

Appendix B Central Bedfordshire Equality Impact Assessment

Title of the Assessment:	Discharge of Homelessness Duty in to a Suitable Home Policy	Date of Assessment:	19/02/14
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Stage 1 - Setting out the nature of the proposal and potential outcomes.

Stage 1 – Aims and Objectives	
1.1	<p>What are the objectives of the proposal under consideration?</p> <p>The Discharge of Homelessness Duty in to a Suitable Home Policy sets out the Council’s approach to discharging its homelessness duty. The policy provides a clear definition of suitable accommodation for discharging its duty to social housing and the private rented sector and implements a power which will increase the availability of properties that can be used to relieve homelessness.</p> <p>The policy will :</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> enable greater flexibility in bringing the homelessness duty to an end use social housing stock to maximum effect with an increase in planned allocation reduce the number of people on the housing register reduce the use and time spent in expensive temporary accommodation.
1.2	<p>Why is this being done?</p> <p>Currently, if an applicant has been accepted by the Council as homeless the applicant will be offered a social housing property once a suitable property becomes available. This is either through a direct let or through Choice Based Lettings following a Housing Register application. The policy introduces an additional route for the applicant to be housed which is an offer for a suitable property in the private sector.</p> <p>Applicants should be housed more quickly due to the increased availability of properties, spend less time in temporary accommodation and more social housing properties can be allocated to those in need making a planned move.</p>
1.3	<p>What will be the impact on staff or customers?</p> <p>The anticipated greater choice of accommodation could enable households to remain close to a school or family. Homeless acceptances are likely to be provided with a settled home more quickly reducing the length of stay in temporary accommodation.</p> <p>Other households in housing need on the housing register will benefit from an increase in available social housing lets (which would have otherwise been allocated to people owed the homelessness duty).</p> <p>The main potential negative impact on customers is that applicants would no longer be sure of the allocation of social housing to relieve their homelessness. The disadvantage of private rented sector housing compared to social housing is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the quality of accommodation; - poorer access to tenancy sustainment support;

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- higher rents; and
- less security of tenure.

Personal circumstances are taken in to account when considering whether a Private Sector Offer (PSO) would be suitable to reduce the disproportionate effect the above disadvantages can have on vulnerable households. This includes consideration of affordability. The impact of the location of the property is minimised through consideration of access to schooling, employment, caring responsibilities, medical services and other services. A minimum standard of a suitable property is also set out to prevent applicants from living in poor quality housing.

There is no identified impact on staff.

1.4 How does this proposal contribute or relate to other Council initiatives?

The Housing Green Paper in 2013 set out the commitment to introduce the private sector offer power.

The policy supplements the Allocations Policy and Homelessness Strategy.

1.5 In which ways does the proposal support Central Bedfordshire's legal duty to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act

Applicants considered vulnerable, requiring adaptations to the property due to their disability and those fleeing domestic violence, violence or harassment will be exempt from private sector offers. This will ensure that these groups can receive the support that social housing is typically more readily able to provide. This will also reduce repeat homelessness.

The suitable property criteria provides additional protections for vulnerable households so that they are not placed in poor quality accommodation. Poor housing can have a detrimental effect on the health and well being of households. The risk that homeless households might be placed in unsuitable accommodation will be reduced.

- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it

Homeless households should benefit from a reduced length of stay in temporary accommodation (TA). This will reduce stress, frustration and reduce the financial impact as TA typically costs more and 'living in limbo' can hamper employment prospects.

The suitable location criteria will protect children from being moved away from a school during important exam years.

Older and disabled people that rely on family and friends delivering care and support will not be detrimentally impacted as homeless households providing this support will be housed within suitable proximity to continue to deliver this support.

Homeless households will not have to make a choice between a home and employment as the criteria takes in to account access to employment.

Applicants with substance misuse problems are unlikely to be placed in a position where they are

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forced to choose between an increased risk of relapse and a home by being housed near social networks that could trigger a relapse.

- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it

Allowing people owed the main homelessness duty to turn down offers of suitable accommodation in the private rented sector and wait for an offer of social housing is unfair:

- to other households on the housing register who have to wait longer to access limited social housing stock; and
- to the taxpayer who is funding expensive temporary accommodation whilst people owed the homelessness duty wait for an offer of social housing.

