for customers with disabilities, and application for these homes should be made via application to the able living team, and allocated via the able living policy and procedure.
- 3.8.11** All clients seeking adapted stock must make themselves known to able living on registration or if their circumstances change and should not “bid”, acquire or sign for a tenancy that then requires physical alteration

to the property either inside or out. A client that does not make their circumstances completely clear will not have subsequent adaptations approved.

- 3.8.12** Any potential letting will require both the property and the client to be assessed by an Occupational Therapist or a member of the able living team to determine its suitability. Economic viability, building regulations and, where applicable, Disabled Facilities Grant legislation may apply.

4 housing allocations policy: core principles

4.1.1 the allocations policy

All applicants who have expressed an interest in a vacant property will be considered. Preference and allocation of properties will be given in the following order:

- Band A: Urgent Need
- Band B: High Need
- Band C: Medium Need
- Band D: General Need

4.2 Band A: Urgent Need

- People who are homeless and owed the ‘full duty’ as defined by s193 Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) and/or people who are threatened with homelessness and owed a duty under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) should they become homeless
- Housing Association tenants who are eligible for one bedroomed properties and are under-occupying flats & maisonettes suitable for children in high demand areas or houses by one or more bedrooms. (Properties vacated through this initiative will be allocated to customers in Band A and Band B)
- Housing Association tenants who are under-occupying flats & maisonettes suitable for children in high demand areas or houses by one or more bedrooms. (Properties vacated through this initiative will be allocated to customers in Band A and Band B)
- Clients “bed blocking” in hospital requiring urgent discharge (bed blocking: where a client is occupying a hospital bed that they no longer need, but cannot be discharged home due to unsuitability of their present accommodation).

4.3 Band B: High Need

- People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds, including grounds relating to a disability (including disabled/complex health or welfare needs requiring specialist/accessible accommodation, which will be let by able living – see able living policy and procedure)
- People who are overcrowded by two or more bedrooms (see appendix 1, overcrowding policy for further details)
- Applicants fleeing domestic violence as per district-wide protocol
- Care leavers and children assessed by Social Services as in need or at risk (where housing is a factor).

4.4 Band C: Medium Need

- Other homeless – homeless under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) but not owed a ‘full duty’.
- People who are overcrowded by one bed, or who are occupying unsanitary and unsatisfactory housing conditions
- Residing in an insecure tenancy that is coming to an end
- Leaving supported accommodation
- Assessed disability/health need
- People who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the Local Housing Authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship to themselves or others. This includes the need to move a specific location (for example to gain employment, or to give or receive evidenced care).

4.5 Band D: General Need

- All customers not in first three bands.

4.6 Bedroom standard

A standard number of bedrooms are allocated to each household in accordance with its age/sex/marital status composition and the relationship of the members to one another.

A separate bedroom is allocated to:

- Each married or cohabiting couple
- Any other person aged 21 or over
- Each pair of adolescents aged 1 - 20 of the same gender.
- Each pair of children under 8 regardless of gender.
- Adolescent’s aged 9 – 20 of different gender will qualify for their own bedroom.

Households including a pregnancy will be allowed to bid for appropriately sized properties in anticipation of their future needs.

4.7 Target lets and short listing:

All properties will be advertised to all applicants; however applicants will rank in accordance with the core principles of the Allocations policy.

Customers can express an interest to properties they are eligible for. There are effectively two routes to housing via the Allocations Policy:

Housing Needs Route:

- 75% properties are targeted to be allocated to Bands A, B, C, and D in Priority descending order.

Customers will be short listed primarily on their band; the second preference will be their registration date.

Waiting time Route:

- 25% properties are allocated according to waiting time. Percentages are reviewed on an annual basis in line with annual area lettings plans that will take account of community cohesion issues.

4.8 direct lets

4.8.1 There are a small number of allocations made outside of the system because of their exceptional circumstances and urgency. These are:

- Statutorily unfit or unsanitary conditions, renewal areas clearance or demolition
- Emergency need for housing, in these case decisions will be made by the Voids Director and Strategic Housing Needs Manager, for example witness protection cases or fire and flood.
- Moving into to an adapted home – see able living section.
- Customers requiring supported housing will go via the Single Pathway (see Supported Housing Allocation Policy and procedures)

5 Suspension policy

5.1.1 The suspension policy relates to those applicants who are eligible to apply for social rented housing but may have breached previous tenancy conditions to a level which would grant the landlord an immediate possession order.

5.1.2 All suspensions will be for a specific time period and reviewed under the suspension review policy and procedure.

5.1.3 Suspensions should be within reason and for a specific time scale in accordance with the nature of seriousness of the behaviour. This should be measured on a risk assessment basis, balanced against their need priority and level of vulnerability. This includes:

- Risk to them
- Risk to the community and neighbourhood
- Risk to staff and other agencies working with the applicant.

