

# Lichfield

# Lettings Scheme

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یہ دستاویز اگر آپ کو کسی دیگر زبان یا دیگر شکل میں درکار ہو، یا اگر آپ کو ترجمان کی خدمات چاہئیں تو برائے مہربانی ہم سے رابطہ کیجئے۔

### Urdu

本文件可以翻譯為另一語文版本，或製作成另一格式，如有此需要，或需要傳譯員的協助，請與我們聯絡。

### Cantonese

જો તમને આ દસ્તાવેજ બીજી ભાષા અથવા રચનામાં જોઈતો હોય, અથવા જો તમને ઈન્ટરપ્રિટરની સેવાઓ જોઈતી હોય તો, કૃપા કરી અમારો સંપર્ક સાધો.

### Gujarati

Jeżeli chcieliby Państwo otrzymać ten dokument w innym języku lub w innym formacie albo jeżeli potrzebna jest pomoc tłumacza, to prosimy o kontakt z nami.

### Polish

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## **Section One The Lettings Scheme**

### **Background**

The majority of socially rented properties within the Lichfield District will be let in accordance with this published Letting Scheme. The housing associations with stock in Lichfield District include:

- Bromford
- Waterloo Housing Group
- Orbit Housing Group
- Sanctuary Housing
- Housing 21
- Jephson
- Mercian
- Optima
- Riverside
- Metropolitan
- Advance Housing & Support
- Trident Housing Association

### **Key Aims and Objectives**

The overall aim of the lettings scheme is to ensure that all social housing within Lichfield District is allocated fairly and objectively to those in the greatest housing need, having regard to any legislative requirements and codes of guidance and regulations set by the Government and the Homes and Communities Agency.

This scheme has been developed with a view to meeting the following principles and key objectives:

- To operate an allocations scheme that offers realistic, informed choice for all.
- To improve local, regional and national mobility and to encourage balanced and sustainable communities.
- To ensure that every application is dealt with fairly and consistently irrespective of race, disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion and belief and age.
- To operate a choice based lettings system that is simple, easy to understand, transparent, open and fair.
- To give appropriate priority to applicants who fall within the Housing Act “Reasonable Preference” categories.
- To empower applicants by giving them more opportunity to express choice and preferences about where they want to live whilst having regard to the availability of housing resources and the high demand for housing.
- To assist those applicants who are vulnerable in accessing the scheme.

## **Service Standards**

As part of our commitment to our applicants we have agreed some key service promises. These are set out at the end of this booklet. Our customer service promises include every time that we are in contact with you we will:

- ✓ Treat you with courtesy and respect
- ✓ Listen
- ✓ Be helpful and polite
- ✓ Try to deal with you at first point of contact
- ✓ Make things as easy as possible
- ✓ Deal with any complaint in line with our complaints procedure

## **Equality and Fairness**

The Lichfield Letting Scheme will ensure its policies and practices are non-discriminatory and will promote equal opportunity by preventing and eliminating discrimination on the grounds of race, disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion and belief and age. The scheme will be accessible, responsive and sensitive to the diverse needs of individuals. Our aim is to create an environment where equality and diversity is at the heart of everything they do.

The impact of the policy will be monitored, to ensure that it promotes equality of opportunity to individuals and minority groups. In order to achieve this, all applicants will be asked to provide details of their ethnic origin and any other demographic information when they apply to join the register.

We will ensure all potential applicants have accessible information about the service and equal opportunity to apply, express an interest in and receive offers of accommodation. We will do this by acting to provide a tailored self service for all applicants, so that they can choose how they express interest in properties. This will include expressing interest on their behalf if they wish and monitoring the profile of those who are applying and expressing an interest in properties to ensure that minority and hard to reach groups are actively engaged in the service.

## **Charitable Status**

Some Housing Associations are charitable organisations. This means that before they grant a tenancy to an applicant they ensure the applicant meets the criteria set out as part of their charitable status.

Their charitable status means that before an applicant is offered a home they may be asked for further information about their circumstances. An applicant may be refused a tenancy by a charitable landlord if they do not meet the criteria which applies to their charitable status. The criteria includes people who are in receipt of welfare benefits or have a low income, older people, people with disabilities, those who have a long term physical or mental illness or people in other recognised charitable need.

## **Deliberately Withholding Information or Providing False Information**

Fraudulent behaviour is taken very seriously and all appropriate action will be taken to address it.

It is a criminal offence (punishable by a fine of up to £5,000) if an applicant gives false information or withholds information related to their housing application.

Possession proceedings can be instigated if a tenancy was obtained by giving false information.

## **Section Two The Housing Register**

### **Introduction**

It is not possible to re-house every potential applicant who may wish to rent a property. This is because the demand for vacancies outstrips supply. For this reason the lettings scheme prioritises applicants with a housing need who are assessed as meeting certain qualifying criteria.