1.6 Is it possible that this proposal could damage relations amongst groups of people with different protected characteristics or contribute to inequality by treating some members of the community less favourably such as people of different ages, men or women, people from black and minority ethnic communities, disabled people, carers, people with different religions or beliefs, new and expectant mothers, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities?

Applicants that are housed in the private sector may not have the same level of access to tenancy sustainment services that social housing providers provide. To reduce this impact personal circumstances are taken in to account to understand whether a private sector offer would be appropriate. Also during the first year of a PSO tenancy, the Council will endeavor to provide some level of support to the applicant to help sustain the tenancy, subject to resources available and competing demand for services. Where appropriate, support services, such as Bromford Support, will be sought to help sustain the tenancy.

Vulnerable people such as applicants at risk of domestic abuse may be considered for a PSO out of the area so that they can move away from the risk. In these situations the Council may not be able to offer the same tenancy support that the applicant may have had in Central Bedfordshire. Instead the Council would only be able to make the receiving authority aware of the vulnerable person moving in to their area and signpost the applicant to available services.

The engagement activity highlighted a concern that applicants would not be treated as fairly in the private rented sector compared to social housing. It is perceived that private sector tenants would have a lower level of redress if problems developed with the property or the landlord. There is also the concern that outcomes can be different if the tenant chooses to exercise their rights. For example a private sector tenant can enforce their rights to get repairs done, but the landlord may decide not to renew the tenancy agreement at the end of the fixed term.

The suitability criteria does not specifically consider whether the landlord allows pets and the impact this could have on the household. Pets can be important to some applicants, particularly elderly people and rough sleepers who may rely on pets for companionship. The Council is of the view that homelessness is an emergency situation and a suitable property should not be refused if pets cannot be accommodated. This is the policy for Temporary Accommodation and so it is likely that the applicant would have made alternative arrangements prior to the offer. Council Officers will however try and match a household with a pet to a house where the owner allows pets but this might not be possible each time.

Proximity to cultural and faith resources are not specifically considered in the policy, however

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under human rights legislation individuals have a right to hold a religious belief but the right to manifest that belief is qualified. Consideration within the policy is given to ensuring that people have access to employment, education, local services, amenities and transport. **Added to this will be 'due regard will be given to issues related to the Equality Act protected characteristics' to take account of access to religion or belief..**

The policy states that the council would not usually make a PSO if the applicant is considered vulnerable. Vulnerability is not defined in the policy. Engagement activity has highlighted that young people are especially vulnerable in private sector accommodation but it is not clear whether young people and care leavers are included in this definition.

Stage 2 - Consideration of national and local research, data and consultation findings in order to understand the potential impacts of the proposal.

Stage 2 - Consideration of Relevant Data and Consultation

In completing this section it will be helpful to consider:

- **Publicity** – Do people know that the service exists?
- **Access** – Who is using the service? / Who should be using the service? Why aren't they?
- **Appropriateness** – Does the service meet people's needs and improve outcomes?
- **Service support needs** – Is further training and development required for employees?
- **Partnership working** – Are partners aware of and implementing equality requirements?
- **Contracts & monitoring** – Is equality built into the contract and are outcomes monitored?

2.1. Examples of relevant evidence sources are listed below. Please tick which evidence sources are being used in this assessment and provide a summary for each protected characteristic in sections 2.2 and 2.3.

Internal desktop research

	Place survey / Customer satisfaction data		Demographic Profiles – Census & ONS
	Local Needs Analysis	x	Service Monitoring / Performance Information
	Other local research		

Third party guidance and examples

x	National / Regional Research		Analysis of service outcomes for different groups
x	Best Practice / Guidance	x	Benchmarking with other organisations
	Inspection Reports		

Public consultation related activities

x	Consultation with Service Users		Consultation with Community / Voluntary Sector
x	Consultation with Staff		Customer Feedback / Complaints
	Data about the physical environment e.g. housing market, employment, education and training provision, transport, spatial planning and public spaces		

Consulting Members, stakeholders and specialists

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	Elected Members	x	Expert views of stakeholders representing diverse groups
x	Specialist staff / service expertise		

Please bear in mind that whilst sections of the community will have common interests and concerns, views and issues vary within groups. E.g. women have differing needs and concerns depending on age, ethnic origin, disability etc

Lack of local knowledge or data is not a justification for assuming there is not a negative impact on some groups of people. Further research may be required.

