

APPENDIX B

Proposed Changes to the Sub Regional Allocations Policy

Aims of the policy review:

- To meet legislative requirements and incorporate new statutory guidance
- To incorporate feedback from customers, partners and stakeholders since scheme launch
- To ensure the policy achieves the aims of the partnership
- To minimise misinterpretations of policy
- To provide clear and thorough detail to customers, partners and stakeholders

Details of Policy Changes:

No.	Current Policy	Proposed Amendment	Rationale
1.	Housing Related Debt		
	<p>Applicants with current housing related debt are placed in band 4. If the debt is cleared they return to their appropriate band.</p> <p>If applicants have debt from a previous property/tenancy they are placed in band 4 for 12 months. At the end of 12 months they can be reassessed if debt cleared or a payment plan has been maintained for 12 months.</p>	<p>Applicants will be assessed according to their housing need and placed in the relevant band with the relevant needs where appropriate. However they will not be authorised to bid on properties until a) the debt is cleared or b) they have maintained a payment plan rigidly for no less than 6 months.</p>	<p>It was originally assumed that placing applicants with debt (a form of unacceptable behaviour) would prevent them being successful when bidding. This has not been the case and a number of households have been housed leaving the debt outstanding. Landlords are losing this money in many cases. It should be noted that there is possible legal challenge risk to this change, as some see 'suspensions' as illegal. All partners will need to run this aspect past internal legal teams.</p>

No.	Current Policy	Proposed Amendment	Rationale
2.	Social Tenants in Band 1 & Band 2		
	Tenants of BH landlords can accrue band 1 or 2 priority if the need exists for urgent re-housing. Tenants of social landlords who have opted to place 100% of their properties through BH can also gain Band 1 or 2 priority where appropriate. Tenants of other landlords can not.	Tenants of all social landlords where the tenancy is within the Bedfordshire sub-region, regardless of the landlord's participation in BH will be eligible to accrue Band 1 or 2 priority. BH protocol for awarding this priority must be followed including providing detailed evidence of the urgent need.	Tenants who were unable to accrue high/urgent priority would be limited in their options within the social housing sector. This change would treat all social tenants in Bedfordshire equally. Each social tenant that is re-housed will free up a property for another household.
3.	Social Tenants Residing Outside of Bedfordshire		
	Tenants of social landlords where the tenancy is outside of Bedfordshire remain in band 4 regardless of housing needs.	Tenants of social landlords where the tenancy is outside of Bedfordshire, but who meet the local connection criteria to Bedfordshire, will be assessed in accordance with their housing circumstances and will be entitled to band 3 status if appropriate, but not band 1 or 2.	Households of all other tenures residing outside of Bedfordshire are able to accrue needs in band 3 where they have a local connection, so this would assess all tenures equally. There is some concern that this will put pressure on Bedfordshire resources (e.g. adaptation funds, social services etc), but other sub-regional schemes have not found this to be the case where they operate in this manner.
4.	Local Authority Tied Tenants		
	Where an employee of a local authority in Bedfordshire has a tied	Where an employee of a local authority in Bedfordshire has a tied tenancy and as part of	Where a local authority is contractually obliged to provide alternative accommodation upon a tied tenant retiring from local authority employment, the

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	tenancy and as part of that tenancy agreement the local authority is contractually obliged to provide alternative accommodation at the end of that employment, the household is given appropriate needs within band 3.	that tenancy agreement the local authority is contractually obliged to provide alternative accommodation at the end of that employment, the household will be given band 2 priority.	needs level given in band 3 may not be high enough to enable re-housing. Band 2 priority will enable the local authority to fulfil its obligation to re-house.
5.	Bedroom Deficiency		
	Households who are 1 or 2 bedrooms deficient are awarded 1 need for this, those who are 3 or more bedrooms deficient are awarded 2 needs.	Households who are 1 bedroom deficient will be awarded 2 needs in band 3 for this and those who are 2 or more bedrooms deficient will be awarded 3 needs.	This falls in line with guidelines on bedroom standards and overcrowding; 1 bedroom deficient being “overcrowded” and 2 or more being “severely overcrowded”.
6.	Needs Increase in Band 3		
	The number of needs attached to each criterion in band 3 has been outlined in section 10 of the current policy document.	The number of needs attached to each criterion in band 3 will increase by 1. This will not apply to Dependant Child or Assured Shorthold Tenancies (AST), which will remain as 1 need each. <i>Possibly additional increase needs for medical; low=2,</i>	Privately rented accommodation held on an AST can be seen as adequate housing and is a viable housing option to those in housing difficulty. The partnership wanted to give less priority to households in this tenure than other forms of more insecure tenure and contemplated placing these households in band 4. However a large number of households in band 3 with 2 needs (often AST with children) have been successful, so the concern was moving these 2 criteria into band 4 would lead to