The Housing Register is a list of all the applicants who meet the qualifying criteria and have been accepted onto the lettings scheme. It includes new applicants and existing social housing tenants who are assessed as having a housing need.

### **Who can apply?**

Housing Associations have the discretion to refuse to make an offer if the applicant meets any of their exclusion criteria.

### **Joint Applications**

Joint applications will be accepted, provided both applicants are eligible, meet the qualifying criteria and aged 16 or over and intend to occupy the property together as their only or main home.

### **Multiple Applications**

Multiple applications will not be allowed. If multiple applications do exist, the application which is a true reflection of the applicants' circumstances will be kept open. Any other applications will be cancelled.

### **Mutual Exchange Register**

Mutual exchanges will be promoted and encouraged in order to assist tenants to be mobile. The Housing Options Team is available to provide advice and assistance to tenants to make best use of the Register.

Mutual exchanges are currently advertised through 'Homeswapper'. A link to this website will be provided on the Homes Direct's homepage. If you are a social housing tenant, you may find another tenant who would like to exchange (or swap) homes with you. As a Housing Association tenant you can register free of charge and seek suitable tenants to exchange with. To register with this please visit your Housing Associations website and follow the HomeSwapper link or log on at [www.homeswapper.co.uk](http://www.homeswapper.co.uk). If you are a tenant of another Housing provider you can also use the HomeSwapper scheme.

Before the exchange can take place both parties must apply to their landlord for written permission to move. You must not exchange until you have received permission in writing.

When seeking permission from the Housing Associations for an exchange, we will consider the following before any decision is made:

- Neither property will be overcrowded or extensively under occupied
- There is no legal proceedings on either property
- The property has not been specially designed or adapted for a disabled person and no person requiring the adaptation would be living there if the exchange takes place
- The property is part of a sheltered housing scheme and should the exchange take place, no qualifying person would be living there
- Any other information which may affect the decision made whilst taking account current legislation.

### **Applications from Elected Members, Board Members and Employees**

Applications can be accepted from employees, elected members, board members and their close relatives, provided they are eligible to apply and subject to the rules in Schedule 1 of Housing Act 1996. Applicants must disclose any such relationship at the time of application.

### **How to apply**

An application can be made by visiting the website, [www.HomesDirect.org.uk](http://www.HomesDirect.org.uk). When you complete your registration with Homes Direct your application is made active and you are able to bid for properties straight away. If you are shortlisted for a property your application will be fully assessed to ensure you have the correct priority on the housing register. **This may result in a change to your priority and your position on the shortlist. Being on the housing register does not mean you have been accepted as being eligible for an offer of accommodation, as your circumstances will be subject to verification (see page 13).**

### **Changes in Circumstances**

Applicants who move to a new address or whose circumstances change after they have been accepted onto the housing register (e.g. someone joining or

leaving their household) should amend their application online as soon as possible.

### **Annual Renewal**

Every year, on the anniversary of a customer's registration date, applicants will be prompted by email asking if they wish to stay on the housing register and if there has been any change in their circumstances. If no reply is received within 28 days the application will be cancelled. If a customer is known to be vulnerable every effort will be made to contact them, either by telephone, visiting them at home or contacting a relevant support agency to confirm whether they wish to remain on the register.

### **Cancelling Applications**

As Homes Direct is a self service system, applicants have control over their application, so if a customer no longer wishes to remain on the housing register, it will be their responsibility to cancel the application. The Housing Association will only cancel an application if:

- The customer has been re-housed.
- Notification has been received from an executor or personal representative that the customer is deceased and s/he was the sole applicant.
- It is discovered that the customer has given false or misleading information in their application.
- Evidence is obtained that the applicant is no longer eligible.

### **Appeals**

You have the right to appeal against our decision if you feel that we have not taken into account all relevant information or if you feel we have made our decision unfairly. Appeals can be made either verbally, in writing or via a third party (with the applicants' express consent) within 5 days of being notified of our decision.

The appeal will be reviewed by an independent manager who was not involved in the original decision. You will be notified of the outcome of the appeal in writing within 15 working days or we may agree a longer timescale with you if we need to.

**We will not hold any properties empty whilst the appeal is being considered.** However, if the appeal is successful we will seek to offer you a suitable alternative property.

If, after considering this response, you still believe that you have not been dealt with fairly, you may take your complaint to the Head of Neighbourhood who will consider your appeal against our decision.

If you are still not satisfied after considering the response of the Head of Neighbourhood, you may take your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman who may review our decision.

## **Section Three Assessing Housing Need**

### **Reasonable Preference Groups**

Applications will be assessed under this scheme, to ensure that those in greatest housing need are given preference for an allocation of accommodation. Landlords within the partnership give reasonable preference to applicants as set out in s167 (2) of the Housing Act 1996 and the Homelessness Act 2002. These are:

- Applicants who are homeless. This includes applicants where there is a statutory duty to re-house as well as applicants who are intentionally homeless and those who are not in priority need.
- Applicants occupying unsanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions
- Applicants who need to move on medical or welfare grounds, including grounds relating to disability
- Applicants who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the housing authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or to others)

In addition, section 167(2) gives housing authorities the power to frame their allocation schemes to give additional preference to particular descriptions of applicants who fall within the reasonable preference categories and who have particularly urgent housing needs.