5.1.4 Prior to the suspension being placed the separate procedural guidelines should be followed.

5.1.5 Applicants can be suspended if any of the following apply to the applicant, or any of the household members:

5.1.6 damage

Suspensions can be imposed if the applicant or their household members have deliberately or negligently caused damage to a current or previous property. Upon review of their suspension, applicants who have caused extensive damage to a Housing Association property will not be allocated accommodation without an effective support package being in place, and until reasonable payments have been made towards the cost of the damage.

5.1.7 perpetrators of anti-social behaviour

Suspensions can be imposed if the applicant or household members have been:

- involved in conduct causing or likely to cause a nuisance or annoyance to a person residing or visiting the locality of a Housing Association property
- convicted of using their home or allowing it to be used for immoral or illegal purposes
- convicted of an offence which affects the well being of the neighbourhood in the locality of their present or previous home or the locality for which they are applying.

- Have a conviction which is not spent for a serious crime, and there could still be a significant risk to some members of the community in which they live.

5.1.8 If an applicant is suspended:

- The applicant will not be able to bid for a property for the period of suspension
- The applicant will not be nominated for a Housing Association property
- Incommunities will not offer a property to any joint applicants eligible for a joint tenancy on that applicant's registered application.

5.1.9 When the applicant is suspended from homes or is imposed with any other restriction upon bidding, the officer placing the suspension will write and inform the customer of this suspension or restriction within two working days of making the suspension/placing the restriction. The letter must include details of the review process.

5.2 How long do suspensions last?

The length of time applicants are suspended will depend upon the reason for suspension:

5.2.1 If the suspension is for anti-social behaviour it will be up to an **initial** maximum of twelve months and, upon review, the total **complete** suspension can be no more than two years.

5.2.2 The following only can make the decision on Ineligibility and Suspensions:

- Housing Managers
- Directors
- Tenancy Enforcement Manager
- Strategic Housing Needs Manager
- Housing Options Manager
- able living Manager

5.2.3 Guidance can be received from the Tenancy Enforcement Team and the Legal Services Team on whether the behaviour would make it possible to obtain a possession order.

5.2.4 In the case of current tenants where an ongoing investigation is taking place by Tenancy Enforcement Team or the Legal Services Team, the application will be immediately be suspended. The tenant must be informed in writing by Tenancy Enforcement Team or the Legal Services Team and given 21 days to object to the decision.

5.2.5 Upon review of the suspension, if the review results in the application having their suspension revoked a fresh application must be put into the homes system. This prevents an applicant who has been guilty of unacceptable behaviour from gaining unfair advantage because an application has been entered and given ineligibility status and has been registered for a significant period of time.

5.3 Rent arrears and offers of accommodation

5.3.1 Applicants will not automatically be suspended or excluded for rent arrears, but actively empowered and encouraged to address their arrears in order to become re-housed. Applicants and their household members are informed when they initially register their housing application on homes that they must address any current or former rent arrears immediately if they wish to be considered for re-housing. Failure of applicants to demonstrate a pattern of consistent, consecutive, and continuous payments towards rent arrears within their financial means will prevent applicants from being re-housed.

- Before an applicant is denied accommodation on the basis of rent arrears, the following must be considered:
 - How the debt came about
 - When the debt occurred
 - What advice the applicant was given when they signed up for the tenancy, including whether they were given housing benefit advice
 - Whether the arrears can be reclaimed via housing benefit. If this is feasible, all efforts must be made to assist and empower the applicant to do this to prevent homelessness and to support vulnerable groups.

5.3.2 Applicants and their household members should not be denied an offer of accommodation through homes if they have made arrangements to pay as set out below.

5.3.3 conditions and arrangements to pay

- If, at the time of an offer accommodation being made there must be evidence of clear continuous repayments of current and former rent arrears from any Housing Association being made. This should include either:
 - Evidence that the debt is cleared, or
 - Evidence of a minimum of 12 weeks or 3 months of reasonable, continuous, consecutive payments being made. If there is a break in the pattern of this payment the applicant may not be re-housed until
 - The minimum pattern of 12 weeks or 3 months re-payments have been re-established and evidenced.
 - Applicants with Debt must also attend debt counselling, and evidence that they have sought this help must be demonstrated alongside the consecutive payments prior to an offer of accommodation been made.

- 5.3.4** A “reasonable payment” constitutes a substantial but reasonable amount in accordance with the applicants’ financial means.
- 5.3.5** If the applicant is in regular employment the amount in these cases is to be agreed with the responsible housing officer/housing manager and the customer. A written rent arrears agreement must be completed and monitored. This agreement must be attached to any future tenancy agreement until the debt is cleared.
- 5.3.6** If the applicant is in receipt of benefits regular payments must consist of a **minimum** of £3.00 per week or £12.00 per month (or DWP equivalent).

