



Dorset Home Choice Common Allocations Policy



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1. Introduction and Background

1.1 The Dorset Home Choice CBL Partnership

1.1.1 Dorset Home Choice is a choice based lettings scheme (sometimes referred to as 'the scheme' in this document) that covers the whole of the geographical area of Dorset (including Bournemouth and Poole).

1.1.2 Choice based lettings is a system for letting social housing, supported by the government, which allows housing applicants more choice by advertising vacancies and inviting applicants to express interest in being the tenant of any given property.

1.1.3 This document sets out the housing allocation policy for the Dorset Home Choice CBL Partnership (referred to as 'the partnership' throughout this document) and explains:

- How to apply for housing
- Who is eligible for housing
- How applicants will be assessed and prioritised

1.1.4 All applicants are assessed by partners using the guidelines and criteria set out within this policy to ensure fairness and consistency. Please note that some partner housing providers may have specific criteria that they have to adhere to when letting their homes (such as a household of a certain size in a property of certain size). Where this is the case the property advert will make this clear. Specific partner local authority criteria with regard to eligibility, banding and bedroom requirements for each household are set out within each relevant section of this policy.

1.1.5 The partnership is made up of 8 local authorities in the Dorset area and their partner housing providers. The 8 local authorities are:

- Borough of Poole
- Bournemouth Borough Council
- Christchurch Borough Council
- East Dorset District Council
- North Dorset District Council
- Purbeck District Council
- West Dorset District Council

- Weymouth & Portland Borough Council

Whilst Bournemouth Borough Council, Christchurch Borough Council and East Dorset District Council are partners within the overall Dorset Home Choice scheme they will retain their own allocations policy.

A listing of the partner housing providers that have signed up to the scheme can be found at Appendix 2.

1.2 **Aims of Dorset Home Choice**

1.2.1 The aims of the Dorset Home Choice CBL scheme are:

- To help meet the housing needs of households within the Dorset Home Choice partnership area in the most effective way;
- To maximise housing opportunities for households within the Dorset Home Choice partnership area by eliminating artificial boundaries;
- To meet the statutory requirements of the Local Authorities within the current legislative framework, whilst working genuinely in partnership with partner housing providers to deliver a common vision for a fair and accessible service;
- To have a common housing register assessment framework across all Dorset Home Choice partners party to the common policy;
- To provide a simple to use, customer-friendly lettings service for social housing vacancies within the partnership area;
- To investigate opportunities to maximise the efficiencies in the provision of services to customers and improve the customer experience of the service.
- To give preference to those with a local connection to the relevant Dorset Home Choice partner authority;
- To simplify processes and procedures for housing providers advertising their vacancies across Dorset;
- To take full advantage of the economies of scale available through joint working and commissioning and procurement services to generate savings.

1.3 **The Scheme in Brief**

- 1.3.1 All applicants for social housing across the Dorset Home Choice partners will complete the same application form and will be assessed against the criteria as set out within this policy (except Bournemouth Borough Council, Christchurch Borough Council and East Dorset District Council applicants who will be assessed against their own allocations policy). Depending on their circumstances applicants will be placed into one of three bands and in very small number of cases an Emergency Priority band.
- 1.3.2 Once an application has been registered, applicants will be advised of their banding, the reason for their banding, application date, the size of the property that they are eligible to bid for, together with a personal reference number which will enable them to bid for vacancies being advertised across the whole of Dorset for which they are eligible.
- 1.3.3 Homes available to let will be advertised every week. People with active applications on the housing register will be able to view details of the homes that are available and will be able to 'bid' on those homes for which they are eligible.
- 1.3.4 Applicants will be able to make bids in a variety of ways and can monitor the progress of their bids and bidding history by accessing their account on the scheme's website (www.dorsethomechoice.org).
- 1.3.5 Once the bidding deadline has passed, the successful applicant will be selected from those that applied to the property based on:
- The band in which they have been placed which reflects their housing need (See section 3.5)
 - Their band start date within that band
 - Local connection to each partner Local Authority as set out within this policy
- 1.3.6 A nomination to a partner housing provider will be made subject to verification of the details supplied on the original application form. Incorrect information may result in the nomination to the housing provider being withdrawn and the application being re-assessed.
- 1.3.7 The banding and band start date of the successful applicant will be made available to all applicants via the recent lettings feedback. This will enable applicants to develop realistic expectations regarding their chances of success and likely waiting period.

1.4 Statement on Choice

- 1.4.1 The Dorset Home Choice partnership believes in offering people seeking housing as much choice as possible. There is very high demand for social housing in Dorset and the provision of choice has to be balanced with the need to ensure that housing goes to those with the greatest need.
- 1.4.2 Dorset Home Choice has been developed to enable applicants to view the details of available properties across Dorset, choose between them and bid for those properties for which they are eligible.
- 1.4.3 Whilst the aim of Dorset Home Choice partners is to provide choice in the allocation of social housing in Dorset, there will be a number of exceptional situations where this will not be possible. For example, where a housing provider needs to make an urgent management move or the requirement to make a direct offer to deal with an emergency case. In such cases the home will be let as a direct offer rather than being advertised through Dorset Home Choice.
- 1.4.4 The partnership will advertise the majority of their vacancies through the scheme. Applicants will be given advice and assistance to allow them to make informed choices about the type of accommodation which best meets their housing needs and aspirations.
- 1.4.5 The partnership is committed to ensuring that their approach to letting properties is fair, accountable, provides equality of opportunity and maximises the potential for making the best use of all the available housing. However there may be cases where officers need to make decisions outside the policy and in these instances there will be delegated authority to the relevant Head of Service in each partner authority to make such decisions.
- 1.4.6 The property adverts will provide valuable information about the property, together with links to information about the local neighbourhood, to enable applicants to make informed decisions about which accommodation they want to be considered for.

1.5 Equal Opportunities – Ensuring Access to Dorset Home Choice for all

- 1.5.1 There are many benefits of Dorset Home Choice to people seeking a home, but it does require them to be proactive. People will need to:
- Find information on available homes
 - Choose between homes
 - Bid for homes

- 1.5.2 The partnership will ensure its policies and practices are non-discriminatory and will aim to promote equal opportunity by preventing and eliminating discrimination on the grounds of gender, colour, race, religion, nationality, ethnic origin, disability, age, sexual orientation or marital status. The scheme will be accessible, responsive and sensitive to the diverse needs of individuals and officers will be trained to a high standard in valuing and promoting equality and diversity in the delivery of the lettings service. The partnership will take measures to ensure that people from potentially disadvantaged groups have equal access to housing opportunities with the population as a whole.
- 1.5.3 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 other demographic information when they apply to join the housing register.
- 1.5.4 The partners will ensure that all potential applicants have equality of information about the service and equal opportunity to apply, bid for and receive offers of accommodation. We will do this by:
- Advertising the service widely in a variety of accessible media;
 - Providing practical assistance to those who may have difficulty in understanding the requirements of the system;
 - Providing practical assistance, where the applicant may have difficulty completing the paperwork;
 - Providing tailored assistance to those who may have difficulty bidding for properties, including placing bids on their behalf, if that is necessary; and
 - Monitoring the profile of those who are applying and making bids to ensure that minority and hard to reach groups are actively engaged in the service.
- 1.5.5 Due to the high demand for housing in Dorset, we can only ensure fair access to Dorset Home Choice. Even though some applicants may be classed as 'vulnerable' and need support to participate in Dorset Home Choice, this will not necessarily reflect a high level of current housing need. Therefore, in reality, they may not have a high chance of securing a home.
- 1.5.6 An Equalities Analysis has been undertaken on the Dorset Home Choice scheme and its results have been taken account of within the final policy.
- 1.5.7 Each of the organisations involved in the Dorset Home Choice Partnership has an Equal Opportunities Policy to ensure that:
- Everyone has equal access to services
 - No one is discriminated against on the grounds of ethnic origin, disability, age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or for any other reason
- 1.5.8 Any allegations or concerns that an organisation has not acted

appropriately should be made directly to that organisation. All partner housing providers have a complaints policy and an independent Ombudsman.

1.6 Meeting our obligations

1.6.1 This policy has been developed with regard to the codes of guidance issued to local housing authorities in England, in exercising the functions under 167(1A) and 167(2E) of the Housing Act 1996.

1.6.2 The partnership will ensure that the policy is compatible with obligations imposed by other existing legislation, in addition to Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 as detailed below; this list is not exhaustive.

- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Children Act 1989
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Crime & Disorder Act 1998
- Homelessness Act 2002
- The Equality Act 2006
- The Equality Act 2010
- The Localism Act 2011

This policy also takes into consideration good practice guidance issued by the government, and external auditing bodies.

1.6.3 In addition, the partnership will ensure that the policy is, as far as possible, aligned with local, sub-regional and regional housing strategies, together with existing homeless strategies across the sub region and local authority partner corporate priorities.

1.7 Advice and Information

1.7.1 A clear summary of the scheme will be made available to all applicants on registration. The full copy of this policy is available on request from any of the principal offices of the partners or it can be downloaded from the Dorset Home Choice website (www.dorsethomechoice.org).

1.7.2 Information about the scheme will be provided in a range of formats and languages to applicants upon request, to ensure that all have equality of opportunity in accessing the service.

- 1.7.3 To ensure that everyone can access the service easily, advice and information will also be provided to applicants through a variety of means, including telephone, interactive website, user guide, targeted mail-shots and in person at any one of the partners' housing service reception points where available.
- 1.7.4 Applicants who do not have internet access can visit their local housing office or other locations offering internet facilities e.g. libraries, internet cafes etc.
- 1.7.5 A property list of weekly adverts, which provides details of the advertised vacancies in that partners area, will be available at the partner organisations reception points where these are provided, or it can be downloaded from the website by applicants or professional organisations.
- 1.7.6 Our staff will at all times give impartial advice to all applicants needing help on how to use the service. Staff will also offer a sensitive service to those who are vulnerable and may need additional help. We also aim to provide targeted support to those applicants in the priority bands [Emergency and Gold] to help them resolve their housing needs.
- 1.7.7 For those applicants that may have to wait a considerable time before being successful in bidding for accommodation, information and advice about other social housing options will be provided e.g. other housing providers, private sector renting, low cost home ownership options and mutual exchanges.

1.8 **Monitoring**

- 1.8.1 To ensure that the aims and objectives of this policy are met and that overall, priority for accommodation is given to those in the reasonable preference categories (please see Appendix 1 for definition of reasonable preference) the partnership will ensure that robust monitoring arrangements are in place to monitor lettings outcomes.
- 1.8.2 Applicants' satisfaction levels will also be monitored in order to identify any improvements to the scheme in terms of ease of access to the service and the quality of information and advice they receive. This will include measuring the satisfaction of minority groups and others who are considered hard to reach, and taking action where necessary to ensure good levels of satisfaction are achieved.

1.8.3 The outcomes of lettings will also be monitored to ensure that all minority and hard to reach groups have equality of opportunity in accessing the scheme and that lettings are broadly proportionate to the profile of communities.

1.9 Information sharing, confidentiality and data protection

1.9.1 In accordance with our obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998, all applicants will be made aware when they apply that their personal information will be held and may be shared across all Dorset Home Choice partners and housing providers and other relevant external agencies for the purposes of consideration of an offer of accommodation being made.

1.9.2 All personal information will be processed in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998. Applicants have the right to inspect personal information held about them under section 7 of the Data Protection Act 1998. Applicants may also correct any inaccurate information held about them.

1.9.3 Personal information will not be shared with organisations external to the partnership unless this is for the purpose of assisting in meeting the applicants housing needs or to detect or prevent fraud in accordance with the applicant declaration when making an application.

1.9.4 Where an applicant may have difficulty communicating directly themselves, their informed consent will be obtained before using advocates or interpreters to communicate on their behalf.

2. Joining the Housing Register

2.1 How to apply

2.1.1 Anyone wishing to bid for a home must apply to join the Dorset Home Choice housing register. An applicant can register by any of the following methods:

- Online via our website at www.dorsethomechoice.org
- By completing a paper application form, available from any of the Dorset Home Choice partner local authorities or partner housing providers.

2.1.2 An advocate (for example family, friend or support agency) can complete the application form on behalf of a vulnerable person. The applicant's signature will always be required on manual forms.