To ensure that local priorities are met, the scheme may provide for other factors, other than those set out in section (2) of the Housing Act 1996 in determining which categories of applicants are to be given preference for an allocation of accommodation within the scheme, providing they do not dominate the scheme at the expense over those listed in the statutory preference categories as listed in 167(2).

### **Verification checks to be completed before an offer of housing is made.**

Verification checks will be completed by requesting originals (or where agreed, copies) of relevant documentation. This will include (but is not limited to):

- Proof of identity
- Nationality and immigration status
- Income details
- Household makeup

The Housing Association reserves the right to require proof in whatever form appears appropriate or to make enquiries of other organisations to confirm the applicant's statements. If this is necessary the applicant's consent will be sought in line with Data Protection Act. If such consent is not given no offer will be made.

The Housing Association will contact existing and former landlords and other agencies to make the following checks at point of offer.

- Whether the applicant is in arrears or owes any monies to their landlord.
- Whether the applicant has been involved in any anti-social behaviour.
- Whether the applicant has complied with the terms of their current or former tenancy.

### **The Banding System**

Priority banding is based on housing need. The scheme will be used to assess the housing need of housing applicants and they will be put in the appropriate band according to their application.

There will also be prioritisation of applicants within specific bands. All applications will be given an application date. Within each band there will be prioritisation using the date that the applicant is placed within the band awarded to their application.

<b>BAND A</b>
1. Applicants assessed as statutory homeless who are owed a full housing duty.
2. Applicants who have been approved on a Housing Association, Local Authority or Private Landlord under-occupation scheme.
3. Applicants releasing a rented property with major adaptations where there is an identified need for that type of property. Evidence for demand will be required from the landlord.
4. Applicants where there is evidence of serious violence, domestic abuse and/or harassment and an ongoing risk to the applicant or member of their household and as a result cannot return to their home.
5. Applicants who are unable to continue to occupy their current accommodation due to high medical need or disability.
6. Applicants with a high need for alternative accommodation on the grounds of significant social welfare need.
7. Applicants in properties that are assessed as having a lack of facilities or that are subject to statutory Prohibition or Demolition Orders in accordance with legislation.
8. Applicants who are overcrowded and short of 3 bedrooms or more, in line with the bedroom entitlement rules.
9. Applicants who are in short term supported housing and are required to move on to alternative accommodation urgently. Confirmation about these circumstances will be required from the organisation providing the supported accommodation
10. Applicants with a need to move to a particular locality where significant hardship would be caused if they did not move.
11. Applicants who are leaving the armed forces.
<b>BAND B</b>
1. Applicants who are assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness but where there is no statutory duty to obtain housing. Also those that have been assessed as intentionally homeless.
2. Applicants who are overcrowded and short of two or more bedrooms, in line with the bedroom entitlement rules.

3. Applicants who need to be closer to their place of work or have an offer of employment and need to be closer to that workplace. Evidence of employment / offer of employment will be required and travelling from current address is unreasonable. Unreasonable would be no means to travel be either car or public transport, public transport that would require multiple changes and any working commute that would be excessive in time (over 1 hour each way).
4. Loss of tied accommodation. Applicants will need to provide a copy of the notice to quit from their employer.
5. Applicants who are left in property following a relationship breakdown and have no right to remain in their current tenancy.
6. Applicants who are leaving prison, but not yet released and are not excluded from re-housing
7. Applicants who are unable to afford their mortgage payments. To include owner occupier applicants who are forced to sell their existing home due to being unable to afford the mortgage payments. Applicants will be required to provide evidence of mortgage payments and income
8. Families with children under the age of 10 and are in an upper floor flat with no lift.
<b>BAND C</b>
1. Applicants who are overcrowded and are short of one bedroom.
2. Applicants with any other reasonable housing needs. To include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applicants who are sharing facilities with more than one household, this could include sharing the bathroom or kitchen.</li> <li>• Applicants living in a property that has minor disrepair and/or in poor condition but is not a risk to health or safety.</li> <li>• Applicants who need to be closer to family and friends to give/receive support.</li> <li>• Applicants who have been approved as foster or adoptive parents and require an additional bedroom to facilitate a placement. Evidence of approval will be required.</li> <li>• Applicants who have lower levels of hardship, medical, social and welfare needs.</li> </ul>
<b>BAND D</b>
1. Applicants who have no identified housing need.
2. People who have worsened their circumstances by deliberately doing something or failing to do something that has increased their need and who did not meet the criteria for any category other than Band 4 before taking the action in question
3. Applicants who owe debt to a current or previous landlord for rent, service charges and other property related recharges and don't meet the re-housing with rent arrears policy.