5.4 suspension review process

general principles

- 5.4.1** Applicants can request a review of suspensions. In most cases applicants should make a written representation detailing the full reasons why they think the decision is wrong, and to supply any additional information that they feel may help their case.
- 5.4.2** In certain cases, for example those of a complex nature, an applicant can request an oral hearing where they may bring someone with them for support, or to help them present their case.

5.4.3 applicants will

- Receive an acknowledgement of their request for suspension review in two working days
- Be notified of the decision within 21 days of the request for a review. This time limit may be extended by agreement with the client.

5.4.4 suspensions review for general housing management issues

Stage one

- 5.4.5** All suspensions due to damage to property are reviewed. This will initially be undertaken within the Local Management Trusts by a housing manager.

Stage two

- 5.4.6** If the applicant appeals the decision of the reviewing manager this will be reviewed by the Director of the relevant Trust.
- 5.4.7** If the applicant appeals the review of the suspension at stage two, this will be reviewed by the Open Moves manager and, where applicable, in conjunction with a Director.

5.4.8 suspension of statutory homelessness cases

5.4.9 There is a distinct difference between eligibility and ineligibility for:

- Allocation of housing
- Advice and assistance for homeless priority under the Housing Act.

5.4.10 This is covered under S160 (A) 7 of the Housing Act 1996, which states that:

5.4.11 “Accommodation shall not be allocated to persons who are ineligible if he/she is unsuitable to be a tenant because he/she or a member of his household has been guilty of conduct which would have entitled the authority to a fault based possession order had it been the landlord at the time”.

5.4.12 The test for eligibility for allocation is different to the test for eligibility for assistance. The test for eligibility of allocations includes the additional ground of exclusion specifically relating to unsuitability as a tenant.

5.4.13 It is therefore possible in some circumstances for applicants to be suspended under the allocation policy when they are found ineligible for unreasonable actions and behaviour.

5.4.14 In these cases the applicants will be eligible for housing advice and assistance but will be ineligible for re-housing

5.4.15 review process for statutory homeless applicants

Stage one

5.4.16 Statutory homeless cases of a complex nature may require some form of support or management assistance to manage a tenancy in the long term. These cases will be discussed in detail with the Housing Options Manager, who will discuss the case with the Director from the relevant Trust.

5.4.17 Each case will be looked at on an individual basis and evaluated for any support needs after which a decision will be made on future support plans prior to the customer being re-housed. This may include the need for further references, arrangements to repay debts, a probationary tenancy e.g. tenancy compliance scheme or some form of support service to enable the customer to maintain a successful tenancy. All decisions will be confirmed in writing to the customer.

Stage two

5.4.18 If the above fails, then the case will be referred to the Strategic Housing Needs Manager who will convene a case conference with a Director from the Trust who will review the case independently. The

final decision on re-housing the customer, including the identification of a property in a specific area, will be made by the Strategic Housing Needs Manager and the independent Director. This will include the need for identifying a management let where necessary. All decisions made at this stage will be binding to all the Trusts.

5.4.19 All decisions will be confirmed in writing to the customer including the right to appeal or request a review of the decision.

5.4.20 review of suspensions for ASB

5.4.21 The Strategic Housing Needs Manager will carry out initial reviews of suspensions, which have been placed by the Tenancy Enforcement Team following the procedure below. The review of the suspension will initially be carried out in consultation with:

- Tenancy Enforcement Team
- Housing Options Manager
- Directors of Housing Trusts
- Any other involved statutory/non statutory agencies

5.4.22 The review will consist of investigation in accordance with the allocation policy and will take careful consideration of relevant legislative requirements, statutory instruments and the prevailing Code of Guidance.

5.4.23 possible outcomes of suspension reviews

5.4.24 Following a suspensions review the outcome will result in either:

1. **The original decision being upheld:** the letter will give the reasons supporting the review decision. There is no right to request a review of the decision reached on this review.
2. **The original decision being overturned:** the letter will explain what action will be taken as a result and the reasons for doing so.
3. **The applicant provides the reviewing officer with new information** i.e. information not known to the officer who took the original decision. This new information will be forwarded to the officer making the original decision with a request for further enquires to be made. If the officer upholds the original decision, the applicant will be advised in writing of the right to request a review of that decision.

5.4.25 Where an applicant remains dissatisfied with a review decision, he/she may appeal on a point of law to the County Court under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by Homelessness Act 2002).