2.1.3 Applicants will be asked if they would like any support to complete the application form.

2.1.4 The form will include a question on whether applicants need any support to participate in Dorset Home Choice.

2.1.5 Advice and information on applying for housing is available from local authority housing offices. See the list in appendix 3 for contact details.

2.1.6 On registration, applicants will be written to and given:

- Their registration date
- The band they have been awarded
- The reason for their banding
-
- A summary of the scheme
- Details of their right to review

Applicants should check the accuracy of this information as it will be used to decide their priority for receiving an offer of housing.

2.2 Identification required

2.2.1 The following evidence is required at the point of applying to the register to assess banding for an applicant:

- Proof of identification for every applicant on the register - drivers licence, birth certificate, or passport
- Proof of address, (Utility bill, bank statement council tax statement/bill, drivers licence)
- Proof of income
- Proof of other circumstances that may affect your housing assessment
- Where relevant, proof of immigration status

Where possible, proofs should be dated within the past 28 days.

- 2.2.2 Applicants will also be asked as part of the application process, to sign a declaration of consent to allow enquiries to be made about their eligibility for housing and level of priority.
- 2.2.3 Where applicants are unable to provide identification information, then their named advocates or support agency will be contacted. Applicants will be asked as part of the application process, to sign a declaration of consent to allow an advocate to act on their behalf.
- 2.2.4 Some partners may waive the identification requirements above except in cases where immigration status has to be established.
- 2.2.5 Proof of identification will be required at point of nomination/offer/tenancy sign up – see section 6.3.1 for further details.

2.3 Who can apply

- 2.3.1 Anyone over 16 years of age who is eligible and meets the required qualification criteria, may apply. This includes people who are already secure, assured, introductory or assured short-hold tenants of any of the member partner housing providers.
- 2.3.2 It should be noted that a tenancy will not usually be given to applicants under the age of 18 years without a 'guarantor' (e.g. Social services, parent, guardian, litigation friend). Partner housing providers may have different policies in dealing with persons under the age of 18. For more details please contact the individual partner housing provider.
- 2.3.3 Applicants who are residing in HM prison are still able to apply (if eligible) but will be unable to bid for properties until one month before their release. Their application will be registered from the date of receipt.

2.3.4 Serious offenders, including applicants who are the subject of MAPPA (Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements) will only be able to be allowed onto the housing register and receive an offer of accommodation after an appropriate risk assessment of their eligibility in the first instance. This may restrict the choice of locations for which they can bid.

2.4 Who can join the register

In considering applications to join the housing register housing authorities must ascertain:

- if an applicant is eligible for an allocation of accommodation, and
- if an applicant qualifies for an allocation of accommodation

Only if these two criteria are met (subject to certain exceptions set out within this policy) can an applicant join the Dorset Home Choice Housing Register.

2.5 Who is not eligible?

2.5.1 The Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) states that accommodation can only be allocated to people who are eligible.

2.5.2 **Certain people from abroad with limited rights to remain in the United Kingdom or who are subject to immigration control are not eligible** to be allocated housing. These groups of people are set out in 'The Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (England) Regulations 2006' (as amended). People who are in doubt about whether they are eligible should seek detailed advice from their local authority's Housing Advice Team.

2.5.3 Note that these eligibility criteria do not apply to applicants that already have a Secure or Introductory Tenancy, or an Assured Tenancy allocated by the Local Housing Authority.

2.5.4 Applicants who are not eligible to register with Dorset Home Choice will be informed in writing of:

- The decision and the reasons behind it
- Their right to review and how to do this

2.6 Who does not qualify?

2.6.1 Housing authorities may only allocate accommodation to people who are defined as 'qualifying persons' (s160ZA(6)(A) Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Localism Act 2011).

2.6.2 Applicants that fall into one of the following categories will be classed as non qualifying persons and will be unable to join the Dorset Home Choice housing register:

- a) Applicants assessed as being adequately housed as defined by this policy (subject to some exclusions regarding rural settlements with less than 3000 inhabitants and those that need to join the register because of an interest in low cost/shared ownership);
- b) Applicants that have the financial means to meet their own housing needs. See section 2.8 for further details. For those applicants wishing to apply to North Dorset District Council this will also include all owner occupiers unless they can show that their property is unaffordable or unsuitable for their needs;
- c) Applicants with no local connection (as defined by this policy) to the Dorset Home Choice Local Authority partner area(s) they are applying to (subject to certain exceptions – please see section 2.7).
- d) Applicants applying to North Dorset District Council and the Borough of Poole with significant (8 weeks or more) rent arrears where any of the rent has not been paid in full (in both social and private rented accommodation).
- e) Applicants assessed by Dorset Home Choice partners as being guilty of unacceptable behaviour. This means that the applicant, or a member of their household, have been guilty of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable to be a tenant. This behaviour must normally have occurred in the previous two years.

2.6.3 Behaviour is unacceptable if it is behaviour that would, if the applicant had been a secure tenant, allow the housing authority to obtain an outright possession order under section 84 of the Housing Act 1985 in relation to Grounds in Part 1 of Schedule 2 other than Ground 8.

2.6.4 Examples of unacceptable behaviour may include:

- Significant (8 weeks or more) rent arrears (where any rent due has not been paid) or breach of tenancy obligations where no attempt is being made to repay the debt or remedy the breach.
- Conduct likely to cause serious nuisance, annoyance or harassment to neighbours

- Using accommodation or allowing it to be used for immoral or illegal purposes
- Serious damage or neglect of a property by the tenant or other occupants
- Committing domestic violence and abuse
- Knowingly giving false or misleading information or withholding information that has been reasonably requested
- Threatening, or perpetrating violence or abuse against members of staff of a Dorset Home Choice partner organisation.

2.6.5 Cases will be considered on an individual basis and applicants will have the right to appeal if they are not satisfied with the decision made. The following criteria will be applied in determining whether an individual or household should be denied the right to register with Dorset Home Choice, because of their behaviour:

- There must be reliable evidence of violent or anti-social behaviour, or domestic violence and abuse
- The behaviour need not have led to possession, prosecution or other enforcement action by a statutory agency, provided there is reasonable probability that, had the applicant been a tenant, an outright possession order would have been granted because of that unacceptable behaviour.
- In normal circumstances the behaviour concerned should have occurred within the last two years. In cases of a more serious nature, for example, those involving criminal prosecution, a longer time-scale may be appropriate.
- There must be reasonable grounds for believing that the behaviour could continue or be repeated. For example, the applicant may have issued threats or there might be a history of repeat offending or the applicant has failed to hold a tenancy/licence successfully since the behaviour/incident occurred.

2.6.6 Partner local authorities in Dorset Home Choice will review applications to the register on request following the receipt of further information. This may include an applicant being able to demonstrate that there has been no further instance of such behaviour, and/or that they can show that they are engaged with support that will enable them to maintain a tenancy. In these cases further consideration will be given after a year, during which acceptable behaviour has been demonstrated, has elapsed. Each case will be treated on its merits and an applicant may appeal if not satisfied with the decision.

2.6.7 It should be noted that the allocation policy cannot cover every eventuality. In special cases where there are exceptional circumstances, each local authority partner has discretionary power to waive the requirement for a local connection, award reasonable preference and additional preference banding categories and approve offers of housing, taking into consideration all factors relevant to housing and social needs. Where this document refers to rules and

criteria for determining priority, eligibility and qualification for housing, subject to any legal constraints, discretionary powers may be used to deal with special cases which may need to be treated as exceptional.

2.7 Local Connection Qualification Requirement

2.7.1 The following local authority partners require the applicant to have a local connection to their specific local authority area in order to be able to apply to join the register (as set out in 2.6.2 c)):

Purbeck District Council
Weymouth & Portland Borough Council
West Dorset District Council
North Dorset District Council
Borough of Poole

However exceptions to this will include where applicants:

- Have been accepted by a Dorset Home Choice local authority as statutorily homeless, and the requirement for a local connection has been waived for specific reasons such as the applicant is fleeing domestic violence and abuse;
- Need to move to the relevant Dorset Home Choice local authority area to give or receive essential and critical support where failure to do so would cause hardship (this does not apply to those applicants applying to Purbeck District Council and for the Borough of Poole this applies to applicants that need to move for the receipt of essential and critical support only);
- There are special circumstances such as health or support needs that are only available within the relevant Dorset Home Choice local authority area (this does not apply to those applicants applying to Purbeck District Council);
- Applicants are assessed as having an urgent (emergency) need to due to imminent risk of domestic violence and abuse, threats to life, racial or homophobic harassment, extreme anti-social behaviour, vulnerable witnesses or any other significant and/or immediate need for a move to more suitable alternative social housing accommodation;
- Due to institutionalisation, hospital admission or other regulation are not otherwise non-qualifying persons due to a lack of a local connection to the Dorset Home Choice Local Authority being applied to (e.g. MAPPA, MARAC, witness protection cases) and where social housing is deemed to be the only suitable accommodation option;

- Applicants to the Borough of Poole that are accommodated in supported housing and requiring move on to social housing recommended by Children's Services (including Care Leavers, foster carers) or Adult Services (including Learning Disability Team and Locality teams);
- Applicants to North Dorset District Council, Purbeck District Council, West Dorset District Council and Weymouth & Portland Borough Council that are accommodated in supported housing and have been recommended for move on. In these cases the local connection will apply to the Local Authority area that the applicant came from unless there are exceptional circumstances that mean that the applicant has to remain in the Local Authority area they are now in (e.g. Permanent employment – being at least a fixed term contract last for at least 12 months, or long term educational commitment lasting at least one academic year);
- Applicants to Purbeck District Council that have an exceptional housing need that cannot be met by other housing options and need to move to Purbeck District Council in order to meet that need. These applications will be assessed on a case by case basis;
- Are current or former members of the British Armed Forces that have left the services in the last 5 years;
- Are serving members of the British Armed Forces who need to move because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service;
- Are bereaved spouses and civil partners of members of the British Armed Forces leaving Services Family Accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner;
- Are serving or former members of the British Reserve Forces who need to move because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service;

2.7.2 In such circumstances applicants will be banded in line with the policy, regardless of the fact that they have no local connection to the relevant Dorset Home Choice Local Authority.

2.7.3 To demonstrate a local connection:

Borough of Poole applicants are required to:

Have lived in the Borough of Poole continuously for the **last 2 years**.

(Residency in a property where treatment or rehabilitation of any kind whilst working will not count towards establishing a local connection)

OR

Are able to demonstrate the need to move to Poole for **essential and critical receipt of support where significant harm would result if this was not provided**.

This includes those where immediate family associations are confirmed to have resided in Poole for the past 5 years continuously.

Purbeck District Council applicants are required to:

- Be resident in the Purbeck District Council area for the last 5 years where residence has been out of choice.
- Have family connections in the Purbeck District Council area . The Local Government Association guidelines define this as immediate family members (e.g.parents, siblings and non-dependent children) who currently reside in the relevant area and have lived there for at least five years and with whom there has been frequent contact, commitment or dependency. Other categories of relationship may be considered including foster relationships, where clear evidence of frequent contact, commitment or dependency is shown.

North Dorset District Council applicants are required to:

- Be continually resident in the North Dorset District Council area for the last two years where residence has been out of choice
- Have family connections in the North Dorset District Council area . The Local Government Association guidelines define this as immediate family members (e.g. parents, siblings and non-dependent children) who currently reside in the relevant area and have lived there for at least five years and with whom there has been frequent contact, commitment or dependency. Other categories of relationship may be considered including foster relationships, where clear evidence of frequent contact, commitment or dependency is shown.
- The need to move to the North Dorset District Council area to give or receive medical or other support.
- Work in the North Dorset District Council area. The Local Government Association guidelines define this as employment other than of a casual nature. For the purposes of this policy this will be defined as having had permanent work with a minimum of a 16 hour contract per week for the previous two years, and without a break in the period of employment for more than three months. Residency in a property where treatment or rehabilitation of any kind whilst working will not count towards establishing a local connection.

Applicants to West Dorset District Council and Weymouth & Portland Borough Council are required to:

- Be resident in the West Dorset District Council or Weymouth & Portland Borough Council area for the last two years, where residence has been out of choice.
- Work in the relevant local authority area. The Local Government

Association guidelines define this as employment other than of a casual nature. For the purposes of this policy this will be defined as having had permanent work with a minimum of a 16 hour contract per week for the previous 6 months, and without a break in the period of employment for more than three months. Residency in a property where treatment or rehabilitation of any kind whilst working will not count towards establishing a local connection.