## Further Information about Categories

### Homeless Applicants

Lichfield District Council will work with all applicants who are homeless or threatened with homelessness to provide them with assistance and options appropriate to their circumstances. We will always act to prevent homelessness in the first instance.

Lichfield District Council has a legal duty under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) to ensure that homeless applicants owed a full housing duty under s.193 (2) are provided with suitable accommodation. Applicants meeting this criteria will have received a letter from the Council making the decision confirming that they have a duty to assist the applicant to obtain housing. Homeless applicants owed a full duty will be placed in Band A.

As Band A is effectively the highest priority band for most applicants and all those within it are considered to be in high levels of relative need, it is not considered possible or necessary to accord any further priority to such homeless applicants. Such applicants are, by virtue the s193 (2) duty, provided with accommodation suitable to their needs.

Applicants who are assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness in 28 days in accordance with the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) but there is no statutory duty to obtain housing will be placed in Band B.

### **BAND A**

#### **1. Applicants assessed as statutory homeless who are owed a full housing duty:**

Lichfield District Council has a legal duty under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) to ensure that homeless applicants owed a full housing duty under s.193 (2) are provided with suitable accommodation. Applicants meeting this criteria will have received a letter from the Council confirming that they have a duty to assist the applicant to obtain housing. Homeless applicants to whom the full duty is owed will be placed in Band A.

#### **2. Applicants who have been approved on a Housing Association, Local Authority or Private Landlord under-occupation scheme:**

The lettings scheme will allow for underoccupation in circumstances to give appropriate priority where allocation would result in the release of under-occupied properties. Properties may be under-occupied in the following circumstances:

- as part of a local lettings plan properties may be under-occupied by one bedroom or more depending on the specific details of the local lettings plan

- an applicant is downsizing from a larger family home as part of a local authority or housing association scheme.
- An existing tenant who needs to move to a smaller home due to the impact of the Welfare Reform Act.

**3. Applicants releasing a rented property with major adaptations where there is an identified need for that type of property. Evidence for demand will be required from the landlord:**

We aim to make better use of housing that has already been specially built or adapted for disabled people, such as accommodation with a level access shower, stair lift, or wheel chair access. Applicants living in such properties and no longer require an adapted property will be placed in Band A.

**4. Applicants where there is evidence of serious violence, domestic abuse and/or harassment and an ongoing risk to the applicant or member of their household and as a result cannot return to their home:**

In these circumstances evidence would be required to support the case from appropriate professionals, agencies and support networks before any additional priority would be awarded (**verification for statutory homeless applicants will be carried out by Lichfield District Council, other applicants will be verified at point of offer**).

Applicants awarded this priority will be placed into Band A.

Examples would include, but is not limited to:-

- An applicant suffering domestic abuse from a partner, or relative with whom they currently reside, or a former partner and for whom the use of an injunction or other form of legal remedy may not be appropriate.
- An applicant suffering serious harassment and legal remedies are not working or are inappropriate. Harassment implies a degree of deliberate intent with some underlying motive and can be distinguished from neighbour disputes or nuisance.
- Victims of racial crime and/or abuse at their current home.

**5. Applicants who are unable to continue to occupy their current accommodation due to high medical need or disability**

This is assessed as being where current housing conditions are having a major adverse effect on the medical condition of either the applicant or a member of their household. **These applicants will be placed in Band A and would require evidence, which will be verified at point of offer.**

Examples would include:

- A wheelchair user occupies a home where facilities are upstairs and therefore inaccessible

- An applicant is due to be discharged from hospital and their current accommodation is totally unsuitable for their assessed need
- A referral has been received from a mental health professional stating that the current housing is having a severe effect on an applicant's mental well being
- Any applicant who needs to move to suitable adapted accommodation because of serious injury, medical condition or disability which they, or a member of their household, has sustained as a result of service in the Armed Forces.

#### **6. Applicants with a high need for alternative accommodation on the grounds of significant social/welfare need:**

In circumstances where an applicant needs to move on social or welfare grounds, **evidence would be required to support the case, which will be verified at point of offer.**

Applicants with care or support needs, or other social needs may need to move to alternative accommodation on welfare grounds

Those applicants needing to move urgently on welfare grounds will be placed in Band A. Priority of this level will only be awarded if the current housing situation is so significant it will have a serious impact on the well being of the applicants.

Examples would include:

- Parents forced to live apart (where they have previously lived together) except where it could reasonably be expected for both parents to live in either of the homes that they occupy.
- Child separated from parents (where they have previously lived together) where the child cannot occupy the current home of the parent, and that they will live as a family unit if suitable accommodation is allocated.
- Applicants with a high degree of vulnerability and their housing situation is having a detrimental effect on their quality of life.