2.2. Summary of Existing Data and Consultation Findings: - Service Delivery Considering the impact on Customers/Residents

- **Age:** e.g. Under 16 yrs / 16-19 yrs / 20-29 yrs / 30-44 yrs / 45-59 yrs / 60-64 yrs / 65-74 yrs / 75+

National data:

In 2009-10 1% of homeless acceptances had priority need because of old age. 7% had priority need because of their young age (16-17year olds and 18-20 year old care leavers).

Local data:

16-44 year olds are those that are most affected by homelessness. Four households were classified as vulnerable due to old age (P1E 2012-13).

The applicant's age when accepted as eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need (April 2012 March 2013)

Age	Count
16 - 24	66
25 - 44	67
45 - 59	20
60 - 64	1
65 - 74	3
75 & Over	2

P1E – 2012/13

66% of homeless households were families with children. This corresponds with national data which found that 68% of homeless acceptances were households with dependant children or included a pregnant woman

Applicant households found to be eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need during the quarter (analysis by household type)

	1 child	2 children	3 or more children	All households
Applicant whose household includes dependent children	57	32	16	105
Applicant is, or household includes, a pregnant woman and there are no other dependent children				24
Applicant aged 16 or 17 years old				2
Applicant formerly "in care", and aged 18 to 20 years old				2

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P1E – 2012/13

On average 34 households are in temporary accommodation each month. 22 (64%) of these were households with dependents or a pregnant woman. The average length of stay for households with dependents or a pregnant woman is 19.5 days, 8.3 more days compared to other households.

Temporary Accommodation

Measure	April 2013- January 2014
Average per month of households in Temporary Accommodation	34
Average per month of households in Temporary Accommodation (households with dependants / pregnant)	22
Average length of stay in temporary accommodation - Pregnant/dependants households	19.5 days
Average length of stay - all other households	11.2 days

Housing Balanced Scorecard 2013/14

Homeless children living in temporary accommodation are some of the most deprived children in this country, missing out on schooling, on play, and opportunities to develop (Shelter: Living in Limbo 2004).

Cold, damp housing harms children's health. Children growing up in such conditions are 25% more likely to suffer severe ill-health and disability during childhood or early adulthood. (DCLG, Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012: Final Stage Impact Assessment, 2012 – from here on referred to as DCLG, 2012)

Good quality accommodation can bring other benefits that can give rise to positive externalities including improved attendance at school and consequent improvements in educational performance and labour market participation. For instance Shelter estimate that 8% of children in sub-standard accommodation miss out on one quarter of all their schooling (DCLG, 2012)

Young people may need additional support to maintain a tenancy due to their inexperience in maintaining a home. Due to the additional tenancy support typically available in social housing, young people may be at higher risk of repeat homelessness in private sector housing.

Older people may also require additional support to sustain their tenancy and may have better outcomes in social housing as this support is more readily available.

The consultation asked 'In determining the suitability of a PSO, the Council will consider the proximity and accessibility to local services, amenities and transport'. Do you agree with this suitability criteria? 10 responded 'yes' and 1 responded 'no'. 1 respondent provided qualitative feedback regarding this criterion stating that consideration to a person's age and/or disability should be considered when assessing accessibility.

- **Disability:** e.g. *Physical impairment / Sensory impairment / Mental health condition / Learning disability or difficulty / Long-standing illness or health condition / Severe disfigurement*

National data:

In 2009-10 14% of homeless acceptances had a priority need related to a physical disability or

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mental illness.

Homelessness and disability

Accepted as homeless applicant, or a member of their household is vulnerable as a result of:	2012/13
Physical disability	8
Mental illness or disability	15
Drug dependency	0
Alcohol dependency	0

P1E 2012-2013

Cold, damp housing can increase rates of asthma, respiratory and skin allergies, and other lung diseases. Poor quality housing is linked to physical accidents and injuries, to social and mental effects including depression, isolation, anxiety or aggression. Noise-related stress, exposure to toxins, lead, asbestos or carbon monoxide can have very severe health impact and even more so on those that already have poor health (DCLG, 2012).

Shelter, the housing charity, found that there are high levels of depression associated with homelessness and living in temporary accommodation. Nearly half of parents with children and 71 per cent of childless people reported being depressed. (Shelter, Living in Limbo, 2004).