6 advertising of properties and lettings criteria

6.1 advertising and bidding cycle

6.1.1 Vacant properties are advertised on a 7-day cycle via open moves homes newsletter

6.1.2 customers can apply to become a member and bid for a property:

- At a kiosk at one of our 11 access points (see list in appendix)
- Via any computer
- By telephoning the housing options helpline
- By telephone the local housing trust
- In person at any housing office
- In person at the housing options team
- With the help of a Tenancy Support Co-ordinator

6.1.3 all customers are advised on:

- The availability of access points.
- How the weekly advertising cycle operates
- How to become a member and bid for properties
- How to find out about available homes
- How the selection process operates
- Where announcement of lets are published
- Other methods of accessing the web-site
- Who to contact for assistance/information on homes
- Independent advice agencies

6.1.4 Additional advice and support service will be provided via housing staff and other partner agencies for those who have difficulty in accessing the service. Assistance is provided to people who may require help completing the registration form due to language or literacy difficulties, disabilities or severe medical conditions. Where necessary home visits will be arranged. A homes customer information guide is available and includes:

- An easy step-by-step guide
- Details of accredited Bradford access points
- Details of other methods of accessing open moves homes

6.1.5 Properties are advertised for 7 days.

6.2 acceptances and void bids

6.2.1 On certain occasions a customer may be successful in bidding for more than one property. In these cases, once verified, the customer will be given the choice of either viewing or acquiring just one of the available properties. However, if a customer requires more time to make a decision then 24 hours may be allowed in exceptional circumstances. Once the customer makes the decision and accepts a property all bids they make on other properties will be invalid.

6.2.2 If the customer's banding arises through Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) then the housing options case officer may also contact the customer to determine which property they prefer and notify the relevant landlord.

6.2.3 A customer will only be allowed to refuse 3 reasonable offers of accommodation. If this maximum is reached, the application will be suspended for 12 months.

If a customer has been accepted as homeless and owed the 'full duty' as defined by s193 Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) only one reasonable offer of accommodation will be made. If this offer is refused, the application will be placed in Band **C** and allowed a maximum of 2 further refusals of reasonable offers.

6.3 garages

6.3.1 Garages to rent are available through the open moves homes website.

6.3.2 All applicants are eligible to express an interest in garages, which are available through the six Trusts. The individual Trusts may set their own criteria for allocation of these.

6.3.3 Prior to acceptance of allocation of a garage applicants will be required to complete a tenancy agreement outlining the conditions of renting the garage.

6.3.4 mutual exchanges

6.3.5 Eligible applicants can apply on open moves homes to swap their home.

6.3.6 Applicants can join the home swap scheme if they are a tenant with permanent, self-contained accommodation with the following organisations:

- Incommunities
- Local Authorities
- Housing Associations
- Housing Co-operatives

6.3.7 Applicants need to list:

- The areas they wish to move to
- The type of property they require

6.3.8 After completing registration applicants need to check the homes website or use the housing options helpline to see if there are homes available to swap with and then check if they meet the criteria.

6.3.9 Once a suitable match is found the applicant can choose to either:

- Contact the suitable applicant to see if they wish to do the home swap with them, or
- Ask a member of the helpline team or housing officer to contact the other applicant on their behalf.

6.3.10 Results of all lettings will be published openly and made available to the public via the web-site and the newsletter, incorporating the following details:

- Total number of bids received for the property
- Confirmation of the successful customer's membership date and relevant band
- Property type

6.4 **lettings criteria**

6.4.1 Lettings criteria are the rules used to decide which property an individual applicant is eligible for. Every advert for a vacant property will state the lettings criteria for that property.

6.4.2 The purpose of having property criteria is to:

- Assist customers in making informed choices when considering available properties
- Enable partner landlords to make best use of their stock
- Help to develop balanced and sustainable communities
- Ensure new tenants applying for housing benefit qualify for the eligible benefit in relation to property size and their household composition
- Make new customers aware of any community lettings initiatives which are in operation in specific areas

6.5 age restrictions on properties

6.5.1 Age restrictions can only be placed on properties in response to a local lettings policy, which are decided and agreed in response to estate management issues following the guidelines below.

6.5.2 Age restrictions can be placed on properties in the following circumstances:

- The property is sheltered accommodation
- The property has a care line attached
- There is an estate management issue or evidence of a high level of ASB and there is an initiative to reduce this
- The property is purpose built for older tenants.

6.5.3 All other properties will be placed as having an age restriction of minimum age of 18.

6.5.4 All age restrictions on properties must be decided in line with the guidance below on local lettings policies and, as with all restrictions, be subject to review in line with:

- Housing demand
- Housing need
- Changing housing management issues.

7 Local and rural lettings policy criteria

7.1.1 There is a provision for local, community and rural village lettings initiatives within the allocations policy. In accordance with CLG code of guidance, local and rural lettings policies can be operated, but with the provision that overall reasonable preference is given to applicants in the reasonable preference categories and that there is no discrimination. The following criteria apply.