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		<i>high=4.</i>	more band 4 lets, which is in date order, so could lead to the housing of more home owners or people on high incomes.
7.	Dependant Child Needs		
	Having dependant children or child attracts 1 need in band 3.	This will continue to attract 1 need in band 3, but applicants will only be eligible to receive this need if other criteria in band 3 apply. Households will not be able to be in band 3 with only dependant child needs.	Having a dependant child (DC) is not really a housing need in itself; however it was felt that where a household has a DC they should be given higher priority than a similar sized household with no dependants. Care will be taken to ensure the policy can not be misinterpreted and DC needs awarded alone.
8.	Additional Band 3 Need – Households in AST who are owed a duty under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996		
	Currently these applicants would be in band 2 with high priority.	Households who are owed a duty under Part VII who have been placed in a private sector AST, where the tenancy is held directly with the private landlord and not through a licence or tenancy with the Local Authority, will not be placed in band 2 but will be awarded needs in Band 3.	In some cases households who are owed a duty under Part VII are placed directly in private AST on 6 or 12 month tenancies. Where these applicants maintained band 2 status they were then being successful when bidding and leaving behind the private tenancy, which was causing bad feeling with the landlords. The level of priority will be reduced until such a time that the tenancy is due to expire, but these households fall into a reasonable preference category so must be afforded some level of priority. They will be awarded 2 needs.

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9.	Refusals – penalties for band 3 and 4 applicants		
	If an applicant refuses 3 offers of tenancy they will be asked to identify which property types and areas they would like and only bids placed that match that criteria will be considered.	Where an applicant in band 3 makes 3 unreasonable refusals of offer they will be placed in band 4 for 6 months. Where an applicant in band 4 makes 3 unreasonable refusals of offer they will be tied down to agreed types of property and specific areas and any bids placed on properties not matching this will not be considered for 6 months. Failure to attend a mutually arranged accompanied viewing will be considered as a refusal.	A high number of refusals have been received from applicants bidding on properties they are not really interested in. This leads to extended officer time and can lead to void time extensions and other applicants missing out on a property they would have accepted. To reduce this a penalty has been introduced. A 'reasonable' refusal will be defined as due to something that the applicant did not know from the property advert. If the applicant had been informed of something in an advert (e.g. area) and then refuses this will be considered as 'unreasonable'.
10.	Applicant's Requirement to be Contactable		
	No specific requirement for the applicant to be available for contact, meaning officers must chase to make offers of tenancy.	It will be the applicant's responsibility to be contactable and keep all contact details up to date and return any attempts to contact made by partners within 1 working day. Where an applicant is not contactable an offer of tenancy will not be	Partners were spending lots of time trying to get hold of applicants to discuss offers of property. This was increasing time to process shortlists and in some cases leading to increases in void times. If an applicant is actively bidding it is reasonable to expect them to be available for contact following close of bidding.

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		made, or may be withdrawn.	
11.	Cross Border Preference		
	10% of properties are advertised with preference to applicants on cross border housing registers regardless of the applicant's place of residence.	Preference for these properties will no longer be given to applicants who reside in the same local authority area as the property.	Some applicants were applying to alternative housing registers in areas where they had no connection or desire to live just so they could bid on 'cross border' properties in their own local authority area, which are often let to lower priority applicants. The amendment will allow cross border advertising to work as envisaged allowing true cross border movement of applicants.
12.	Requirements to Bid: Band 1 & 2		
	Applicants in these bands (other than social tenants under-occupying their accommodation) are required to place a bid on a suitable property within 6 weeks of being awarded the priority. After this a bid will be placed by an officer and this will be considered as a final offer if the bid is successful.	Applicants in these bands (other than social tenants under-occupying their accommodation) will be required to use all 3 of their bids each week where suitable properties have been available. Failure to do so will lead to bids being placed by officers and a successful bid will be considered as a final offer. Suitable properties will be defined at point of awarding the band 1 or 2 priority.	It was always intended that applicants in high priority would use all their available bids each week, but the policy did not clearly define this, so some applicants were only using a single bid within the 6 week period. This was leading to extended time in the high band and extended time in temporary accommodation in the case of homeless applicants. This amendment will also help to reduce the numbers of people chasing band 2 priority where the need to move is not urgent.

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13.	Allocations Outside the CBL Scheme		
	Direct lets and local lettings policies and extra care retirement properties are briefly mentioned in the current policy.	A new section clearly outlining when properties will be allocated outside of the CBL scheme and reasons for this (e.g. example reasons for direct lettings) will be explained in the amended policy. Reasons for local lettings policies and how these will affect the priority of bidding applicants will be clearly explained.	This section was not considered clear enough or in enough detail.
14.	Shortlisting Process		
	This process is explained in the current policy.	More detail will be provided in the amended policy, clearly explaining the process for applicants.	More detail was required in this section.
12.	Application Process		
	Details of who can apply and who to contact to apply are outlined in the current policy.	Clear details of who can apply and how to apply to the scheme will be outlined in detail. Each stage of the application process will be detailed.	More detail was required in this section.

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13.	Content Re-design		
		<p>New sections will be added:- e.g. 'Bidding': how to bid, preference bidding, 'suitable' bid, requirements/restrictions to bidding etc.; 'Applying to the Scheme': how to apply, assistance, incomplete applications etc.</p>	<p>Contents will be re-designed and some new sections included. This will make the document more user friendly and enable additional clarification/detail where required.</p>