Overall, half of people who responded to Shelter's 2004 survey said that their health or their family's health had suffered due to living in temporary accommodation. People who had been living in temporary accommodation for more than a year were more likely to report damage to their health through living in temporary accommodation. (Shelter, Living in Limbo, 2004).

Frequent moving and disruption associated with living in temporary accommodation makes it difficult for children to keep school places, maintain their attendance and do well at school. Two fifths of parents (43 per cent) reported that their children had missed school due to their housing situation. On average, children had missed 55 days of school equivalent to quarter of the school year. One in ten parents (11 per cent) said that at least one of their children did not have a school place at all for the term. Parents also said their children had long journeys to school and had problems with transport. (Shelter, Living in Limbo, 2004).

The trauma of becoming homeless and stresses associated with living in temporary accommodation affect children's mental and emotional well being. Over two fifths (42 per cent) of parents said that their child was 'often unhappy or depressed'. Children also experienced a lot of problems at school including bullying and behavioural problems. One in ten parents (11 per cent) said that their child had been given a statement of Special Educational Needs and one in ten said their child had been suspended, excluded or expelled from school. (Shelter, Living in Limbo, 2004).

- Carers: *A person of any age who provides unpaid support to family or friends who could not manage without this help due to illness, disability, mental ill-health or a substance misuse problem*

Over 2 million people become carers every year (Carers UK). Every day, another six thousand people take on a caring responsibility and 3 in 5 people will become a carer at some point in their lives. By 2026 more than 10% of the population will be over 75 and significant numbers of the workforce age 45+ will have caring responsibilities.

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Valuing Carers 2011 estimates that the economic value of the contribution made by carers in the UK is around £119 billion per year. This is 37% higher than an estimate made in 2007.

- **Gender Reassignment:** *People who are proposing to undergo, are undergoing or have undergone a process (or part of a process) to reassign their sex by changing physiological or other attributes of sex*

- **Pregnancy and Maternity:** *e.g. pregnant women / women who have given birth & women who are breastfeeding (26 week time limit then protected by sex discrimination provisions)*

24 homelessness acceptances were households that included a pregnant woman and no other dependent children in 2012/13 (P1E – 2012/13).

On average 22 households with dependents or a pregnant woman are in temporary accommodation each month. The average length of stay for households with dependents or a pregnant woman is 19.5 days, 8.3 more days than other households.

Cold, damp housing harms children's health and can contribute to post-natal depression in mothers. The development of babies and young children in poor housing conditions can be significantly affected. (DCLG, 2012).

A suitable proximity to ante natal services will be important for pregnant women to ensure consistency in care.

- **Race:** *e.g. Asian or Asian British / Black or Black British / Chinese / Gypsies and Travellers / Mixed Heritage / White British / White Irish / White Other*

National data:

In 2009-10 14% of homeless acceptances were Black or Black British, 7% were Asian or Asian British, 3% were mixed and 45 Chinese or other.

Ethnicity of homelessness acceptances 2012-13

	White	Black	Asian	Mixed	Other
Numbers accepted as being homeless and in priority need	145	7	2	5	0

Table 784: Local authorities' action under the homelessness provisions of the Housing Acts: financial year 2012/13

Ethnic minority households are more likely to live in rented accommodation and flats, and about a quarter are living in pre-1919 homes, many of which are in a poor condition. (Race Equality Foundation 2014). In particular black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi households are more likely to live in homes that fall below the Decent Homes Standard than white households. (Department for Communities and Local Government)

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Housing services are usually tailored to the needs of different clients, but this is rarely the case for Gypsies and Irish Travellers. Many authorities recognise that they would rather live on sites, but since there are not enough of these, they do little to make the accommodation they can provide more suitable, for example by providing tenancy support to those who have recently moved from sites. As a result many Gypsies and Irish Travellers find it difficult to keep up their tenancies, leading to a cycle of eviction, from housing to homelessness and unauthorised encampments, and to eviction again. (CRE)

Overall black and minority ethnic people are more likely to be unemployed, irrespective of their qualifications, place of residence, sex or age. They are less likely to hold senior management positions. (Equality Review (ER)) A property that prohibits access to current employment could therefore have a more significant impact than on White British people.

In 2006 at GCSE 5+A*-C, pupils from of African, African-Caribbean, Bangladeshi and Pakistani backgrounds achieved below national averages. Disrupting education with a school move could therefore have a more detrimental impact on these groups.