7.1.2 They must be decided in consultation with:

- Voids Director
- Strategic Housing Needs Manager
- Tenants and local residents regardless of tenure
- Equality and diversity officers from both relevant housing provider and the local authority
- Appropriate Local Authority senior officer
- Relevant elected members
- Relevant management board
- Other relevant local liaison & enabling officers

7.1.3 A stock and demand profile of the area must be developed, and in addition final approval must be obtained prior to implementation of any local lettings policy from the Local Authority's senior housing officer. Any proposals for local lettings policies must include a proposal which addresses the issues below:

- Identify and explore the barriers to accessing housing
- Deliver better outcomes and improve life chances for current tenants and future residents
- Local tenants and residents groups and board members can identify the need for local lettings plans.
- Cohesion on community and social issues
- Local economic and service factors specific to the area in question

7.1.4 Tenants and residents and relevant providers can make the initial request in a number of ways:

- By letter or by e-mail
- Verbal communication
- Via consultation through tenants groups

7.1.5 Local and rural lettings policies

- Local and rural lettings policies be in a specific neighbourhood, rural area or estate. Policy development take into account:
 - Particular local circumstances
 - Planned regeneration priorities
 - The need for more intensive housing management
 - Increased investment in the area
 - Multi-agency working
 - Support for smaller local populations, their economies and service provisions
 - Local area demand.
 - A clear commitment to equality of opportunity and cohesion.
 - A clear commitment to working towards more balanced communities aiming to re-house a mix of:
 - Different household types
 - Households of different ages/and or with children of different ages
 - Households of different racial and ethnic groups
 - People who are in paid employment and those who are not in paid employment
 - Families that have one parent and those which have two parents
 - Households that have previously had a tenancy and those who have not

7.1.6 Key stages required developing local lettings policies

Breakdown of and information on:

- Property types and numbers
- Household type, including customer profile information on residents
- Voids and lettings within last financial year
- Numbers and reasons for refusal
- Reasons for re-housing and reasons why tenants leave
- Identification of particular management issues –‘hot spots’ for residents and tenants
- Where most availability has occurred and why
- Number of registered transfers
- The level of demand for properties in the area
- Duration of tenancies
- Re-let times
- The layout of the area and services available
- Social issues within the area and any multi-agency involvement
- Rural profile as per local development framework i.e. rural village

7.1.7 how is this applied?

7.1.8 Fifty percent of lettings will be allocated to customers in housing need who also meet the secondary local and/or rural preference criteria in the case of an agreed local and/or rural lettings policy.

7.1.9 rural lettings criteria only

1. The applicant will currently reside within the identified Rural Village and have done so continuously for 12 months
2. The applicant currently works within the Rural Village (other than seasonal work) and has done so continuously for the past 12 months
3. The applicant has a close family connection (either mother, father, son or daughter) who resides within the Rural Village and has done so for the past 5 years
4. The applicant has lived in the Rural Village for 5 years or more and/or for 5 years at some point in the past.

7.1.10 It is important to note that support for rural housing is further supplemented through the Council's affordable housing programme. In many smaller rural areas where targeted housing developments are taking place it is the Local Authority's approach to ensure that a percentage of all properties built are made available for local residents. This includes developments where property is offered for sale, low cost home ownership, rent and shared ownership. This can come via section 106 agreements and other planning tools. Therefore the approach to rural lettings policy development will be aligned as appropriate with any new housing developments and the application of the affordable housing policy

7.2 nominations from other RSLs and nomination agreements

7.2.1 All RSL properties that are allocated via Bradford homes scheme will be deemed 'nominations'. However, with the current Authority Agreement in place on nomination rights (i.e. fifty percent) it is the RSL's responsibility to ensure they measure previous years' nominations acceptance figures and allocate properties on homes accordingly. Nominations will be monitored by Incommunities as the agent of the Local Authority.

7.2.2 Partner Associations allocating properties through Homes are:

- Brunel
- Accent
- Manningham
- William Sutton
- Yorkshire Metropolitan
- Anchor Housing Association
- Nashayman
- Places for People
- Hanover Housing
- Headrow Housing
- Home Housing

7.2.3 Each Housing Association will sign a nominations agreement with Incommunities and Bradford Council (see separate nominations agreement policy). It is the overall responsibility of the Local Authority to ensure the nominations agreement is adhered to.

Local variations from the Joint Allocations Policy are to be expected and are accepted in line with the particular organisation’s objectives and customer base.

7.2.4 Housing Associations must

- Advertise their properties for nominations via the homes website
- Provide regular information on successful nominations
- Complete and update the events section on:
 - Successful nomination
 - Reason for refusals

(This can be done in the events history and under the refusal procedure. This needs to be done to allow transparency and effective monitoring)
(See nominations agreement).