- Where an applicant needs to move to take up an offer of permanent employment (over 16 hours and evidence will be required) within the relevant local authority area and commuting to their new place of work from their existing home would be unreasonable..
- Have family connections in the relevant local authority area. The Local Government Association guidelines define this as immediate family members (parents, siblings and non-dependent children) who currently reside in the relevant area and have lived there for at least five years and with whom there has been frequent contact, commitment or dependency. Other categories of relationship may be considered including foster relationships, where clear evidence of frequent contact, commitment or dependency is shown.
- The need to move to the relevant local authority area to give or receive medical or other support.

2.7.4 Applicants will be required to provide proof of their local connection to the relevant local authority area being applied to before their application is assessed.

2.7.5 In some rural locations, further local connection restrictions may apply to properties subject to planning conditions, restricting occupancy to applicants from a particular area (section 106 Town and Country Planning Act 1990). In addition local lettings plans may also impose specific conditions for initial letting and/or ongoing lettings. In these cases these specific requirements will take precedence over the general local connection requirement.

2.7.6 For the purposes of this section, residence in the Dorset area will not be of a person's choice if it is a consequence of being detained under the authority of an Act of Parliament or by being placed in the area to receive treatment or rehabilitation of any kind for any kind of dependency.

2.7.7 The local connection rule will not apply to applicants who are assessed as having an urgent (emergency) need due to imminent risk of violence or those who are part of a witness protection scheme.

2.8 Applicants financial resources

2.8.1 Social Housing provided throughout the Dorset Home Choice partner areas is for people who are considered to have insufficient resources to meet their housing need. Those considered to have adequate financial resources to meet their own housing needs will be disqualified from joining the register.

2.8.2 The resources available to each household will be assessed to determine whether they are sufficient to meet their housing need.

Household Income

2.8.3 Applicants with a household income more than five times higher than the relevant Local Housing Allowance level prevailing in the relevant Dorset local authority area at the time will normally be considered to be able to meet their own housing needs, through either renting privately or owner occupation. Local affordability issues will be taken into account given that some areas of Dorset have especially high property values and as such each Local Authority area may adopt additional financial criteria to assess household income. Such applicants will therefore be disqualified from joining the housing register.

2.8.4 Further information on the financial assessment and the Local Housing Allowance rates that apply across Dorset are available from local authority housing teams (contact details provided in Appendix 3).

The following types of income are fully disregarded:

- Attendance Allowance
- Disability Living Allowance
- Personal Independence Payments

Capital, Savings and Equity

2.8.5 The capital, savings and equity available to an applicant's household will be assessed. If it is determined that, given:

- The applicant's capital, savings and equity
- The size and composition of the applicant's household
- The local housing market (for example prices to buy or rent privately)
- an applicant can resolve their own housing need within their local housing market they will be fail to meet the qualification criteria to join the Housing Register.

2.8.6 Applicants can contact their local authority housing teams for details of how this assessment is made.

2.8.7 An exemption from the financial assessment will apply in the following circumstances:

- if the applicant or partner, where applicable, has been (or would be) accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need by a Dorset local authority;
- Any applicant that qualifies for sheltered housing or has a medical requirement for sheltered housing will be exempted from the financial qualification test and will be placed in bronze band (if they have no other housing needs) and will be eligible to only bid for and be offered sheltered housing (this does not apply to applicants to the Borough of Poole where the resources available to each household will be assessed to determine whether they are sufficient to meet their housing need);
- Applicants that are currently underoccupying social housing that is of a type that is in high demand and/or in an area that has high demand, , may be exempted from the financial qualification criteria on a case by case basis provided they wish to remain in the Dorset Home Choice local authority area they live in ;
- Applicants that have exceptional housing needs that cannot be met adequately via other housing options may be exempt from the financial assessment. Each case will be dealt with on its merits and the decision on exemption will be taken by the Local Authority Partner that they are applying to.

2.8.8 Partner housing providers within Dorset Home Choice have different policies relating to income levels and other assets of those households that they will accommodate. Whether a bid for home is accepted will therefore be subject to the policies of the each partner housing provider. More information is available from each Dorset Home Choice partner.

2.8.9 Applicants may be required to demonstrate that they can afford the rent on any prospective tenancy before being allowed to sign for it.

2.8.10 Please note that that applicants that own their home that apply to North Dorset District Council will need to show that their home is unaffordable or unsuitable for their needs as well as being able to show that they do not have the financial capacity to meet their own housing needs in order to be accepted onto the housing register.

2.9 Which Dorset local authority will manage my application?

2.9.1 When an applicant applies to Dorset Home Choice one of the partnership local authorities will be responsible for assessing their application and managing their case. This will include:

- Issuing all correspondence
- Addressing any enquiries
- Assessing any health/ wellbeing or housing defect issues
- Managing any reviews

2.9.2 The local authority that will manage an application will be determined by the applicant expressing a preference for one of the local authority partners that they have applied to. It will be made clear that this will not restrict where applicants can bid, or their chances of being housed in other local authority areas that they apply to.

2.9.3 Where a Dorset Home Choice partner has accepted a homelessness duty towards an applicant they will manage their housing register application, regardless of which local authority area the applicant would prefer to live in.

2.10 Joint applications

2.10.1 Joint applications will be accepted, provided all applicants are eligible, aged 16 or over and intend to occupy the property together as their only or main home. The joint application will be assessed and placed in a band using the details of the household with the greatest housing need. The housing needs of all the household members that are registered on the application will be considered in assessing cumulative needs.

2.11 Multiple applications

2.11.1 Multiple applications will not be allowed. If an application is already registered, the applicant must decide which application they want to keep. All other applications will be deleted. This will also apply to people who are registered as the main applicant on more than one application, including any joint applications.

2.11.2 Where joint applicants are included on an application both will be entitled to claim the earliest banding start date for their current banding when applying in their own right.

2.12 Applications from employees/elected members and their close relatives

2.12.1 Applications can be accepted from employees, elected members, board members and employees of housing providers and their close relatives,

provided they are eligible to apply.. Applicants must disclose any such relationship at the time of applying. In order to ensure transparency and impartiality, employees, elected and board members and employees of housing providers must not attempt to apply any undue influence in the handling of their application or an application from friends or close relatives. In these circumstances approval must be given prior to an offer of accommodation being made, in accordance with the procedures of the relevant partner organisation. Partner organisations will also comply with their own codes of conduct with regard to any such application.

2.13 Giving false information or deliberately withholding information

2.13.1 It is a criminal offence for anyone applying for housing from a housing authority to knowingly or recklessly give false information or knowingly withhold information which is relevant to their housing application.

Anyone found guilty of such an offence may be fined up to £5,000 and/or receive a possible prison sentence and could lose the tenancy if they have been re-housed as a result of providing false information or deliberately withholding information.

2.13.2 Applicants, who are found to have made fraudulent claims in this way, will be removed from the Register for a period of 12 months, after which a fresh application can be made. This decision will be subject to review and the applicant (or their named advocate) will be informed in writing of the decision and of their right to request a review of that decision in writing.

2.13.3 The partnership will consider taking action against a professional organisation that knowingly or recklessly provides false information or deliberately withholds information on behalf of an applicant they are representing.

3. Assessing Housing Need

3.1 How is housing need assessed?

3.1.1 Once a complete application has been received it will be assessed and placed into one of the four bands which are set out below. The band given will depend on the applicant's level of housing need.

3.1.2 The scheme has been drawn up in accordance with existing government guidance, to reflect the pattern of housing need within the partnership area and with regard to the specific criteria that each partner local authority requires.

3.2 How are bands allocated?

3.2.1 Whilst offering choice to applicants wherever possible, allocation schemes must still ensure that reasonable preference is given to applicants (who are eligible and who qualify to join the register) who fall into 1 or more of the following groups over those who do not:

- People who are homeless (within the meaning of Part 7 of the 1996 Housing Act as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002). This includes people who are intentionally homeless and those who are not in priority need;
- People who are owed a (homeless) duty by ANY local authority under section 190(2), 193(2) or 195(2) of the 1996 Act (or under section 65(2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985) or who are living in accommodation secured by ANY housing authority under section 192(3). The letter detailing the outcome of a homeless application will specify whether 1 of these sections applies;
- People occupying unsanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions;
- People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds including a disability
- People who need to move to a particular locality in the relevant local authority partner, were failure to move would cause hardship to themselves or others.

3.2.2 The scheme can take into account those who qualify under more than 1 category when assessing housing need. However there is no requirement under the Housing Act 1996 to give equal weight to each of the reasonable preference categories.

- 3.2.3 In addition, section 167(2) gives housing authorities the power to frame their allocation schemes so as to give additional preference to particular descriptions of people who fall within the reasonable preference categories and who have particularly urgent housing needs.
- 3.2.4 To ensure that local priorities are met, the scheme may provide for other factors, other than those set out in section 167 (2) of the Housing Act 1996 in determining which categories of people 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).
- 3.2.5 The partnership will ensure that monitoring arrangements are in place in order to monitor lettings outcomes and will review the policy in order to ensure that it meets our key aims and our legal duties.
- 3.2.6 Additional preference can also be given to people with an urgent housing need, such a victims of domestic violence and abuse, racial harassment, witnesses of crime and victims of crime at risk of intimidation amounting to violence and people with urgent medical reasons.
- 3.2.7 Housing authorities have the discretion to review each case on its merits and allocate banding in accordance with individual needs where appropriate.

3.3 Requests to transfer to another home

- 3.3.1 All existing tenants of the partners or partner housing providers have the right to apply for a transfer, subject to any restrictions that apply to their tenancy. Tenants' housing needs will be assessed and placed in the relevant band on the register together with all other applicants.
- 3.3.2 Some advertised properties may be labelled giving preference to transfer applicants to ensure that each housing provider makes best use of their housing stock.
- 3.3.3 Some transfers are exempt from the requirements of the Housing Act 1996 Part 6 and will be dealt with separately. This includes assignment or succession by a relative and mutual exchanges.
- 3.3.4 At the point of nomination for a property, the relevant Local Authority may contact the housing provider and request that a housing provider reference is completed. The housing provider reference may include:
- Confirmation of right to transfer
 - Rent account history
 - Satisfactory condition of the property

- Anti-social behaviour
- Tenancy status

3.3.5 If an applicant is a joint tenant of a partner housing provider and wishes to give up their part of the tenancy to live elsewhere, they will be registered and eligible to bid for accommodation (if they fulfil the eligibility and qualification criteria previously stated). If they are successful in bidding and being nominated, they will be required to relinquish their interest in the tenancy before a formal offer can be accepted.

3.4 Banding

3.4.1 The following section provides details of the four bands. The band in which an applicant is placed will be determined by their housing need as set out in the paragraphs below. A summary of the banding scheme is provided here for information only. Each case will be assessed on its own merits in order to assess the appropriate banding.

Emergency Band	Gold Band	Silver Band	Bronze Band
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exceptional housing need that takes priority over other applicants; • There is an urgent need to move the applicant for financial or operational reasons; • Escape violence, threat of violence, harassment or traumatic event; • Emergency disrepair issues; • Urgent health/wellbeing issue; • Witness protection scheme applicants; • Operational need to move applicant quickly (subject to certain provisions) • Applicants accepted as homeless by North Dorset District Council after 3 months; 6 months in Purbeck and in West Dorset District Council when they have been in temporary accommodation for 6 months and for Weymouth & Portland BC, and Borough of Poole when they have been in temporary accommodation for 12 months * 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overcrowded by two or more bedrooms; • Under occupation; • Severe and/or persistent harassment; • Applicants in supported housing/care leavers ready for move on (except Weymouth & Portland applicants); • High medical/welfare needs; • High disrepair needs; • Combined medical/welfare and disrepair needs; • Cumulative needs (4 or more silver band needs); • Decant applicants • Tenancy succession (subject to certain criteria) • Efficient management of housing stock • Fostering/Adoption (Subject to quota arrangements) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homeless/threatened with homelessness; • Weymouth & Portland Borough Council applicants in supported housing ready for move on; • Medium medical/welfare needs; • Medium disrepair needs; • Overcrowded by one bedroom; • Split families; • Need to move for support (this does not apply to Purbeck District Council applicants) • Need to move for work (this does not apply to applicants to North Dorset District Council, Borough of Poole, and Purbeck District Council) • Service personnel • Community Contribution (North Dorset District Council only) • Affordability (North Dorset only) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliberate worsening of circumstances • Applicants with other housing related debts • Low Medical/Welfare/Disrepair needs • Accepting an offer that doesn't meet housing needs • Sustainable rural housing • Sheltered housing Applicants • Shared/Low Cost ownership applicants • Unacceptable behaviour

*These timescales may be subject to change. Sections 3.5 to 3.8 below set out specific examples of circumstances that may fall within the four bands.