- Religion or Belief: *e.g. Buddhist / Christian / Hindu / Jewish / Muslim / Sikh / No religion / Other*

A lack of awareness about a person's religious or other beliefs can lead to discrimination. This is because religion can play a very important part in the daily lives of people and access to cultural and faith resources may be of significant importance.

- Sex: *e.g. Women / Girls / Men / Boys*

National data:

In 2009-10 45% of homeless acceptances were lone parent households with a female applicant and a further 12% were single female applicants.

Two applicants were accepted as homeless as a result of fleeing domestic violence in 2012-13 (P1E – 2012/13).

Lone parents that are female are significantly more likely to be accepted as homeless than male lone parents, but single men are more likely to be accepted than single women.

Applicant households found to be eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need

Couple with dependent children*	Lone parent household with dependent children		One person household		All other household groups
	Male Applicant	Female Applicant*	Male Applicant	Female Applicant	
37	7	82	20	6	7

* include expectant mothers with no other dependent children

Source: P1E 2012-13

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- **Sexual Orientation:** e.g. *Lesbians / Gay men / Bisexuals / Heterosexuals*

Data is not collected on the sexual orientation of homeless applicants.

When parents are very hostile to young lesbian and gay people, some feel forced to leave home even though they may become homeless as a result. The main cause of homelessness in Central Bedfordshire is eviction by parents who are no longer willing to accommodate them (CBC Housing Green Paper 2011/12).

One in five lesbian and gay people expect to be treated worse than heterosexuals when applying for social housing.

- **Other:** e.g. *Human Rights, Poverty / Social Class / Deprivation, Looked After Children, Offenders, Cohesion, Marriage and Civil Partnership*

Tenants in private rented accommodation are 50% more at risk of carbon monoxide poisoning than both home owners and social housing tenants. It is likely that this risk will be more starkly reflected in poor quality private rented sector accommodation. According to the Chief Medical Officer for England (2011), Carbon Monoxide poisoning causes 50 deaths and hospitalises 200 people a year, and also sends 4,000 people to A&E (DCLG, 2012).

2.3. Summary of Existing Data and Consultation Findings – Employment Considering the impact on Employees

- **Age:** e.g. *16-19 / 20-29 / 30-39 / 40-49 / 50-59 / 60+*

- **Disability:** e.g. *Physical impairment / Sensory impairment / Mental health condition / Learning disability or difficulty / Long-standing illness or health condition / Severe disfigurement*

- **Carers:** e.g. *parent / guardian / foster carer / person caring for an adult who is a spouse, partner, civil partner, relative or person who lives at the same address*

- **Gender Reassignment:** *People who are proposing to undergo, are undergoing or have undergone a process (or part of a process) to reassign their sex by changing physiological or other attributes of sex*

- **Pregnancy and Maternity:** e.g. *Pregnancy / Compulsory maternity leave / Ordinary maternity leave / Additional maternity leave*

- **Race:** e.g. *Asian or Asian British / Black or Black British / Chinese / Gypsies and Travellers / Mixed Heritage / White British / White Irish / White Other*

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- **Religion or Belief:** e.g. *Buddhist / Christian / Hindu / Jewish / Muslim / Sikh / No religion / Other*

- **Sex:** *Women / Men*

- **Sexual Orientation:** e.g. *Lesbians / Gay men / Bisexuals / Heterosexuals*

- **Other:** e.g. *Human Rights, Poverty / Social Class / Deprivation, Looked After Children, Offenders, Cohesion, Marriage and Civil Partnership*

2.4. To what extent are vulnerable groups more affected by this proposal compared to the population or workforce as a whole?

The Government identified in its EIA of the Homelessness duty that:

“The priority given to certain groups of young people and people who are disabled or mentally ill (who are considered most vulnerable and likely to suffer hardship if not secured accommodation), combined with the fact that households that include a pregnant woman or a dependant child are considered to have a priority need for accommodation under the homelessness legislation, means that women, pregnant women, young people and children, and disabled people are more likely to be affected by any change in the way that the main homelessness duty can be fully discharged. People from black and minority ethnic communities are also more likely to be affected because they are over-represented among homeless acceptances (compared to the general population).”

2.5. To what extent do current procedures and working practices address the above issues and help to promote equality of opportunity?

Those at most risk of tenancy failure will not be considered suitable for a private sector offer. We would therefore not usually make a PSO if the applicant is considered vulnerable, requires supported accommodation or is considered unlikely to be able to sustain a private rented tenancy.