#### **7. Applicants in properties that are assessed as having a lack of facilities or that are subject to statutory Prohibition or Demolition Orders in accordance with legislation and statutory regulations.**

Applicants who are required to leave their homes as a result of an emergency Prohibition Order served in relation to the premises under the Housing Act 2004 will be placed in Band A. Applicants living in unsatisfactory housing conditions (as defined by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)) and there is a high risk of harm will be placed in Band A. The level of risk will be determined by Lichfield District Council's Environmental Health Team.

#### **8. Applicants who are overcrowded and short of 3 bedrooms or more, in line with the bedroom entitlement rules. – SEE OVERCROWDING Page 23.**

**9. Applicants who are in short term supported housing and are required to move on to alternative accommodation urgently. Confirmation about these circumstances will be required from the organisation providing the supported accommodation:**

Where an applicant is living in supported housing such as housing for vulnerable people, following satisfactory completion of a support plan and confirmation that they need to move on and are ready to live independently (with or without floating support) to free up the supported housing, the applicant will be placed into Band A.

**10. Hardship Grounds**

**In these circumstances evidence would be required to support the case before an offer is made**

Applicants may need to move to a specific locality in order to give or receive care, to be able to access specialised medical treatment or to take up particular education, employment or training opportunities in a particular local authority district. Applicants may have a specific financial hardship related to their housing need.

Those applicants needing to move urgently on hardship grounds will be placed in Band A. Priority at this level will only be awarded if the current situation is so significant that it will cause significant hardship to the applicant or to others in their household.

Examples would include:

- An applicant needing to move to a particular area to take up employment and if they did not significant financial hardship would be caused.
- An applicant needing to move to be closer to a vulnerable relative where there is no alternative solution and not to do so would cause significant hardship.
- An independent assessment has indicated that they cannot afford their housing costs and therefore cannot continue living in their current accommodation without facing significant hardship.
- Applicants whose financial circumstances have changed recently due to Welfare Reform, which means you can no longer afford to remain in your current home.

**11. Applicants who are leaving the armed forces:**

Members of the Armed and Reserve Forces

Authorities have a statutory duty to frame their allocation scheme to give additional preference to the following categories of people who fall within one or more of the reasonable preference categories and who have urgent housing needs:

(a) former members of the Armed Forces

- (b) serving members of the Armed Forces who need to move because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service
- (c) bereaved spouses and civil partners of members of the Armed Forces leaving Services Family Accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner
- (d) serving or former members of the Reserve Forces who need to move because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service

Where an applicant has been in Her Majesty's Armed Forces at some time in the past (as defined in section 374 of the 2006 Armed Forces Act) and is in urgent housing need. Applicants will be placed in Band A.

The regular army" means any of Her Majesty's military forces other than—

- (a) the Army Reserve;
  - (b) the Territorial Army; and
  - (c) forces raised under the law of a British overseas territory;
- "the regular forces" means the Royal Navy, the Royal Marines, the regular army or the Royal Air Force, and references to "a regular force" are to be read accordingly;
  - "the reserve forces" means the Royal Fleet Reserve, the Royal Naval Reserve, the Royal Marines Reserve, the Army Reserve, the Territorial Army, the Royal Air Force Reserve or the Royal Auxiliary Air Force, and references to "a reserve force" are to be read accordingly;

## **BAND B**

### **1. Applicants who are assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness but where there is no statutory duty to obtain housing. Also those that have been assessed as intentionally homeless:**

Applicants who are assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness in 28 days in accordance with Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) and there is no statutory duty to obtain housing, i.e. those that are classified as homeless but not in a priority need category or those deemed as intentionally homeless, will be placed in Band B.

Lichfield District Council will work with all applicants who are homeless or threatened with homelessness to provide them with assistance and options appropriate to their circumstances.

### **2. Applicants who are overcrowded by 2 – See Overcrowding Page 23**

**3. Applicants who need to be closer to their place of work or have an offer of employment and need to be closer to that workplace.**

Evidence of employment / offer of employment will be required and travelling from current address is unreasonable. Unreasonable would be no means to travel be either car or public transport, public transport that would require multiple changes and any working commute that would be excessive in time (over 1 hour each way):

Where applicants have provided confirmation regarding their employment details and assessment has been made that it is not reasonable for them to be travelling daily to one place of work, such applicants will be placed in Band B.

**4. Loss of tied accommodation. (Applicants will need to provide a copy of the notice to quit from their employer- at point of offer)**

Where applicants have been given written confirmation that they will lose their current accommodation due to their employment, applicants will be placed in Band B (as long as there's no threat of homelessness within 28 days). Also the accommodation should be in the district or the applicant has a connection to the district.

**5. Applicants who are left in property following a relationship breakdown and have no right to remain in their current tenancy:**

Following a relationship breakdown a customer is left in a property that they are not eligible to remain in. The customer will be offered properties through the normal route and be placed in Band B. If after a reasonable period of time the customer has not been housed, the housing provider commences legal action for possession of the property.