3.5 Emergency Housing Need

- 3.5.1 Applicants will be placed in the Emergency housing need band if their need for housing is assessed as so exceptional that they take priority over all other applicants or if there is an urgent need to allocate a property for financial or operational reasons.
- 3.5.2 Individual local authorities will each assess Emergency applications in accordance with paragraph 3.5.5 and the criteria set out below. Substantial evidence must exist and be provided by any relevant statutory or voluntary agencies before such priority is awarded.

The following are **examples** of the type of situations that may qualify:

- Urgent health/ wellbeing need

Emergency disrepair

To escape violence or threat of violence, serious harassment or a traumatic event. Where there is immediate and serious risk to a household living in a Dorset Home Choice partner authority. The Police or another appropriate agency will usually provide supporting evidence that the risk exists. The person at risk may be the applicant, or another person who might be reasonably expected to reside with them.

There is an operational need to move the applicant quickly where the applicant is in a specific type of temporary accommodation such as a refuge, where they can no longer remain and further temporary accommodation is inappropriate.

Applicants accepted as homeless by North Dorset District Council after 3 months, by Purbeck District Council and West Dorset after 6 months and Weymouth and Portland Borough Council and the Borough of Poole after 12 months. These timescales may be subject to change depending on local circumstances).

Where a Dorset local authority accepts a household being referred under the Witness Protection Scheme.

- 3.5.3 Applicants will be given this priority for 3 months. If an Emergency housing need band applicant does not bid for suitable homes available through Dorset Home Choice (or refuses a suitable offer of a property)

they will have their status reviewed and may be placed in 1 of the other bands dependent on their need. In very exceptional circumstances an applicant will be allowed to remain in the Emergency housing need band for longer than 3 months.

3.5.4 The decision to extend or remove the Emergency housing need band status will be made by the local authority (subject to para 3.5.5 below) and will be based upon: -

- Whether a vacancy occurred during the 3 month period that met the declared needs of the applicant.
- The reasons why the applicant failed to apply for the property and whether the reasons were valid.

3.5.5 Please note that awarding of 'Emergency Band' will be made by a senior officer within the the Local Authority that has been applied to unless the banding is expected to apply across other Dorset Home Choice partners in which case the banding decision will be made by the Emergency Band Assessment Panel. Where an immediate decision is required on cross boundary emergency banding, the Senior Manager within the respective Local Authority administering the housing register application will consult two other members of the Assessment Panel, both of which must be from another partner organisation in order for a decision to be made within 48 hours. The consultation is to be carried out via email. The case, and subsequent decision, will be reported to the next full Assessment Panel.

3.5.6 Emergency status may also be awarded where the tenant of a 'sheltered' or 'adapted' property for the disabled has died leaving another family member in the property and the landlord wishes that family member to be moved quickly to enable the property to be let to an applicant who requires it.

3.5.7 In all emergency cases there is an expectation on the applicant, or their representative, to provide the information required to reach a decision.

3.5.8 In those cases where a 48 hour decision period is not suitable due to the urgency of the case, at least two senior managers within the relevant local authority will meet to discuss the case and will make a recommendation to the manager responsible for the Housing Register so that a decision can be made.

3.5.9 Cases considered to be urgent and serious enough to require an allocation to be made outside of the Council's normal policy and procedure are defined as follows:

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

3.5.10 Housing providers will be expected to demonstrate that they have taken reasonable steps to deal with urgent cases before referring for an emergency banding request.

3.5.11 The relevant Local Authority will carry out risk assessments and consultation with the Community Safety team, Police and Probation as well as existing and potential housing providers where appropriate, to assess the appropriateness of any resulting allocation which may arise from the award of emergency banding to an applicant.

3.6 **Gold Housing Need**

3.6.1 Applicants may be placed in gold band if they fall within the categories set out below.

Lack of bedrooms / Overcrowding

3.6.2 Applicants who lack 2 or more bedrooms, (Section 3.12 refers) or have been confirmed as overcrowded (defined as a category 1 hazard and/or Statutory overcrowded) by a Local Authority officer, UNLESS evidence exists that proves the overcrowding is deliberate and where all other housing options have been assessed as unreasonable.

Under-occupation

3.6.3 The applicant is a tenant of a Dorset Home Choice partner who resides within the relevant Dorset Home Choice partner area and under-occupies their existing property and is looking to move to a smaller, more suitable property. Note: Where a tenant lives in specialist two-bedroom property this may not apply. Applicants will only be able to benefit from this banding once when applying to the register unless there is a subsequent change in their circumstances.

Harassment

- 3.6.4 The applicant is a victim of severe and/or persistent harassment or violence (including racial harassment) at their current property within the relevant Local Authority area - providing evidence exists to substantiate the claim (e.g. from Police/Housing Officer), and re- housing is the most appropriate course of action. This band will last for three months and may be extended for a further three months if the harassment or violence is continuing and evidence is provided to confirm this.

Medical/Welfare

- 3.6.5 The applicant is awarded a 'high' medical priority (see Appendix 6).
Note that where public monies have been committed or works begun to adapt the applicants property to meet the applicants housing needs the applicant may be moved to bronze band.

Disrepair

- 3.6.6 Based on the conditions identified, the local authority has deemed the applicant's (your) home to have the presence of Category 1 hazards, Bands A - C (Housing Health & Safety Rating System) that CANNOT be resolved or reduced to a Category 2 hazard within 6 months.

Supported Housing Move on

- 3.6.7 The applicant resides within a short-term Supported Housing project (usually available for up to a maximum of two years) and is seeking to 'move-on' into independent accommodation. NB: The Project Manager of the scheme must confirm in writing that the applicant is ready for such a move and has acquired reasonable skills to sustain a tenancy. Until this time, the applicant will be placed within the Bronze Band. This will not apply to applicants to the Borough of Poole. The application date will be the date they entered the Supported Housing, or the date a homeless application was made. The earliest date will apply. This will be subject to quota arrangements which will be determined by individual local authority partners and will not apply to Weymouth & Portland Borough Council applicants who will be banded silver.

Please note refuges are not classed as move on accommodation for this purpose.

Care Leavers Move on

- 3.6.8 Where a young person who has been looked after, fostered or accommodated and has had a duty of care accepted under the Children Act in the relevant Dorset Home Choice area, and is ready for independent living, they should be awarded gold band to enable a planned move on to independent suitable accommodation providing a support plan

is in place. This will be subject to quota arrangements which will be determined by individual local authority partners and will not apply to Weymouth & Portland Borough Council applicants who will be banded silver.

Combined Medical/Welfare and Disrepair

- 3.6.9 The applicant has been awarded a 'medium' medical priority, combined with a 'medium' disrepair award from the Silver Band (See Appendix 6).

Cumulative need

- 3.6.10 The applicant is awarded four or more silver band housing needs with the exception of those applicants that are found to be intentionally homeless by the relevant local authority.

Decants

- 3.6.11 Social Housing Tenants whose existing properties are subject to major works for rebuilding/renovation/demolition or re-designation and need to move to another location, will be placed into the gold band to enable them to move quickly. Applicants will be placed into gold band up to 12 months before the proposed start date of the scheme/works (this date has to be confirmed by the landlord) and will be given an application date 1 year prior to their actual registration date.

Tenancy Succession

- 3.6.12 Where the Local Authority receives written support from a Dorset Home Choice landlord that an applicant has been living in a social housing property but has no legal right to succeed to that property, and the landlord confirms that they intend to pursue possession of the property, the applicant may be placed into gold band. The applicant will be subject to the financial assessment set out within the policy. Where an applicant may or may not have a legal right to succession but wishes to downsize they may also be placed into gold band to facilitate the best use of housing stock. This Does not apply to the Borough of Poole.

For the Borough of Poole the awarding of gold band will only be considered where;

- there is a statutory right to succeed and the applicant requires a move to more smaller accommodation or sheltered housing.
- there is no legal right of succession but the partner housing provider's tenancy agreement or succession policy, in agreement with the local authority, dictates that a discretionary succession would be reasonable and proportionate, and the applicant has a need to move to alternative accommodation.

Effective management of social housing within Dorset

3.6.13 This priority will be awarded in a number of situations set out below to aid the efficient management of social housing stock

- Under occupation of social housing
- Those moving from one bed general needs property to one bed sheltered accommodation
- As a management tool to resolve issues affecting a block or estate
- As a tool to help partner organisations address their housing responsibilities contained within employment contracts

Fostering/Adoption Quota

3.6.14 Those applicants that are fostering or adopting children and who require an extra room in order to enable them to foster/adopt may be placed into this band. This banding will be subject to any quota arrangements set out within each Dorset Home Choice local authority partner.

3.6.15 Applicants will also be placed in the Gold band if there is a proven social need or to support the delivery of another service. This applies to applicants who, for exceptional reasons, fall outside of the rest of Dorset Home Choice Allocations policy, and need to be found secure alternative accommodation. This may include children at risk issues where children would otherwise be accommodated by social services.

3.7 Silver Housing Need

3.7.1 Applicants may be placed in the silver band if they fall into any of the following categories:

Medical/Welfare

3.7.2 Applicant awarded a 'medium' medical priority (see Appendix 6). This would include an applicant sharing facilities where there was significant and ongoing harm and detriment to the applicant and this was supported by evidence from an external agency.

Disrepair

3.7.3 Based on the conditions identified, the local authority has deemed the applicant's (your) home to have the presence of Category 1 hazards, Bands A - C (Housing Health & Safety Rating System) that CAN be resolved or reduced to a Category 2 hazard within 6 months.

Lack of bedrooms

3.7.4 Applicants who are assessed as lacking one bedroom in their current home.

Homeless/Threatened with Homelessness

3.7.5 People who are homeless (within the meaning of Part 7 of the 1996 Housing Act as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002). This includes people who are intentionally homeless and those who are not in priority need.

People who are owed a (homeless) duty by ANY local authority under section 190(2), 193(2) or 195(2) of the 1996 Act (or under section 65(2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985) or who are living in accommodation secured by ANY housing authority under section 192(3). The letter detailing the outcome of a homeless application will specify whether one of these sections applies.

Applicants accepted as homeless or threatened with homelessness by a Local Authority within the Dorset Home Choice area under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 including Rent (Agricultural) Act Cases will be placed in the silver band.

Applicants registered with North Dorset District Council that are accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need within this category will be moved to Emergency band if they remain un-housed after 3 months on the register.

Applicants registered with Purbeck District Council that are accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need within this category will be moved to Emergency band if they remain un-housed after 6 months on the register.

Applicants registered with West Dorset District Council, and North Dorset District Council that are accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need within this category will be moved to Emergency band if they remain un-housed after 6 months on the register.

Applicants registered with the Borough of Poole and Weymouth & Portland Borough Council that are accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need will be moved to emergency band if they remain unhoused after 12 months on the register.

All of the above timescales are subject to change dependent on local circumstances.

Split Families

3.7.6 Applicants that have previously lived together but who, not by choice are living in separate households due to the lack of suitable accommodation available, and cannot live together and wish to be re-housed together and have not been accepted by Dorset Home Choice Partners under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002). This includes those who may not have been living as part of the household at the time of the application, but whom it would be reasonable to expect to live

with the applicant, as part of his/her household.

An application form should be completed by the household living in the worst property out of the households applying, to ensure the application is placed in the correct banding.

Need to move for Support

- 3.7.7 Applicants who are able to demonstrate the need to move for essential and critical receipt of support where significant harm would result if this was not provided and this support is not available where they currently live. This does not apply to applicants to Purbeck District Council. Applicants to the Borough of Poole must need to move to the area to **receive** essential and critical support where significant harm would result if this was not provided.