We would not usually make a PSO if the applicant or a member of their household requires significant disabled adaptations to make the property suitable.

We would not usually make a PSO if the applicant was previously a social housing tenant and who has fled domestic violence; other violence; or harassment.

- To mitigate concerns about reduced security of tenure in the private rented sector, legislation put additional protection in place such as a minimum fixed term tenancy of at least 12 months. Moreover, the duty will recur if the applicant becomes homeless again within two years of accepting the private rented sector offer, through no fault of their own, regardless of whether they still have a priority need for accommodation. The Council is also looking to develop an information pack outlining expectations of tenants and landlords to ensure that there is transparency and availability of information.

The Central Bedfordshire policy states that the Council will try to secure two-year agreements with landlords, where possible.

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The suitability decision can be reviewed on request by the applicant.

A property will not be suitable if:

- Significant disruption will be caused to employment, caring responsibilities, or education of the household.
- There is insufficient proximity to and accessibility of medical facilities and other support, which are used by, or essential to the well-being, of the household will also be taken into account.
- The proximity and accessibility to local services, amenities and transport is not adequate.
- The accommodation is not in a reasonable physical condition and does not meet minimum standards set out in the policy.

During the first year of a PSO tenancy, the Council will endeavor to provide some level of support to the applicant to help sustain the tenancy, subject to resources available and competing demand for services. Where appropriate, support services, such as Bromford Support, will be sought to help sustain the tenancy.

2.6. Are there any gaps in data or consultation findings

Wider views on the policy have not been sought on the impact of the policy.

2.7. What action will be taken to obtain this information?

Formal consultation will be carried out on the policy in March 2014.

Stage 3 - Providing an overview of impacts and potential discrimination.

Stage 3 – Assessing Positive & Negative Impacts

Analysis of Impacts	Impact?		Discrimination?		Summary of impacts and reasons
	(+ve)	(- ve)	YES	NO	
3.1 Age	*			*	Young people and older people may have poorer outcomes in a private sector property due to higher risks of tenancy failure. However personal circumstances are considered in PSOs and tenancy support is available.
3.2 Disability	*			*	Accessibility requirements will be considered before accommodation is offered to ensure that the property is suitable.
3.3 Carers	*			*	Applicants with caring responsibilities will be housed in reasonable proximity to the cared for person.

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3.4 Gender Reassignment	*			*	Increased availability of properties will lead to a faster homelessness solution reducing the need for TA.
3.5 Pregnancy & Maternity				*	Temporary accommodation (TA) and poor accommodation can have negative outcomes on pregnant women and those who have recently given birth. The policy will reduce the need/length of TA use and ensure that accommodation is appropriate.
3.6 Race	*			*	Increased availability of properties will lead to a faster homelessness solution reducing the need for TA.
3.7 Religion / Belief	*			*	
3.8 Sex	*			*	Increased availability of properties will lead to a faster homelessness solution reducing the need for TA.
3.9 Sexual Orientation	*			*	Increased availability of properties will lead to a faster homelessness solution reducing the need for TA.
3.10 Other e.g. Human Rights, Poverty / Social Class / Deprivation, Looked After Children, Offenders, Cohesion Marriage and Civil Partnership				*	

Stage 4 - Identifying mitigating actions that can be taken to address adverse impacts.

Stage 4 – Conclusions, Recommendations and Action Planning

4.1 What are the main conclusions and recommendations from the assessment?

The introduction of private sector offers will increase the supply of housing for homeless households. This will mean that households will spend less time in temporary accommodation. Other households in housing need on the housing register will benefit from an increase in available social housing lets.

Private sector housing can have a number of disadvantages compared to social housing such as poorer quality of housing, poor access to tenancy sustainment support, higher rent and less security of tenure. The policy will mitigate these disadvantages by checking the suitability of a property against the following factors:

- Vulnerability
- Disability

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Affordability - the significance of any disruption caused by the location from employment, caring responsibilities, or education of the household - the proximity to and accessibility of medical facilities and other support, which are used by, or essential to the well-being, of the household - the proximity and accessibility to local services, amenities and transport - PSO outside the Central Bedfordshire area - suitability of property 																							
<p>4.2 What changes will be made to address or mitigate any adverse impacts that have been identified?</p> <p>No changes are required.</p>																							
<p>4.3 Are there any budgetary implications?</p> <p>No adverse implications. If the policy can reduce bed and breakfast use, there may be a positive implication.</p>																							
<p>4.4 Actions to be taken to mitigate against any adverse impacts:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Action</th> <th>Lead Officer</th> <th>Date</th> <th>Priority</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Consult stakeholders on the policy to check that the criteria will not lead to any adverse impacts.</td> <td>Jo Burnham</td> <td>03/03/14</td> <td>H</td> </tr> <tr> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> </tr> <tr> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> </tr> <tr> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>				Action	Lead Officer	Date	Priority	Consult stakeholders on the policy to check that the criteria will not lead to any adverse impacts.	Jo Burnham	03/03/14	H												
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Stage 5 - Checking that all the relevant issues and mitigating actions have been identified

<p>Stage 5 – Quality Assurance & Scrutiny: Checking that all the relevant issues have been identified</p>	
<p>5.1 What methods have been used to gain feedback on the main issues raised in the assessment?</p> <p>Two stakeholder engagement events were held in February 2014 to gather views from members of staff and customers that may be affected by the changes such as homelessness applications and Housing Register applicants.</p> <p>A formal consultation ran for 4 weeks in March 2014. 11 responses were received.</p>	
<p>Step 1:</p>	
<p>Has the Corporate Policy Advisor (Equality & Diversity) reviewed this assessment and provided feedback? Yes</p>	
<p>Summary of CPA's comments:</p>	
<p> </p>	

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I support the findings and issues highlighted in the EIA. Additional national data and conclusions drawn from the Government's EIA has been added by way of comparison in sections 2.1 and 2.4. I would recommend further consideration of the following issues:

- The Government identified in its EIA of the Homelessness Duty that individual applicants will be able to appeal against decisions by local authorities if they believe that the offer of accommodation is not suitable (through the courts as per other decisions under homelessness legislation). The policy does not highlight that applicants are able to appeal a decision or provide information as to how this should be done. It is recommended that this is included for the sake of transparency. Comments: The policy does include a section outlining the 'Right of applicant to request a Review of Property Suitability'. Section 4.3 of version 0.6 of the policy explains that *the applicant can request a review under s202 of the Housing Act 1996. The review request should be made within 21 days of the offer of accommodation being made. A senior officer or an appointed independent agent not involved in the original decision will conduct the review. The application will continue if it is found that the property was not suitable. A further offer of accommodation will be made when possible. The duty will be discharged and the case closed if it is found that the accommodation was considered to be suitable.* Section 4.2 of the v0.6 policy sets out how clients are informed of this right: *Officers will send a letter to the applicant when making an offer, setting out the following [...] the right to request a review of the suitability of accommodation [...].*
- There is evidence that highlights that social isolation can have negative health impacts on elderly people and that pets can help :

The support older people want and the services they need Joseph Rowntree Foundation. *Pets were cited as a source of pleasure and of company, but as a source of some anxiety if people thought they should talk about problems in the discussions. They described some of the responsibilities, generally foreseeable, arising from pet ownership, such as meeting the cost of vets' bills and, in the case of dogs, being able to exercise them.*

Given the low numbers of elderly people and homelessness applications, perhaps an exception could be considered on a case by case basis in relation to pets and vulnerable older people? Comments: The first priority for households accepted as priority homeless will be to find a roof over their heads. This may mean that accommodation where pets are allowed will be a secondary matter. Council officers will try and match a household with a pet to a house where the owner allows pets but this might not be possible each time.

- It also recommended that consideration is given to the needs of people who have guide dogs and assistance dogs (rather than pets) and how this would impact on the way in which the duty is discharged. Comments: Applicants that need assistance dogs will be considered vulnerable and so will not be made a PSO. Further details on this will be included in the good practice guidance.
- Under human rights legislation individuals have a right to hold a religious belief but the right to manifest that belief is qualified. The Equality Act also protects people with no religious and other beliefs (e.g. Athesim Humanism, climate change etc.). Consideration within the policy is given to ensuring that people have access to employment, education, local services, amenities and transport and this may provide sufficient consideration. Given the largely rural nature of the Central Bedfordshire area it could potentially be argued that it will not be reasonably practicable to build very wide ranging additional

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considerations into the policy. Comments: Under 'The proximity and accessibility to local services, amenities and transport' in Appendix B of the policy the following will be added 'due regard will be given to issues related to the Equality Act protected characteristics'.