**6. Applicants who are leaving prison, but not yet released and are not excluded from re-housing:**

Applicants will be assessed based on information provided by prison officers. Clarification will be needed on expected time of release and any risks will be taken into account.

**7. Applicants who are unable to afford their mortgage payments.**

To include owner occupier applicants who are forced to sell their existing home due to being unable to afford the mortgage payments. Applicants will be required to provide evidence of mortgage payments and income. Before an offer is made

**8. Families with children under the age of 10 and are in an upper floor flat with no lift.**

Applicants who are assessed as having children under age of 10 and live in an upper floor accommodation, with no lift, such applicants will not be able to apply for housing that is similar to their current accommodation, i.e. like for like accommodation.

## **BAND C**

### **1. Applicants who are overcrowded and are short of one bedroom:**

See overcrowded

### **2. Applicants with any other reasonable housing needs. To include:**

Applicants who are assessed as having other needs such as sharing facilities, minor disrepair but not a health or safety risk, need to be closer to family or friends, medium hardship, medium and low medical, medium and low social/welfare will be placed in Band C. Evidence will be required before an offer is made.

## **BAND D**

### **1. Applicants who have no identified housing need:**

If it is established that an applicant has no housing need yet want to join a waiting list, such applicants will be placed in Band D and will be re-assessed if their circumstances change.

### **2. People who have worsened their circumstances by deliberately doing something or failing to do something that has increased their need and who did not meet the criteria for any category other than Band D before taking the action in question:**

If it is established that an applicant has deliberately done or failed to do something that has increased their need, that increase in need will be ignored for the purposes of calculating their priority band. Their needs will therefore be assessed from whatever their circumstances would have been had they not taken the action in question.

For example (but not limited to):

- moving to accommodation with a greater shortage of bedrooms
- moving to accommodation which was unsuitable for medical, welfare or disability reasons
- bringing an additional person into the accommodation who did not have an urgent housing need

### **3. Applicants who owe debt to a current or previous landlord for rent, service charges and other property related recharges and don't meet the re-housing with rent arrears policy:**

Applicants who have current or a history of rent arrears will need to provide clear information about the reasons for the rent debt to their landlord and explain the steps they have taken to address the issue.

Housing Associations have their own policy for rent arrears, and will apply this in most circumstances, and will only offer homes to applicants and existing applicants where it is clear they can afford the rent and service charge.

**Applicants who are currently adequately housed, but want to live independently: (this is not a category in Band D but needs to be identified in the policy)**

Any applicant that is living in accommodation that they have no legal rights to, and have not been given any notice to leave, but wish to make an application to live independently, such as:

- Applicants residing with family or friends.

**OVERCROWDING**

Only children permanently residing with the main applicant are included. In these circumstances evidence would be required to support the case and this may include a home visit in order to make an assessment. The type of information we would require would be proof of child benefit or tax credit award, a court order if one is in place or a residency order.

For the purpose of assessing overcrowding the following criteria will be used:

- One bedroom for each person or couple aged 16 or over
- One bedroom for two children of the same gender aged 15 or under
- One bedroom for two children aged 9 or under, regardless of their gender
- Two bedrooms for a woman who is over 24 weeks pregnant, so long as the customer can afford the rent if they depend on benefits to support rental payments

We reserve for ourselves the discretion to modify the above criteria and not apply them rigidly particularly where that would result in unfairness to the particular applicant or other applicants generally. Bedroom eligibility will be in line with the welfare benefit rules.

**Occupancy criteria – General Needs (rented)**

The Lettings Scheme will always offer applicants choice. The scheme allows for applicants to make informed decisions about their new home e.g. willing to live in a first floor flat with children etc.

**Eligibility criteria:**

- One bedroom for each person or couple aged 16 or over.
- One bedroom for two children of the same gender aged 15 or under.
- One bedroom for two children aged 9 or under, regardless of their gender.
- A pregnancy that is 24 weeks + will be classed as a child in the household.
- A disabled customer or partner who needs non resident overnight carer will be allowed an extra bedroom.
- Preference for bungalows and adapted homes will be given to individuals or families whose health/mobility will benefit from this type of accommodation.
- 2 bedroom bungalows may be allocated to a single person or couple if all the occupants are of pensionable age.

- Individuals/families with children can accept flats above the ground floor if they feel it improves their accommodation (unless there is a lettings plan for the flat).
- Cats and dogs will not be allowed in properties with a communal entrance. Pets may be allowed in properties with their own entrance, with or without shared gardens, at the discretion of the Housing Manager and the permission must be confirmed in writing.
- Where homes have planning restrictions they will be offered according to any Section 106 or other agreements (e.g. age restricted schemes or rural schemes requiring local connection).
- Where there are local lettings plans we will ensure we meet the individual agreed criteria.
- As a registered charity applicants must fulfil our charitable status rules. If the overall household income is more than £60,000 the customer will not qualify for rented housing with us, however we will offer applicants other housing options as described below.