8 keeping the housing register up to date

8.1 updating the application/registration form

8.1.1 annual review

8.1.2 Every twelve months on the anniversary of their initial application registered members will be contacted to check:

- If applicants/household members circumstances have changed
- Whether applicants/household members wish to remain on the housing register.

8.1.3 Contact will consist of:

- A notice on the homes website and newsletter.
- Prompts to customers on the homes website to renew/update application details
- Letters to inactive bidders in the last twelve months who will be given 28 days to respond and update or renew their application

8.1.4 If Members do not respond within the required timescale their registration may be suspended, if one of the categories identified below applies.

8.2 Inactive applications

8.2.1 Applications will be suspended as inactive in the following circumstances

- If the applicant asks us to do so
- If the application is no longer valid and no response has been received from customers during the annual review
- If applicants do not respond to a review letter or other correspondence.
- If applicants move and do not tell Incommunities their new address.
- If applicants leave the country and are subsequently prevented from being registered because of the restrictions within the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996.
- If it is discovered that applicants have supplied false or incomplete information

8.3 duplicate applications

- 8.3.1** In order to maintain good maintenance and management of the systems, the creation of duplicate applications must be avoided.
- 8.3.2** When an attempt to make a duplicate application is made this will be recognised on the website and the 'inputter' will be warned that an application already exists and in most cases be prevented from creating the application
- 8.3.3** Identified duplicate applications will be deleted automatically
- 8.3.4** In the cases where the attempt to create a duplicate application is made in order to update or change address details this can be updated at the local housing trust or access point. The events screen will be updated to reflect this change and reason for it. In the instance that names and surnames, date of births or applicants need removing from the membership form then customers/offices must write to the Strategic Housing Needs Manager providing evidence of the change. The Manager will then update the records and update the events history confirming that evidence has been provided.
- On the homes system individuals will fall into the following categories:
 - Current members
 - Live active bidders

8.4 suspended members and categories of suspensions

- Suspended re-housed members
 - Suspended ineligible member
 - Suspended member for arrears
 - Suspended member for anti-social behaviour
 - Suspended inactive members – members who have failed to update or renew their application
 - Suspended duplicate members
- 8.4.1** Members on homes are not permanently deleted. This is to ensure:
- Effective monitoring – in order to ensure a picture of registered members is available
 - Equality of opportunity for members to reactivate their membership if a reported error has occurred and their membership has been inappropriately deleted
 - That all suspended applicants can be reviewed and application re-activated and updated without unnecessarily creating new duplicate applications that block or slow down the system and prevent inefficient membership and present an inaccurate picture of housing need.

9.0 Bradford Homes Overcrowding Allocations Policy: March 2011 Appendix

9.1.1 Background – the Pathfinder Programme and Overcrowding and Bradford. In December 2007, the has been made in reducing the use of temporary accommodation Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) stated that, whilst excellent progress and in meeting the Decent Homes standard,

“We now want local authorities to increase their focus on overcrowding alongside these issues. We have spent too long focusing on individual aspects of poor housing and now want to focus on lifting children out of bad housing overall”¹.

This is the intent behind the CLG’s funding of over 75 Overcrowding Pathfinder Programmes over 2008-10, including all 33 London Boroughs. The Bradford Pathfinder Programme has undertaken a number of measures to tackle overcrowding in the district, including enabling 80 under-occupiers to free up family Incommunities properties; giving 75 overcrowded households access to the private rented sector through the Bond Scheme; and bringing back to use 5 empty private sector properties for overcrowded households.

Clearly, overcrowded housing cannot be solved only through the Homes system. However, in conjunction with the freeing up of under-occupied properties, widening Homes opportunities for overcrowded households has a part to play in tackling overcrowding, and thereby addressing the educational, health and social disadvantages faced by overcrowded families.

According to the 2007-8 Bradford Housing Requirements Study², there are around 8,300 households in Bradford who are overcrowded by the CLG’s