Need to move for Work

- 3.7.8 Applicants who are able to demonstrate the need to move nearer their place of work within, the Dorset Home Choice partner area because they have secured or have permanent employment (over 16 hours) in the area (evidence of the employment must be provided). This does not apply to applicants applying to the Borough of Poole, Purbeck District Council and North Dorset District Council.

- 3.7.9 **Move on from Supported Accommodation in Weymouth & Portland Borough Council** To enable the best use of Supported Accommodation within the Borough applicants with a local connection who have resided in a Supported Housing Project for a minimum period of 1 year and are seeking to move to independent accommodation will be awarded silver band.

The Supported Housing Provider must confirm in writing that the applicant is ready for such a move with details of any relevant support required to assist/enable such a move. Until this time, the applicant will be placed within the Bronze Band. If the applicant falls into other reasonable preference categories they may be awarded a higher band to reflect that additional preference.

Please note refuges are not classed as move on accommodation for this purpose.

Service Personnel

- 3.7.10 The needs of personnel that have served or are serving within the British Armed Forces will generally be assessed under the general provisions of the policy such that medical/welfare/other needs of such applicants would be looked at against the same criteria as any other applicant. However applicants that fall within one of the following groups will be placed in silver band subject to the overall financial assessment set out within the policy:

- (a) current members or former members of the British Armed Forces that have left the services in the last 5 years
- (b) serving members of the British 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 British Armed Forces leaving Services Family Accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner
- (d) serving or former members of the British Reserve Forces who need to move because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service

Community Contribution

3.7.11 Applicants applying to North Dorset District Council where applicants are undertaking voluntary work for 16 hours or more per week in the North Dorset District Council area. Proof will be required at point of application.

Affordability

3.7.12 Applicants to North Dorset District Council, where a property becomes unaffordable due to a change in the applicants circumstances, applicants may be awarded silver band to reflect this hardship and prevent homelessness. This will not apply to applicants to any of the other Dorset Home Choice local authority partners.

3.8 Bronze Housing Need

Deliberate Worsening of Circumstances

3.8.1 Households that have been assessed as having deliberately worsened their housing circumstances by moving into accommodation that is unsuitable for their needs and /or by taking no action to improve their circumstances which can be evidenced may be placed into bronze band.

Deliberate worsening of circumstances will arise where local authorities decide that an applicant has given up accommodation that was suitable for their needs where there was no requirement or obligation to do so. To reduce the likelihood of applicants moving into poorer accommodation in order to qualify for higher priority and quicker re-housing, applicants who are deemed to have deliberately worsened their circumstances will normally be placed in the Bronze band.

This decision can be reviewed on request.

Examples of deliberate worsening of circumstances might include:

- Selling a property that is affordable and suitable for an applicants' needs
- Moving from a secure Assured Tenancy to insecure, overcrowded accommodation with family or friends, where there is no good reason for this move
- Where there is evidence that it was reasonable that an applicant could have remained in their original accommodation

Where an applicant has little or no control over their move to alternative accommodation, this should not be considered as a deliberate worsening of circumstances.

Sheltered Housing

- 3.8.2 Applicants who may otherwise be assessed as adequately housed but with a local connection to the relevant Dorset Home Choice local authority being applied to with a requirement for sheltered housing. This band will be subject to certain age restrictions which vary dependent on the local authority partner being applied to and the registered provider offering accommodation. Applicants to the Borough of Poole will still be subject to the overall financial assessment.

Other Housing Related Debts

- 3.8.3 Applicants that have other housing related debts (such as outstanding service/support charges, rent in advance or rent deposit payments, storage and removal costs, housing benefit debts, property repair and cleaning costs, outstanding temporary accommodation or bed and breakfast debts and any legal costs associated with debt recovery) to social landlords or local authorities with no payment plan in place may be placed in bronze band. Those applicants in high medical/welfare need or those fleeing abuse/harassment/violence may be exempted from this requirement.

Accepting an offer that does not meet housing needs

- 3.8.4 Note that if an applicant accepts an offer of housing that does not fully meet their housing needs and then subsequently reapplies to the housing register with no change in their circumstances, it is likely that they will be placed in the bronze band.

Low Medical/Welfare/Disrepair

- 3.8.5 Applicants with minor medical, welfare or disrepair needs. See Appendix 6 for further details.

Rural Sustainability

- 3.8.6 If an applicant has a local connection (as defined in section 2.7 above) to a rural parish (defined as a settlement with a population of under 3000 (unless subject to a statutory instrument enabling a rural exception or are subject to a specific request within a section 106 agreement) and no other housing need they will go into bronze band rural sustainability.

Unacceptable behaviour

- 3.8.7 People who engage in, or have been found responsible for, unacceptable behaviour. In this case further consideration will be given after a year, during which acceptable behaviour has been demonstrated, has elapsed. Each case will be treated on its merits and an applicant may seek a review if not satisfied with the decision.

Supported Housing not yet ready for Move On

- 3.8.8 Applicants who are residing within a short term supported housing project (usually available for up to a maximum of two years) but who are not yet assessed as ready to move on. This band does not apply to applicants to the Borough of Poole.

Shared/Low Cost Ownership Not Eligible to Bid

- 3.8.9 Applicants that wish to take advantage of shared ownership / low cost home ownership offers will be allowed onto the register and placed in a Not Eligible category. The bidding process is not available to those seeking low cost home ownership products.

3.9 Changes in Circumstances

- 3.9.1 Applicants must provide information about their current housing situation so that the following can be assessed:
- The band they are placed in
 - What size, and where appropriate, what type of property they can bid for
- 3.9.2 Applicants must inform their local authority housing team of any changes in their circumstances **within 28 days**. This includes any change that may affect the priority which has been given to their application. Applicants must notify their local authority of any change of address or change in the composition of their household **as soon as the change occurs and must complete a change of circumstances form within 28 days of the change occurring**. Evidence of these changes (where applicable) must also be provided within the same 28 day period. Failure to comply with

these timescales will result in the applicant being removed from the Housing Register.

3.9.3 Applicants have the right to apply for their banding priority to be reviewed if there is a material change of circumstances.

3.9.4 If a person successfully bids for a property and it is later found that the housing situation was different from the details provided when the application was made the offer may be withdrawn.

3.10 Moving bands following a change in circumstances

3.10.1 Applicants whose housing need changes will have their application reassessed. This may change the band their application has been placed in.

3.10.2 Those moving to a lower band because their need for housing has reduced will keep the same band start date to determine how high up that new band they will be.

3.10.3 In exceptional circumstances where keeping the same band start date would cause serious detriment to the applicant, an officer may use their discretion to give an applicant changing bands their original application date.

3.10.4 Those moving to a higher band because their need for housing has increased will have their band start date changed to the date their change of circumstances request was received. This is so that applicants who have been in this high level of need for a long time will remain above applicants who have recently joined this band.

3.10.5 If it is accepted by the relevant local authority (or an organisation working on their behalf) following a review that an applicant should have been placed in a higher band, their band start date will be backdated to the date of the change of circumstance or the date of the review depending on the circumstances of the case .

3.11 Notification

3.11.1 Once an application form has been entered online or received by a Dorset local authority housing team it will be assessed and the information entered onto the Dorset Home Choice register system. Once the local authority managing the application is in receipt of all the required information from the applicant the application can be fully assessed. The applicant will be notified in writing within a maximum of 20 working days of any decision that has been made on their housing register application.

3.11.2 This notification will include:

- The 'band' in which the applicant has been placed and brief details of why this decision has been made
- The size of the property that the applicant is eligible to bid for
- Their 'band start date'
- A unique reference number
- Information on how Dorset Home Choice works, including where to find information on available homes and how to bid
- Information on sources of further advice and assistance
- A reminder of the need to notify any change in circumstances immediately
- Information on the review procedure

3.11.3 Applicants will also receive notification of any reassessment of their application within a maximum of 20 working days if they have provided details about their change of circumstances to their relevant local authority.

3.12 Size of property for your household

3.12.1 Applications will be assessed to determine the size of property that their household requires and this assessment will be different depending on the housing authority that you apply to. A household is defined as "the applicant and any other person who normally resides with the applicants as a member of his/her family or any other person who might reasonably be expected to reside with the applicant" (Housing Act 1996).

3.12.2 Household members living together as a couple will be assessed as requiring 1 bedroom, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Size of Property - North Dorset District Council, West Dorset District Council and Weymouth & Portland Borough Council Applicants

3.12.3 The following assessment (known as the maximum bedroom entitlement) will normally be made for those applicants applying to West Dorset District Council, Weymouth & Portland Borough Council and North Dorset District Council about the ages and sex of children (who are under 18) who can share a bedroom, or who need separate bedrooms (except in exceptional circumstances):

- Children that are of different sexes and are more than 7 years apart – **separate room**
- Children of different sexes where one or more is over 7 years – **separate room**
- Two Children of the same sex under 18 years – **share 1 bedroom**

- Additional adults (defined as being 18 years old or over) living permanently in a household will require an extra bedroom.
- A disabled tenant or partner who needs a non-resident overnight carer will be allowed an extra room.
- Foster carers will be allowed one additional room, so long as they have fostered a child or become an approved foster carer within the last 52 weeks.

Please note that an additional bedroom would be allowed for household members in full time education where they are away from the home for term periods but have a need to return during holidays – this allocation would be subject to the overall financial assessment process.

3.12.4 There will also be a minimum bedroom assessment for all applicants which allows one bedroom for each person or couple living as part of the household with the following exceptions:

- Two Children under 16 of the same gender are expected to share
- Two Children under 10 are expected to share regardless of gender
- A disabled tenant or partner who needs a non-resident overnight carer will be allowed an extra room.
- Foster carers will be allowed one additional room, so long as they have fostered a child or become an approved foster carer within the last 52 weeks.

Size of Property – Borough of Poole and Purbeck District Council Applicants

3.12.5 For those applicants applying to the Borough of Poole and Purbeck District Council the size criteria allows one bedroom for each person or couple living as part of the household with the following exceptions:

- Two Children under 16 of the same gender are expected to share
- Two Children under 10 are expected to share regardless of gender
- A disabled tenant or partner who needs a non-resident overnight carer will be allowed an extra room.
- Foster carers will be allowed one additional room, so long as they have fostered a child or become an approved foster carer within the last 52 weeks.

Please note: This is not an exhaustive list. Applicants with a large number of household members may require larger properties. Large properties may not be available in all Dorset Home Choice areas.

Please note: Individual partner housing provider letting policies or local planning policies may affect the size of households that may apply for particular properties. Any such restrictions will be included in the property advert.

- 3.12.6 These property sizes will not apply to existing tenants of a partner housing provider who are seeking to move to a home that is at least 1 bedroom smaller. For example a single person living in a 4 bedroom home will be able to move into a 2 bedroom property. This is to make the most effective use of social housing and free up family accommodation. **This will not apply to applicants to the Borough of Poole.**
- 3.12.7 Where households have particular needs (for example due to health issues) these will be taken into account in determining the size of property that they are eligible to apply for. For example, where the local authority agree that an applicant requires a regular overnight carer they may be eligible for an additional bedroom.
- 3.12.8 Because of the very high demand for properties within Dorset, additional bedrooms will not be awarded for children who do not normally live permanently with the applicant. We may award an additional bedroom to approved adopters/foster carers where this is needed to enable them to adopt/foster. Only one additional bedroom will be awarded in these cases.
- 3.12.9 Such decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis and will be determined by the local authority's decision as to which parent or guardian the child is dependent on in terms of their primary day-to-day care, and with whom the child would therefore be expected to ordinarily reside. One indication may be drawn, for example, by checking circumstances such as which parent receives the Child Benefit.

3.13 Review Procedure

3.13.1 Any applicant has the right of review of the following decisions:

- They have been denied the right to register
- The priority and band start date they have been awarded
- They have had their priority reduced
- A decision not to allocate a property for which the applicant has bid and has the highest priority and earliest band start date
- Their application has been cancelled
- They have been assessed as having deliberately worsened their own circumstances

3.13.2 Once an applicant has been notified in writing of the band in which they have been placed, or their ineligibility, they will have a right of review against the assessment. Requests for reviews must be submitted in writing, to the local authority housing office within 21 days of the date on the notification letter and include the reason why the applicant believes their banding or ineligibility is wrong together with any additional information that the applicant believes is relevant.