### **Under 18 year olds**

Where an applicant is under the age of 18 he/she will only be **eligible for an offer of accommodation** if they meet the following:

- The applicant is supported by a government or voluntary agency and the Housing Association is satisfied with the level of support to be provided.
- They are able to afford the rent or be entitled to housing benefit before an offer will be made.
- They have a trustee and guarantor who are willing to sign and support their tenancy until they are 18.

### **Supported Housing**

Our supported accommodation will have a separate lettings criteria specific to the individual scheme.

## **Section Four Selection of Applicants, Advertising and Allocation of Accommodation**

### **Introduction**

Vacancies will be publicised on the Homes Direct website.

Each property will be clearly labelled to show the property features, local neighbourhood information and the types of household the Housing Association would expect to show an interest in the property.

The Housing Association will endeavour to enable all applicants to exercise choice. However, at a time of high demand for properties, it must also make the best use of its stock. This means that sometimes there will be restrictions in the advert. Expressions of interest from applicants will only count if they can match the requirements in the advert.

## **Making Best Use of our Stock**

### **Under occupation**

The Housing Associations will aim to make the best use of their homes and will work with applicants to release family accommodation where it is no longer required or where applicants require more bedrooms for their family size.

Applicants who wish to move and who will **release a property they are underoccupying** will be advised to register with Homes Direct.

In order to maximise choice for our applicants Homes Direct partners will work together with other providers to share housing opportunities.

All Homes Direct applicants will be sign posted to alternative housing options.

### **Transfers**

Existing social housing tenants can apply to move and will have their priority assessed in the same way as other applicants

Applicants will be expected to have lived in their current property for at least 12 months before they can be considered for a transfer.

## **5. Management moves**

Emergency re-housing is the responsibility of the relevant Housing Association.

However, in some circumstances Housing Associations will seek to find accommodation for applicants in exceptional housing need such as:

- Police advice - households where one or more household member/s are being threatened or pose a threat to the community.
- Domestic abuse - where all other options to remain in the home have been considered.
- Intimidation, harassment or hate crime

### **Advertising Properties**

Housing Associations participating in Homes Direct intend to advertise their vacant properties as part of the scheme. However, there may be occasions, such as a property being used for a management move, when this is not possible.

Adverts will be clearly labelled to show the property features, local neighbourhood information and the types of household that can show an interest in the property.

There will sometimes be other restrictions in the advert. Expressions of interest from applicants will only count if they can match the requirements in the advert.

## **Adapted Properties for Applicants with Disabilities**

Accessible properties are homes which have been designed for or significantly adapted to meet the needs of applicants with physical or sensory disabilities.

Applicants with an assessed need for accessible accommodation will be given priority for that type of accommodation over others in the same band rating without that need and the property advert will make that clear. The advert will also describe the accessible features together with local neighbourhood information to help applicants choose whether to express an interest in that property or not.

In selecting a customer for an accessible property from the short-list of qualifying applicants, the full circumstances of each case will be considered when deciding who will be offered the property. In some circumstances priority may be given outside of date order, if the vacancy is particularly suitable for the needs of a customer.

Applicants in this category can also express an interest in properties, which do not have accessible features. However if they are short listed during the selection stage the partner landlord will assess whether it is reasonable and practicable for the property to be adapted, the customer will be considered for the property on the same basis as the other applicants who have submitted an expression of interest.

## **Local Lettings Plans**

From time to time a local lettings plan may be agreed between Lichfield District Council and the relevant Housing Association for specific areas or developments to reflect local circumstances. Any such plan will be published and have regard to considerations such as the social mix, density, age and community stability. Any such plan will be time limited but during that time properties may be let to applicants outside the normal rules for priority and banding included in this policy.

## **Affordable Housing Developments**

Affordable housing will be advertised through the scheme. When new housing developments are built within rural areas planning restrictions may state that those applicants wishing to apply must have a direct local connection to that specific rural area (local lettings policies). When advertised through Homes Direct, properties will be clearly labelled with the eligibility criteria.

## **Expressing an Interest in a Property**

Available properties will be advertised weekly.

Applicants can express an interest via the Homes Direct website and will be limited to 3 expressions of interest per cycle. Advice and support will be provided to applicants who need it, to ensure they are able to use the scheme to express an interest in properties.

Applications on the Homes Direct system will need to be complete before applicants are able to express interest in properties.

### **Support for Vulnerable Applicants**

The Housing Associations will ensure vulnerable people are able to access the scheme. When a vulnerable customer is identified every effort will be made to assist and support them through the process. Some applicants will require or request support and assistance with accessing information about available properties, expressing an interest and making a decision about an offered property. In all cases the level and type of support will be decided on an individual basis. However in some cases The Housing Association may have to use specialist staff to express an interest on their behalf.