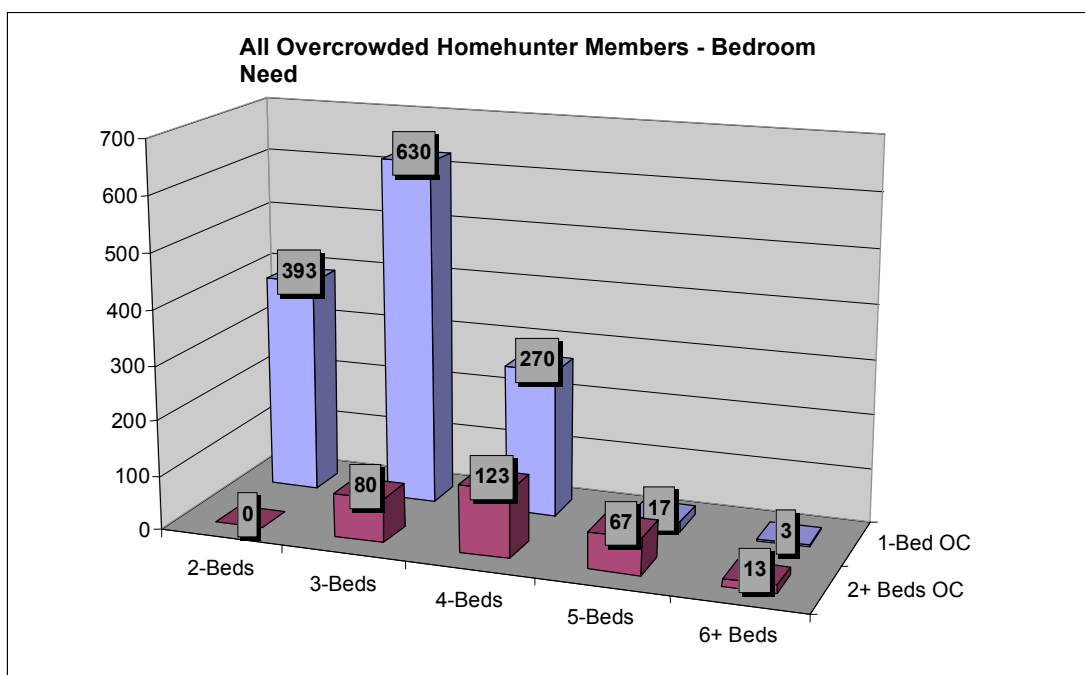
¹ Tackling Overcrowding in England: An Action Plan, CLG, London, 2007, p6

² Bradford Housing Requirements Study, 2007/08 (2008)

Bedroom Standard³. Just under 1,300 of these are “severely overcrowded”; less than 20% of these overcrowded households are in the socially rented sector⁴. This totals more than 4% of Bradford’s households; putting Bradford’s rate of overcrowding well above the national average⁵.

At the last intensive analysis of the former Homehunter CBL system, over 1,500 households were overcrowded; fewer than 300 of these are “severely overcrowded”⁶. As such, it is expected that the impact of the new overcrowding policy will be modest – by comparison to, for example, the 837 statutorily homeless applicants accepted during 2007/8 in Bradford. Figure 1 shows the Homehunter picture in more detail.

Figure 1: Overcrowded Homehunter members by bedroom need



Source: Homehunter system analysis (2008)

Overcrowding in Bradford also has a marked ethnic dimension, which cannot be ignored. For example, the Housing Requirements Study found that whilst residents of Pakistani ethnicity comprise 14.5% of the district’s population, 52% of the district’s overcrowding is experienced by this community; for

³ See Appendix, below. All references to overcrowding are in accordance with the Bedroom Standard, unless otherwise stated.

⁴ Ibid, p42

⁵ Under 3% of England’s households are overcrowded according to the Bedroom Standard – see the CLG’s Housing Survey’s Bulletin no. 2, Jan 2008 (esp. p8):

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/januaryissuetwo.pdf>

⁶ Source: internal Homehunter analysis, September-October 2008.

Bangladeshi residents, the respective figures are 1.1% and 5%. Non-White British groups are generally between three and five times more likely to be overcrowded than their White British counterparts. Finally, overcrowded non-White British residents are much less likely to consider themselves overcrowded,⁷ raising a significant question of fair access to housing services.

9.1.2 homes policy

One of the measures used to address this situation is increased priority for overcrowded applicants to Homes. It is not envisaged that overcrowding can be tackled using Housing Association stock alone; however, in conjunction with an effective approach on under-occupation the new Homes policies will play a part on addressing the problem in Bradford.

9.1.3 band B

This is for households that are “severely overcrowded” only (2 bedrooms or more short of the Bedroom Standard – see Appendix for more details). The following will apply:

- as band B is only one band below the priority given to accepted statutory homeless cases, some of the strict tests laid out in part vii of the 1996 Housing Act are used in this policy
- the total number of household occupants – that is, those staying there on an ongoing basis which is at least semi-permanent – must be such that the Bedroom Standard occupation level is at least two bedrooms over the number of bedrooms in the house
- the occupation level should be confirmed by a visit to the property, alongside *reasonable inquiries* such as benefits/payslips linked to the address. The Housing Options Officer awarding the band must be satisfied of the occupation level
- in addition, the household must contain “*dependent children*” along the lines of the 1996 Housing Act criteria – children with a primary residence (or exceptionally, other dependence) in the severely overcrowded household⁸

⁷ All this paragraph’s figures Bradford Housing Requirements Study, 2007/08 (2008)., p42.