- 3.13.3 Requests for a review of a decision not to allocate a property for which the applicant has bid and has the highest priority and earliest band start date should be submitted to the local authority or partner landlord that has taken the decision.
- 3.13.4 All requests for reviews for any of the other reasons listed above must be submitted in writing to the relevant local authority that determined the applicants original banding.
- 3.13.5 The local authority will acknowledge the review request within 7 days. A Senior Officer who played no part in the original assessment will carry out a review of the case and respond in writing to the applicant within 56 days of the receipt of the request for review letter. Following the review, the applicant will be informed in writing of the outcome together with the reasons for the decision.
- 3.13.6 If an applicant is dissatisfied with the merits of a decision on review they will need to seek a judicial review on the relevant point of law.
- 3.13.7 Any complaints regarding the operation of the scheme should be directed initially to the relevant local authority housing office and if applicants remain unsatisfied to the Local Government Ombudsman. Details of applicants, allocations and complaints will be monitored in relation to diversity to ensure equality of access.
- 3.13.8 The partnership reserves the right to review any decision affecting an application with regard to other issues not covered in 3.16.1 above

The review to be carried out by the managing partner organisation for that application. Discretionary reviews will be undertaken by a Senior Officer who was not involved in the original decision; this could be in conjunction with information provided by other statutory or voluntary advice agencies.

4. The Dorset Home Choice Housing Register

4.1 Review of the Dorset Home Choice Register

4.1.1 All local authorities in Dorset will review the applicants on the housing register at least once every 3 years in order to:

- Confirm that the details on the register are still correct
- Check whether there have been any changes in an applicant's circumstances
- Confirm that the applicant wants to stay on the housing register.

4.1.2 **If an applicant not identified as being vulnerable does not reply to a review it will be assumed that housing is no longer required and the application will be cancelled within 28 days of the original review request letter being sent. The applicant will have to apply again if they later want re-housing. In such cases an applicant will lose their previous band start date and application date and their band start date will be determined by their fresh application date.**

4.1.3 **Where applicants who have been identified as vulnerable, do not reply to a review request, the local authority will seek to contact them again and/ or any advocate (e.g. family, friend or support agency) working with them. This is so that that vulnerable people are not removed from the register inappropriately. If this final attempt to contact the applicant and/ or their advocate fails their application will be cancelled.**

4.1.4 Only in exceptional circumstances will an application be reinstated with the previous band start date. For example an applicant was in hospital and missed the review letters.

4.2 Cancelling applications

4.2.1 An application will be cancelled from the Dorset Home Choice register in the following circumstances:

- At the request of an applicant
- Where an applicant does not respond to an application review, within the specified time limit
- Where a local authority or a housing provider has housed the applicant
- Where an application is incomplete and un-submitted for a period of 28 days
- When a tenant on the housing register completes a mutual exchange
- Where the applicant moves and does not provide a contact address
- Where the applicant has died

- Where the applicant has not supplied the relevant information requested in support of their application within 28 days of a request being made for that information.

4.2.2 When an application has been cancelled, the applicant or their representative will be notified in writing.

4.2.3 Where an applicant has been highlighted as potentially vulnerable, the local authority will contact the applicant, or agency that they are working with if appropriate, to check their circumstances before cancelling the application.

4.2.4 Any applicant whose application has been cancelled has the right to ask for a review of the decision.

4.3 Meeting Applicants Housing Needs

4.3.1 An applicants housing needs will have been deemed to have been met if they are housed within the definitions of this policy.

4.4 Rejoining the Dorset Home Choice Register

4.4.1 Where an applicant wishes to rejoin the Dorset Home Choice register at a later date their new band start date will be determined by the new date that they apply. Their housing need will be reassessed and they will be placed in the appropriate band as set out above.

5. Applying for Properties

5.1 When can you start?

5.1.1 Once applicants have received notification that they have been registered with Dorset Home Choice they can start applying for homes for which they are eligible.

5.2 Property Adverts

5.2.1 Homes will be advertised each week in the following ways:

- Online at Dorset Home Choice
- On newsletters that will be available widely across Dorset. Details of where the newsletters are available from can be obtained from local authority housing teams
- Personalised information will be sent to applicants who have been identified as vulnerable and who are in either the Emergency/Gold/Silver housing need bands

5.2.2 All documentation, adverts and the website will be fully accessible. [This will be reassessed following the Equalities Impact Assessment on the scheme]

5.2.3 Homes will be advertised on a weekly cycle. Properties will be available for bidding from Wednesday at 4.00pm until Monday at 11.59pm when the bidding cycle will close.

5.2.4 Properties advertised will include a photograph of the home wherever possible and a full description of the property. The description will include:

- Type of property
- Number of bedrooms
- Any age restrictions
- Any special criteria associated with the property (e.g. local letting plans/sensitive lets)
- Location of property
- Floor level (if appropriate)
- Any adaptations
- Access to the property (for example number of steps, ramp or lift)
- Type of parking (if any)
- Heating type
- Property energy rating
- Whether pets are allowed
- Rent charged per week (and number of rent weeks per year)
- Any service charges

- Type of tenancy
- Any services provided to the property (caretaker, sheltered housing officers)
- Information on the surrounding area
- Estimated tenancy start date (which may be subject to change)

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

5.3 Labelling of properties

5.3.1 The general effect of labelling can be seen to compromise the extent to which vacancies will be let to the highest priority applicant as described under the banding system. It is therefore important for each housing provider to only use labels to manage the stock in the most effective way order to maintain transparency to the allocation system.

5.3.2 To enable the positive management of stock some homes may be advertised to certain groups of applicants, or to provide preference to certain groups. For example:

- Where a home has been adapted for disabled people only applicants who require this type of home will be allowed to bid for it
- Where, due to planning restrictions or this allocations policy, applicants are required to have a local connection to a particular area within Dorset
- Existing tenants who wish to transfer, including those who wish to move to a smaller property
- Households who have been accepted as homeless by a specific Dorset local authority
- Families with children 14 or under for properties with gardens
- Priority for households with children for certain property types
- Applicants in specific bands to address a specific housing need e.g. those in bronze band.
- Applicants with a medical/welfare requirement for ground floor accommodation.
- Priority for those with rural local connection and/or rural housing need.

In addition to the preference labels Dorset Home Choice partners may choose to allocate to groups of applicants using an allocations plan to address specific needs/issues.

5.4 Local Lettings Policies

- 5.4.1 Section 167 (2E) of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) enables Housing Authorities to adopt Local Lettings Policies and Plans. The Code of Guidance states that these lettings plans could enable a Housing Authority to allocate to specific groups of people, whether or not they fall into the reasonable preference categories. However, it does also state that reasonable preference categories must be taken into account overall and that local lettings plans should not discriminate either directly or indirectly on any equality grounds.
- 5.4.2 The partnership, in accordance with Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002), has a clear Allocations Scheme which is required by law to allocate all secure, assured and introductory tenancies. The partnership is reluctant to make allocations which do not comply with this scheme unless there is a clear and robust justification for doing so.
- 5.4.3 Sites which the partnership will consider appropriate for Local Lettings Plans are as follows;
- Sites with provision of a specific nature (e.g. Eco Homes developments, Live Work etc.)
 - Sites where the location of the scheme presents limitations in terms of the type of nominations which can be accepted
 - Sites where there are issues with hard to let properties
 - Sites where management issues are of significant impact
- 5.4.4 Housing providers should identify the requirement for Local Lettings Plans upon commencement of the development and should begin discussions with the relevant local authority housing team at this time to allow proposals to take shape.
- 5.4.5 Housing providers will be required to provide clear justification and evidence for requesting a Local Lettings Plan, along with the detail of the plan, at least six months in advance of completion/advertising date. In considering the detail of the plan, the housing provider will need to show that consideration has been given to the following factors;
- Meeting identified housing needs
 - Assisting the partnership in dealing with its homelessness duties
 - Steps which the housing provider can take to mitigate risks
- 5.4.6 The partnership will consider the request and will work with the housing provider to reach agreement one month from the original request.

- 5.4.7 The final decision in terms of Local Lettings Plans will be made by the senior officer responsible for Housing within the relevant local authority.
- 5.4.8 The detail of Local Lettings Plans will be publicised on the Dorset Home Choice website and in partner housing newsletters, at the earliest opportunity.
- 5.4.9 Where a housing provider can provide evidence of a particular scheme or estate where difficulties are experienced with demand and therefore, lettings, the partnership will consider requests for Local Lettings Plans which directly deal with this, within the guidelines set out above.
- 5.4.10 Where a housing provider can provide evidence of a particular scheme or estate where management issues are having a significant impact on the quality of life of their tenants, the partnership will consider Local Lettings Plans as set out above.
- 5.4.11 Once Local Lettings Plans are agreed, properties will be advertised through Dorset Home Choice, showing specific details according to the plan. Nominations will then be made to relevant properties according to the agreed plan.

5.5 Sensitive Letting/Local Letting Plans

- 5.5.1 Occasionally there may be a requirement to assist in dealing with issues that impact on a small, specific location that may be only 1 dwelling within an estate. This may be to:
- Reduce the concentration of certain needs groups which is impacting on housing management
 - Promote a more balanced community by seeking to select/not select households with particular characteristics
- 5.5.2 This will be agreed by a process between the local authority housing department and the housing provider (where the local authority is not housing provider itself) and where more than one property in an area is affected this will be set out in an agreed local lettings plan.

5.6 Allocation of rural properties

- 5.6.1 A significant proportion of social housing properties in Dorset are located in rural areas. The availability of private housing is restricted by relatively high house prices and a high demand for second homes within the county together with a low wage economy for those actually living and working in the area.
- 5.6.2 Dorset Home Choice partners therefore wish to ensure through the policy that:

- Rural communities are sustained wherever possible
- Local people in housing need are given additional priority in the allocation of rural properties
- There is a reduction in the reliance on new housing association development to meet housing demands from local people by giving priority in the allocation of existing social housing.

5.6.3 Some rural properties are already restricted to certain applicants owing to the nature of the permission granted when the property was built – these are called section 106 agreements. These restrictions take precedence over any requirements set out within this section of the policy.

5.6.4 Properties in rural areas which are not subject to section 106 agreements will be allocated such that all the properties will be prioritised and labelled for applicants with a local connection to the parish where the property is located. In the absence of any eligible bids from applicants with a local connection to the parish where the property is located, eligible bids from applicants in the adjacent parishes will be considered. Note that within Purbeck District Council 75% of these properties will be allocated in this way.

5.6.5 The Dorset Home Choice property advert will make clear that this preference is in place.

5.6.6 If there are no eligible applicants for that specific property type with a local connection to the relevant settlement and adjacent parishes in that bidding cycle, the shortlist will be re-ordered to give priority to households with a local connection to the relevant settlement and adjacent parishes who would under occupy the property by one bedroom.

5.6.7 If there are still no bids from suitable applicants in that bidding cycle the shortlist will re re-ordered again with no specific priority for local connection to that area.

5.7 **Bidding for a home**

5.7.1 Where an applicant meets the criteria for a home set out in the advert they may bid for that home within the deadline given.

Applicants may bid for homes:

- Online at the Dorset Home Choice website www.dorsethomechoice.org
- Using the telephone bidding service
- In person at the offices of any of the Dorset local authorities
- Using Coupons (these will not be available for all local authority

- partners)
- Using SMS text messaging

5.7.2 The staff within the Local authority housing offices will be available to explain to applicants how to bid. They will also encourage applicants to make use of all the bidding options available to them, so if their circumstances change, and one method will no longer be available to them, they will be able to use another. For example, if an applicant goes abroad on holiday, they may not want to use the automated telephone line as usual, but will be able to bid online through the website.

5.7.3 Advocacy bidding will be allowed to make use of existing networks of support from family, friends, neighbours, and support agencies. To bid an advocate will need the applicant's reference number and their consent to make a bid.

5.7.4 Applicants who are unable to bid will be offered the opportunity for bids to be placed automatically on homes they are eligible for. These applicants will be identified in a number of ways:

- through the application process
- analysis of bidding patterns amongst high priority applicants
- a request from the applicant themselves who is unable to bid
- representation from an agency.