A number of measures will be put in place to ensure that vulnerable applicants are not disadvantaged for example through:

- Providing appropriate advice and assistance
- Partnership working with support agencies
- Translating key documents
- Ensuring appropriate support is available for applicants using the system
- Providing an online guide to assist applicants access the scheme

The Homes Direct partners would like people whatever their background or presumed ability to become active participants in the choice based lettings process. However, in limited circumstances it may be necessary to place certain vulnerable people outside of the choice based lettings process and to allocate properties to them.

### **Statutorily Homeless Households Expressing an Interest**

Applicants accepted as homeless and owed a 'full housing' duty can express an interest in properties of their choice for a period of 4 weeks from the date of the decision letter. If a customer, during that 4 week period, isn't expressing an interest in available properties, or express an interest on unsuitable properties, or unreasonably restricts their choice during this period, Lichfield District Council will express an interest on behalf of the customer for a 'suitable' property. If the customer is subsequently offered this accommodation and refuses it, the homelessness duty may be discharged, thereby removing their priority on the Housing Register from Band 1. If applicants are expressing an interest in suitable properties but have been unsuccessful the 4 week will be extended.

### **Short Listing**

Local connection criteria will be taken into account when short listing applicants for vacancies.

Expressions of interest will be placed in the order of priority e.g. Band A, then Band B, then Band C, then Band D. The date that an application was

placed in their most current Band (the 'band effective' date) will also be used to prioritise applications.

If two or more applicants within the same band have expressed an interest in the same property for which they qualify, their application date or the date they entered their current band will be used to determine the higher priority. If the band date is the same, whichever customer expressed an interest in the property first will be successful.

Where properties are targeted at specific applicants, they will be given priority for that type of accommodation e.g. accessible accommodation for applicants with disabilities or new build properties where certain eligibility rules apply under special planning requirements. (Section 106 agreements).

If a customer is ranked first for more than one property and provided the eligibility criteria are met, they will be contacted to make a decision about which property they wish to accept.

### **Viewing Properties and Receiving Offers**

If you are offered a property, the relevant Housing Association will contact you directly to invite you to view the property and arrange for you to sign for the tenancy if you decide to accept it. Each Housing Association will have their own procedures for offering properties and will be able to give you relevant information on their timescales **and any checks that they may undertake.**

### **Feedback on Results**

Lettings results will be made available to the public upon request. Information will also be available on the website and will include the following information:

- The total number of expressions of interest made for the property
- The successful customer's band effective date.
- Properties where a direct offer was made.

## **Appendix 1 - Local Connection Criteria**

The Housing Associations will use the allocations policy and will allocate 100% of their nominations for those with a local connection, exceptions to this will not exceed 10% of properties in the following circumstances:

- Applicants leaving the armed forces
- To allow housing associations flexibility to encourage sustainable and mixed communities

### **Definition of Local Connection**

Applicants or persons in their household who might reasonably be expected to reside with the applicant who fulfils any the following will be classed as having a local connection:

- If they are normally resident in the district which means that they currently live, or have lived, within Lichfield district and have done for at least 6 out of the last 12 months or for not less than 3 years out of the last 5 years.
- Have close family associations in the district with the family members concerned currently living in the Lichfield district area and have done for at least five years or more. This would normally be parents, adult children, brothers or sisters provided there are sufficiently close links in the form of frequent contact, commitment or dependency. Other family associations such as grandparents and adoptive parents would also be considered if sufficiently close links are evidenced.
- If they are working in the district and have a permanent contract of employment.
- If they have special circumstances which might include the need to be near special medical or support services which are available only in a particular district.

## **Appendix 2 - The letting scheme promise**

### **Every time you are contacted by a Homes Direct partner, we will:**

- treat you with courtesy and respect
- listen
- be helpful and polite
- try to deal with you at first point of contact
- make things as easy as possible
- deal with any complaint in line with our complaints procedure

### **When you make an application for housing we will:**

- provide online help, guidance and support in accessing the Homes Direct website
- make a computer available to enable you to access the Homes Direct website in privacy

### **When you express an interest in a home we will:**

- provide you with the name of the person who will offer you support and advice and will advise you on where you can receive extra help from other agencies
- advertise homes weekly on the website
- provide accurate and up-to-date information about every home advertised
- give you the choice to ask someone to make an expression of interest on your behalf, like your carer or support worker

### **When we offer you a home we will:**

- contact you within 3 working days of the advertisement being closed if you are successful
- arrange a viewing for you to see the home before you sign the tenancy
- talk to you about any help or support that you might need at the time of your viewing

### **To keep you informed at all times we will:**

- publish information about the homes that we let, including the band that the successful applicant was in and how long they had been waiting
- publish our appeals process
- ensure that all information is in plain language and easy to understand
- make all of our information available in other formats and languages upon request
- contact you by your preferred method, such as text or telephone
- hold regular events in the community and with other agencies
- carry out a review of your application every year to see if you still need housing
- produce an annual review of allocations with details of our activities like, expressions of interest made or homes allocated
- ask you what you think about our services and publish the results