- The policy states that the council would not usually make a PSO if the applicant is considered vulnerable. It may be helpful to include a definition of vulnerability. The Officer for Voluntary Organisations for Children, young people & families has recently contacted me to highlight that currently there is no mention of young people in relation to the local authority legal duty, or a mention of their vulnerability with regard to the private sector offer. Comments: This has been included in section 1.6 as an area for potential improvement and the definition of vulnerability will be defined in the practice guidance.

Step 2:

5.2 Feedback from Central Bedfordshire Equality Forum 27 March 2014

Members highlighted the following issues:

- The suitability criteria is really important in helping to ensure that people are placed in appropriate and safe accommodation.
- Emphasis was placed on the importance of checking that the landlord is a fit and proper person
- The effectiveness of energy performance certificates was queried. The use of sub-meters within properties by landlords can mean that fuel bills for individual tenants are substantial, impacting adversely upon the actual affordability of the property.
- The issue of guide and assistance dogs was considered. Landlords will be covered by the Equality Act and so will be subject to indirect discrimination legislation and also provisions relating to discrimination arising from disability. Blind / partially sighted people are likely to be viewed as vulnerable and so may be less likely to be subject to this provision. The issue of retired working dogs was highlighted as they often continue to reside with their owner.
- In considering the Equality Act it was also recognised that landlords will not be able to turn down an individual on the basis of a protected characteristic.
- The Forum debated whether any Equality Act contractual implications were created between the council and the landlord in relation to the delivery of public services but it was noted that the tenancy agreement is between the landlord and the individual.
- The issue of access to faith facilities was considered. It was felt that there should not be a blanket exclusion of this issue and that it should be considered as part of the broad range of suitability factors that are considered. It was suggested that Page 8 Appendix B - suitability of property location could be updated at item three to highlight that due regard will be given to issues related to the Equality Act protected characteristics.

5.3 Feedback from Child Poverty Meeting – 11 March 2014

Attendees at the meeting expressed the following views:

- There is a need to ensure that debt advisers support tenants because there is a risk that people may go into the private sector and then experience increasing levels of debt. There is a need to consider how people in difficulty can be signposted to support such as that provided by Bromford.
- When identifying out of area placements there is a real need to ensure that roots in a

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particular locality have been fully considered and the importance of strong networks such as provision of childcare by grandparents are not overlooked.

- Concern was expressed that rent in the private sector can be significantly higher and so checks on affordability will be particularly crucial.
- Good access to local sources of employment is important to consider when identifying suitable placements. The Council shouldn't place individuals in areas where it will be hard to find work.
- Concern was expressed that the policy might provide a short term fix but that families will come back to the council needing help further down the line.

The meeting was informed that individuals would still be able to apply to the housing register and the process will help reduce queue jumping,

- There was agreement that the needs of family experiencing domestic abuse required special consideration.

Stage 6 - Ensuring that the actual impact of proposals are monitored over time.

Stage 6 – Monitoring Future Impact

6.1 How will implementation of the actions be monitored?

The actions will be monitored by the Head of Housing Solutions.

6.2 What sort of data will be collected and how often will it be analysed?

The Council collects data for the Government's P1E statistical returns. This enables us to monitor how many households are accepted as homeless and offered accommodation in the private rented sector (and monitor any corresponding reductions in households in temporary accommodation). P1E data also tell us the types of household who are being accepted as homeless.

In addition to this, data will be collected on the incidences where the duty has recurred because the applicant has become homeless again within two years of accepting the private rented sector offer, through no fault of their own. This will enable us to monitor the volume of re-applications within two years of the duty being ended with a private sector offer.

6.3 How often will the proposal be reviewed?

The policy will be reviewed every three years unless a review is required earlier.

6.4 Who will be responsible for this?

Head of Housing Solutions.

6.5 How have the actions from this assessment been incorporated into the proposal?

Actions will be incorporated following the development of the final draft of the policy once

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consultation results have been reviewed. This is anticipated to be May 2014.

Stage 7 - Finalising the assessment.

Stage 7 – Accountability / Signing Off

7.1 Has the lead Assistant Director/Head of Service been notified of the outcome of the assessment

Name: _____ Date: _____

7.2 Has the Corporate Policy Adviser Equality & Diversity provided confirmation that the Assessment is complete?

Date: _____