5.7.5 Applicants can apply for up to 6 homes each week. Please note that normal weekly advertising cycle may be altered over Christmas and New Year and during other bank holiday periods. This will be clearly advertised on the Dorset Home Choice website.

5.7.6 However in the event that they have the highest band and earliest effective band for more than 1 home in any 1 week, applicants will be required to choose which home they wish to view. In order to ensure effective housing management applicants will not be able to view more than 1 home in any 1 advertising cycle.

5.7.7 Applicants who apply and are put forward for sheltered housing will have their support needs assessed by a member of the local authority's or the housing providers' sheltered housing team.

Assisted Bidding list

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

5.7.9 In most cases people in such a position will be identified via their Housing Register application form. In most cases, we will consider whether the applicant can be supported by someone appropriate before they are added to the Assisted Bidding List. People considered to be appropriate

to provide assistance will be a professional person, such as a Social Worker, Housing Officer, Housing Adviser, Advocacy Worker etc. or a family member, or any other representative. If someone is unable to submit their own bids, and is not in receipt of any support, it may be the case that other support needs are also not being met. In these circumstances, it may be appropriate to make a referral for floating support (with the permission of the applicant).

5.7.10 There may be other instances where an applicant may be in need of this type of assistance. Application forms include a question relating to an applicant's potential difficulty in applying for properties themselves and asking if they have a Social Worker etc. who could help them. It may be that they receive support from a relative or a friend who could be contacted.

5.7.11 The main purpose of maintaining the Assisted Bidding List will be for a member of staff to monitor the progress of people requiring assistance and to ensure that bids are being submitted on their behalf when suitable properties in their areas of choice become available.

5.7.12 Applicants may also have bids placed automatically by the system (autobidding) where this has been requested and in accordance with applicant wishes on property and area preferences.

5.8 Deadline for property bids

5.8.1 Homes will be advertised each week. The advert will indicate the deadline by which time applications for homes (bids) must be received. Any applications received after the deadline has been reached will not be considered.

5.9 Automatic Bidding

5.9.1 Where applicants have been placed in Emergency or Gold band and are not bidding for suitable properties, local authorities may place bids on their behalf using the automatic bidding facility in order to ensure suitable accommodation is allocated to high priority applicants.

5.10 Training for Stakeholders

5.10.1 Training will be provided to relevant teams and stakeholder groups giving details of the Home Choice scheme and where to find advertised properties. All Home Choice properties will be advertised on www.dorsethomechoice.org and support workers (including Social Work teams) advised to look at this each week and assist their clients to apply.

5.11 **Applicants Not Bidding – North Dorset District Council**

5.11.1 Applicants on the North Dorset District Council housing register that have not placed any bids in a 12 month period when suitable properties were available, where no good reason exists will be removed from the register; this will apply from 3 months from the implementation of this Policy. Applicants may reapply to join the register but will lose their initial application date and effective date in band with regard to their North Dorset District Council application.

6. Selection procedure – Shortlisting and offers

6.1 Prioritising applications

6.1.1 Applicants who have bid for properties will be prioritised:

- Firstly by their band. For example those applicants in the Gold housing need band will be listed above applicants in the Silver housing need band, and
- Secondly **within** each band in order of their band start date, with the applicant with the earliest band start date at the top.

6.1.2 For each home advertised the successful applicant will be the one who is in the highest band and has the earliest band start date.

6.1.3 Each successful applicant's details will be verified before the applicant is accepted for a property to ensure they are eligible for the home and that there has been no material change of circumstances since their banding was assessed. Only those applicants who meet the criteria can be offered the home.

6.1.4 Before making a final decision on the offer, the applicant will be able to view the property. As set out above, where an applicant has the highest band and earliest effective band date for more than 1 home in any 1 week, they will be required to choose which home they wish to view. In order to ensure effective housing management applicants will not be able to view more than 1 home in any 1 week.

6.1.5 Partners in Dorset Home Choice will be able to offer advice to applicants to help them make an informed choice. It will be important however that any guidance offered does not override an applicant's own choices.

6.2 Viewing properties and accepting offers

6.2.1 Applicants offered a home will normally be expected to make a decision whether to accept the offer within 2 working days. Where an applicant requires additional support or time to make such a decision this can be offered by the local authority and/ or housing association, or a support agency depending the circumstances.

6.2.2 The relevant housing provider will arrange an opportunity to view the property. In some circumstances more than one applicant may be invited to view the property, particularly in areas of low demand or in the case of properties that are frequently refused by applicants.

6.2.3 Where applicants have indicated that they are working with a support agency and are happy for information to be shared with the agency, the support agency will be informed if they are being put forward for a property. This will enable the agency to offer support to the applicant in deciding whether to accept an offer.

6.3 Verification of eligibility

6.3.1 The following documentation will be required to verify an applicants' eligibility prior to receiving an offer of accommodation:

- Proof of identity
- Proof of household makeup(including children)
- Proof of any disabilities
- Proof of income/benefits (bank statement, wage slips, DWP documentation)
- Proof of savings/stocks and shares(bankstatement, relevant paperwork)
- Local connection evidence

Please note that in some cases original documents may be required depending on which Dorset Home Choice partner you have applied to.

6.3.1 Local authorities will undertake a check and verification of the information supplied by an applicant when they apply to join the Dorset Home Choice register. Original documents will need to be checked prior to a tenancy being offered.

6.3.2 When an applicant has bid for a home and they are in the highest priority band and have the earliest band start date, there will be a further check on their application to ensure that they are eligible for the home. If the applicant is considered to be eligible they will be notified that they are being considered for the property and asked to confirm whether their circumstances are still the same as those recorded on the Dorset Home Choice register.

6.3.3 There will be clear grounds for refusals or bypassing applicants by housing providers agreed with partner housing providers. A housing provider will inform an unsuccessful applicant of the reason behind their decision. This may include suggested action that the applicant take in order to improve their chances of successfully finding a home through Dorset Home Choice.

6.3.4 All offers of accommodation with housing providers will be subject to the policies of the individual organisation. The housing provider may require additional criteria to be met. Any additional criteria will be clearly set out in

the property advert.

- 6.3.5 Where it is found that an applicant's circumstances have changed from the information held on the Dorset Home Choice register, their application will be re-assessed. If this re-assessment finds that their priority band is reduced they will not be offered the property if they are no longer the applicant with the highest priority band.
- 6.3.6 The detailed verification check will include assessing whether applicants have been guilty of unacceptable behaviour since applying to a Dorset Home Choice partner (or before if this was not identified at the initial verification). Applicants found to have been guilty of unacceptable behaviour since registering with a Dorset Home Choice partner will be removed from the register, and will not be offered the home. Details of unacceptable behaviour are set out above in Section 2.4.
- 6.3.7 Applicants with rent arrears to a private landlord will be considered on a case-by-case basis by Dorset Home Choice local authorities. Applicants who have rent arrears to a private landlord who have been (or would be) assessed as having accrued these rent arrears intentionally may be placed in the bronze housing need band. 'Intentionally' means that the applicant deliberately did something (or failed to do something) that resulted in the rent arrears. An act or omission in good faith on the part of the applicant will not be treated as deliberate if they were unaware of any relevant fact.
- 6.3.8 Applicants who have their priority reduced within Dorset Home Choice will be informed in writing of:
- The decision and the reasons behind it
 - Their right to appeal and how to do this
- 6.3.9 Each applicant's circumstances will be considered on a case-by-case basis, for example if an emergency move is needed or serious harm would result their priority may be maintained, enabling the move to progress. The tenant would be charged and expected to pay back the cost of any work needed to put right wilful damage or neglect.
- 6.3.10 Transfer applicants need to check with their housing provider on the criteria they should meet before being offered a transfer to alternative accommodation.
- 6.3.11 Partners in Dorset Home Choice reserve the right to prevent an offer going ahead where the home is not considered to be suitable for the applicant.
- 6.3.12 This may include issues of public safety, risk, or sustainability of the tenancy. An offer may not be made or may even be withdrawn if the

support needs of the applicant are such that the housing provider, in consultation with the local authority deems that the applicant will be unable to maintain an independent tenancy. This decision may also be informed by the input from other partner agencies involved in a case.

- 6.3.13 In these circumstances there must be a sufficient care or floating support package available to ensure that the tenancy is likely to be successfully maintained.
- 6.3.14 Housing providers will ensure that the property being nominated to is the applicants sole and principle home and that any other property that the applicant has is sold prior to the tenancy starting.
- 6.3.15 Housing providers will undertake an affordability check when allocating properties to ensure that applicants are able to afford the rent for the property.

6.4 Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements

- 6.4.1 Most housing providers within the scheme have entered into an agreement with Dorset Police to exchange information on any applicant convicted under the Sex Offenders Act 1997. Any applicant who has previous convictions of sex offences/is on the Sex Offender register, will be subject to the provisions set out in the information exchange protocol and will be subject to a risk assessment.
- 6.4.2 Before any known offender is offered housing, full consultation will be undertaken with the relevant support agencies to assess the risk involved of placing that individual in the given property.
- 6.4.3 All applicants falling within this protocol will be subject to the qualifying persons criteria previously stated within the policy.

6.5 Refusals

- 6.5.1 A refusal of a property is considered to have occurred if the applicant has viewed the property and an offer has been, or would have been, made had the applicant not refused the property.
- 6.5.2 If an applicant decides to refuse an offer of a home it will be offered to the applicant who is eligible and has the next highest band and/or earliest band start date.
- 6.5.3 Applicants who have been accepted as statutorily homeless by a Dorset local authority are still able to exercise choice through Dorset Home

Choice, to apply for those homes they feel meet their needs. However, if they refuse an offer of accommodation, the refusal will be referred to the local authorities Homelessness Team. They will investigate whether or not the refusal is 'reasonable' and inform the Dorset Home Choice team within 24 hours. If the refusal is 'reasonable' then the second placed applicant will be made an offer of the home. However, if the refusal is deemed 'unreasonable' then the applicant will be advised by the homeless section that their duty will be discharged and the applicant re-offered the home.

- 6.5.4 Homeless applicants will also be advised that if they refuse an offer, the home will be offered to another household with the next highest band and/or earliest band start date who applied. Rather than refusing an offer of accommodation, homeless households will therefore be advised to accept the offer and request a review of suitability once they have been accommodated. Further advice and information is available from each of the Dorset local authorities.

- 6.5.5 If an applicant refuses, without good reason, 2 properties after bidding for them in any 12 month period, they will be contacted by a member of the Council's staff to discuss their bidding. This may lead to their application being reassessed and placed into a lower band.

- 6.5.6 Applicants will be offered advice and assistance to take part in Dorset Home Choice effectively. If it is found that they continue to refuse what are considered to be suitable homes they may have their priority reduced to the bronze housing need band.

7. Feedback and Monitoring

7.1 Feedback

7.1.1 An important part of any choice based letting scheme is to provide applicants with feedback on who has recently been allocated properties. Accompanying each advert cycle will be a feedback section giving details of the properties allocated in previous cycles.

7.1.2 An applicants' personal details will not be included. The feedback will include:

- Property size and type
- Property location
- Number of applicants who bid on each property
- Band of successful applicant
- Application/Band date of successful applicant
- Date property was advertised

7.1.3 The feedback provided will help to inform applicants future choices when bidding for homes and will be closely monitored by the partnership.

7.2 Difficult to let properties

7.2.1 If a vacancy cannot be filled through Dorset Home Choice then the property can be let in any way deemed appropriate by the housing provider in agreement with local authority. This may include re-advertising the property and removing any restrictions or preferences previously attached or making a direct offer.

7.3 Excluded properties

7.3.1 All the partner housing providers are committed to advertising as many of their vacant properties as possible through the Dorset Home Choice scheme. There will be occasions when certain properties will not be advertised and these exclusions will be closely monitored.

7.3.2 All secure tenancy properties will be advertised on Dorset Home Choice but there may be circumstances where they have to be excluded at the discretion of the local authority.

- 7.3.3 For the purposes of Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996, a local housing authority allocates housing accommodation when they:
- (a) select a person to be a secure or introductory tenant of housing accommodation held by them,
 - (b) nominate a person to be a secure or introductory tenant of housing accommodation held by another person, or
 - (c) nominate a person to be an assured tenant of housing accommodation held by a housing provider.