⁸ It should be noted that, in lines with the family-oriented priority of the Programme, priority need categories other than child residence will not qualify an overcrowded household for Band B priority.

- The applicant must be “unintentionally overcrowded”
 - i.e. s/he must not have “deliberately done or failed to have done anything in consequence of which s/he ceases to occupy accommodation which is available for her/his occupation and which it would have been reasonable for her/him to continue to occupy” – in consequence of which s/her is now severely overcrowded
 - All the other provisions of this test in s191, 1996 Housing Act and in Section 11 of the 2006 Code of Guidance apply to this test – substituting overcrowding for homelessness, of course. Therefore the same considerations – affordability, violence, reasonableness, good faith, etc. – must be taken into account for severely overcrowded applicants
- the overcrowded household must be resident in the Bradford LA district **and** at least one member of the household must have a “local connection” to the district – again, in terms of the 1996 Housing Act
- the general provisions on overcrowding in section 3 (below) regarding 6-month residence and the lack of a “natural growth” requirement also apply

9.1.4 band C

band C is likely to give applicants a far longer waiting time than band B, and a lower likelihood of getting a property in their desired locality. Whilst it is still important to have clear restrictions covering access to a scheme giving higher priority than band D, the extensive safeguards covering band B award are not necessary.

For a band C award, the following criteria must be satisfied:

- the household must be overcrowded by the Bedroom Standard (and not entitled to band B). This will include both applicants overcrowded by 1 bedroom and severely overcrowded applicants who are excluded from Band B because, for example, they are “intentionally overcrowded”.
- the general provisions on overcrowding in section 3 (below) regarding 6-month residence and the lack of a “natural growth” requirement also apply.

9.2. either band B or band C

The stipulations in this section apply to both a band B and a Band C award.

- the household must have been in the overcrowded situation for at least six months.
- **there is no requirement that the household has become overcrowded through “natural growth”**. A significant proportion of Bradford’s overcrowding is made up of “concealed” or “multiple” households, where overcrowding can be relieved by one part of the whole household moving out (e.g. a couple and their child leaving their parents’ home)⁹ . .

9.4. expected impact of policy

The available data suggests that the impact of the policy change will be limited, as only a small number of households are expected to qualify for higher banding. For example, as at May 2010 only 24% of overcrowded households on Homes reported that they were living with friends or family as opposed to having their own tenancy, whilst at July 2010 only 5 households were in priority band B due to severe overcrowding. Therefore it is very unlikely that a large number of extra households will be awarded bands B or C as a result of the policy change.

However the impact will be monitored from implementation and particular attention to the overcrowding policy will be paid in the first formal Allocations Policy Review. This is expected to lead either to the incorporation of this overcrowding policy into the Allocations Policy document itself, or else amendment and continued monitoring.

If you have any questions regarding any aspect of the policy, please feel free to contact Andrew Bebbington on 01274 432356.

Appendix: Definitions

Bedroom Standard definition (provided by the CLG).

guidelines for assessing overcrowding: the bedroom standard

The Bedroom Standard is based on the ages and composition of the family. A notional number of bedrooms is allocated to each household in accordance with its composition by age, sex and marital status and relationships of family members. A separate bedroom is allocated to each:

⁹ The CLG does not draw any distinction between “natural growth” and “multiple household” overcrowding, and there is no reason to believe that the health/educational detriment are any different in the two situations.

- married or cohabiting couple
- adult aged 21 years or more
- pair of adolescents aged 10-20 years of the same sex
- pair of children aged under 10 years regardless of sex

Any unpaired person aged 10-20 years is paired, if possible, with a child aged under 10 years of the same sex or, if that is not possible given a separate bedroom. The same applies to any unpaired child aged under 10 years.

definition of a bedroom

For the purposes of measuring overcrowding it is important that the following definition of bedroom is used:

Include any room that, when built, was intended to be a bedroom even it is not used as such at present and even if it does not have a bed in it. It must have a window.

There must be at least one bedroom. Include bedsitters, box rooms and attic bedrooms.

Do not include living rooms or other areas of the house/flat that are used for sleeping. If living rooms used for sleeping were included as “bedrooms” it would lead to an under-recording of overcrowding.

A simple check is, if the accommodation were put up for sale, how many bedrooms would the owner claim it had?

severe overcrowding

Households, who are severely overcrowded, are two or more bedrooms short of the Bedroom Standard.

E.g. – a household who would require a three bedroom property if assessed against the Bedroom Standard but who are currently living in a one bedroom property.

Under-occupation

Households who are under-occupiers are two or more bedrooms above the Bedroom Standard.

E.g. – a household living in a three bedroom property who would only require one bedroom if assessed against the Bedroom Standard.