In addition the provisions of Part 6 do not apply to the allocation of housing accommodation by a local housing authority to a person who is already:

- (a) a secure or introductory tenant,
- (b) an assured tenant (otherwise than under an assured shorthold tenancy) of housing accommodation held by a housing provider, or
- (c) an assured tenant of housing accommodation allocated to him by a local housing authority.

7.4 Policy Review

- 7.4.1 The Dorset Home Choice scheme may be reviewed annually. Any proposed significant changes will be consulted upon as required by relevant legislation.

7.5 Monitoring

- 7.5.1 Effective monitoring will be put into place and will be regularly reviewed to ensure that Dorset Home Choice is accessible, and that the scheme is working as fairly and effectively as possible.

- 7.5.2 The comprehensive monitoring system will include information on:
- The participation and outcomes for vulnerable groups
 - The number of applicants stating that they wish to be supported (for example with completing the application form or with bidding), why, and how this support was provided
 - Applicants who have been awarded a high priority (for example Emergency, High or Medium Housing Needs Bands) but have not been bidding or have not been bidding effectively. This will be followed up to assess the reasons why and whether any additional support is required
 - How applicants have accessed information on available homes
 - How applicants have bid for homes
 - How long applicants who have been accepted as statutorily homeless take to move into permanent accommodation

- The number of applicants who have been bypassed or refused by partner housing providers, and the reasons for these decisions
- The occasions when, and reasons why local authorities have used their residual discretion to depart from of the Policy due to exceptional circumstances
- The number and type of homes diverted by partner housing providers for lettings outside Dorset Home Choice, and the reasons for this
- Equality and diversity monitoring

7.5.3 A range of questions will be included on the application form that will enable equal opportunities monitoring. This information will help reveal whether there are certain groups within the community who are not accessing information about Dorset Home Choice and not participating in the scheme.

7.5.4 As with any monitoring it will only serve a purpose if the results are used effectively to develop and further improve Dorset Home Choice to ensure that applicants who are vulnerable do not lose out. Similarly good practice from other schemes and guidance from central government will be incorporated into Dorset Home Choice.

Appendix 1 Definition of Terms

Active application

An application status that enables applicants to bid for properties on the Dorset Home Choice system.

Additional preference

The phrase used in the Housing Act to allow local authorities to prioritise applicants with the greatest need in the reasonable preference categories.

Adequately Housed

Applicants who, at the time of their application, live in a property which is adequate for their needs in terms of size and facilities. This applies to applicants who live in social housing, are owner-occupiers and tenants of private landlords.

Advocate

A responsible person who has been given approval to 'act' on behalf of an applicant e.g. support worker, family member.

Applicant

A person who applies to register on the choice based lettings scheme, including tenants of a local authority or a housing provider.

Application date

The date the application is assessed by a partner local authority having received all relevant information from the applicant.

Bands

A way of prioritising housing needs within the housing register that places those of similar need within the same band and places bands in a hierarchy of housing need.

Band start date

The date an applicant is placed into a band.

Bedroom Entitlement

The number of bedrooms that an applicant will be considered for.

Bidding

To be considered for an available home, applicants are required to 'make a bid' or 'express an interest' in a property. No money is involved in making a bid or expressing an interest in a property.

Bidding cycle

The number of days in which an applicant has the opportunity to 'place a bid' or 'express an interest' in a home once it is advertised.

Choice Based Lettings

A system which enables applicants for social rented housing the choice of where they would like to live from a list of available properties based on their eligibility for those properties.

Codes of Guidance

Relevant government guidance provided to local authorities to use when drawing up allocations policies.

Common allocation policy

A housing allocation policy that covers all partners within the Dorset Home Choice area with the exception of Bournemouth Borough Council.

Cumulative Need

More than one housing need has been identified in the reasonable preference categories.

Current legislative framework

Housing Act 1996 Part 6, Code of Guidance on Choice Based Lettings, Fair and Flexible guidance on Housing Allocations, Homelessness Act 2002.

Decant

The need to move an existing tenant out of their accommodation to enable building works to be done on that property.

Dorset Home Choice

Dorset Home Choice is a partnership of the following authorities:

Bournemouth Borough Council
Borough of Poole
Christchurch Borough Council
East Dorset District Council
Purbeck District Council
North Dorset District Council
West Dorset District Council
Weymouth & Portland Borough Council

Housing need

An applicant who needs to be rehoused because their current living arrangements are detrimental to their (or a member of their household's) health and welfare.

Housing provider

A registered housing provider, arms length management organisation or stock holding local authority.

Local connection

A defined connection to a settlement or area obtained through living, working or having family in that settlement/area (how the connection is obtained is dependent on the authority being applied to).

Localism Act

A piece of legislation enacted in November 2011 to provide: new freedoms and flexibilities for local government, new rights and powers for communities and individuals, reforms to make the planning system more democratic and more effective and reforms to ensure that decisions about housing are taken locally.

Local lettings policies

Policies that allow certain properties in certain areas to be let against specific criteria.

Normally be resident

Normally resident for the purposes of this policy means that an applicant is if they are normally living in the area (apart from temporary or occasional absences), and their residence there has been adopted voluntarily and for settled purposes as part of the regular order of their life for the time being.

Offer

An offer of accommodation that an applicant has bid for.

Partner organisation

A housing provider that advertises 100% of their vacancies in the Dorset Home Choice sub region through the choice based lettings scheme.

Personal reference number

A unique number that will be provided to an applicant once their application is registered on Dorset Home Choice.

Property label

A description of a property being advertised as available to let.

Reasonable preference

The phrase used in the Housing Act to describe those types of housing need that should be given priority in a local authority's allocations policy.

Registration date

The date an application is received by a local authority.

Rural Parish

Settlements with a population of less than 3,000 as at most recent Census count (unless subject to a statutory instrument enabling a rural exception site).

Shortlisting

The process by which bids received on a property are prioritised so that the applicant with the highest housing need and the oldest band start date is at the top of the list of bidders.

Statutory Overcrowding - See Appendix 4

Under Occupying

A person under occupies when they occupy accommodation that has more bedrooms than their maximum bedroom entitlement.

Urgent management move

The need for a housing provider to urgently move an existing tenant to make best use of their housing stock.

Appendix 2 Partner Housing Providers

List here of all partner housing providers that will be taking part in the scheme.

Ability HA
Anchor Trust
Bournemouth Borough Council
Bournemouth Churches HA
Bournemouth YMCA
East Boro Housing Trust
Synergy Housing
Guinness Trust
Hanover HA
Hastoe HA
Home Group
Housing 21
Knightstone
Magna Housing
Mill Street Housing
Places for People Homes
Poole Borough Council (Poole Housing Partnership)
Sandowne Housing Association
Shaftesbury Housing Group
Stonewater
Spectrum Housing Group
Sovereign Housing
Radian Housing

Appendix 3 Local Authority Contact Details



Housing Options Team - Strategic Housing Services
Environmental Health & Consumer Services
Bournemouth Borough Council
Town Hall, St Stephen's Road
Bournemouth
BH2 6LL
Tel: 01202 451467
Email – housing1@bournemouth.gov.uk



Borough of Poole, Civic Centre
Poole
BH15 2RU
Tel: 01202633805
Email – homechoice@poole.gov.uk



Christchurch & East Dorset Housing Service, Civic
Offices
Bridge Street, Christchurch
Dorset BH23 1AZ
Tel:01202 795213 Email –
housing@christchurchandeastdorset.gov.uk



Christchurch & East Dorset Housing Service,
Civic Offices
Bridge Street, Christchurch
Dorset BH23 1AZ
Tel:01202 795213 Email –
housing@christchurchandeastdorset.gov.uk



North Dorset District Council
Nordon
Salisbury Road
Blandford Forum
Dorset
DT11 7LL
Tel: 01258 454111
Email – homechoice@north-dorset.gov.uk



Purbeck District Council
Westport House, Worgret Road
Wareham
Dorset
BH20 4PP
Tel: 01929 557370
Email - - homechoice@purbeck-dc.gov.uk



West Dorset Housing Advice Centre
South Walks House
South Walks Road
Dorchester
DT1 1 UZ
Tel: 01305 251 010
Email – housingadvice@westdorset-dc.gov.uk



Weymouth and Portland Borough Council Council
Offices
North Quay
Weymouth
Dorset
DT4 8TA
Tel: 01305 838000
Email – housingadvice@weymouth.gov.uk

Appendix 4 – Statutory Overcrowding Definition (Housing Act 1985)

Overcrowding can be caused by too many people living in a dwelling, and depends on the size of the habitable rooms.

If two people of the opposite sex have to sleep in the same room the accommodation will be overcrowded unless the two people are:

- a married or cohabiting couple, or
- at least one occupant is under ten years old.

The number of people of the same sex - unless they are a same sex couple - who can sleep in one room is restricted by the size of the room within the dwelling.

The amount of space in each room

Rooms that are counted as space for sleeping include living rooms, dining rooms, bedrooms and the living area of an open-plan kitchen/living room. For the space and floor area calculations:

- children under one year old are ignored
- children aged from one to 10 count as a half
- anyone aged over 10 counts as 1.

As a general rule:

1 room = 2 people
2 rooms = 3 people
3 rooms = 5 people
4 rooms = 7.5 people
5 or more rooms = 2 people for each room.

The floor area of a room also determines how many people can sleep in it:

- floor area 110 sq feet (10.2 sq metres approx) = 2 people
- floor area 90 - 109 sq ft (8.4 - 10.2 sq m approx) = 1.5 people
- floor area 70 - 89 sq ft (6.5 - 8.4 sq m approx) = 1 person
- floor area 50 - 69 sq ft (4.6 - 6.5 sq m approx) = 0.5 people.

Crowding and Space Hazard – The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)

The HHSRS provides an additional tool for local authorities to tackle overcrowding.

Introduced in April 2006, the HHSRS assesses the deficiencies of a home in terms of the impact on the occupiers. Local authorities use the system to assess properties for 29 health and safety hazards, one of which is crowding and space. The HHSRS operating guidance

[<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/hhsrsoperatingguidance>], outlines the ideal where, depending on the gender mix:

“a dwelling with one bedroom is suitable for up to two people regardless of age; two bedrooms for up to four people; three for up to six people; and four for up to seven people. Living rooms and kitchens are also considered. Whether a dwelling is actually overcrowded depends on the age and circumstances of the family in it.”

A dwelling may not match the ideal, but unless the hazard is a high-scoring Category 1, the authority’s decision to act is discretionary.

Appendix 5 Disrepair Guidance

Level	Description	Banding
High	<p>Serious Disrepair Issue</p> <p>Based on the conditions identified the Private Sector Housing Team has deemed your home to have the presence of Category 1 hazards, Bands A - C (Housing Health & Safety Rating System) that <u>CANNOT</u> be resolved or reduced to a Category 2 hazard within 6 months.</p>	Gold
Medium	<p>Moderate Disrepair Issue</p> <p>Based on the conditions identified the Private Sector Housing Team has shown that your home has Category 1 hazards, Bands A - C (Housing Health & Safety Rating System) that <u>CAN</u> be resolved or reduced to a Category 2 hazard within 6 months.</p>	Silver
Low	<p>Minor Disrepair Issue</p> <p>Has shown that your home has Category 2 hazards, Band D (Housing Health & Safety Rating System).</p>	Bronze

Appendix 6 Medical & Welfare Considerations

When ill health, disability or old age is aggravated by housing conditions and would improve if other accommodation were offered. The award for medical consideration is a range from Emergency to Bronze Band.

Level	Description	Banding
Urgent	Urgent Medical need which is life threatening or which is causing bed blocking with hospital/care facility	Emergency
High	Serious Problems Medical issue(s) which have a serious impact on your housing need or make it unreasonable to remain in your current accommodation.	Gold
Medium	Moderate Problems	Silver
Low	Minor Problems	Bronze

In the case of stress this will be reflected when deciding on banding.

The two crucial factors that are looked for in any awards of medical conditions are:

1. The physical link between the identified medical complaint and the current housing accommodation/situation.
2. That there is a realistic expectation that the identified medical condition would improve if alternative, more suitable accommodation was made available.

The Housing Team will carefully consider any representation received and check the circumstances outlined with any banding award that may have previously been made. Where there is a need, a change to banding will be made.

Support evidence for the medical condition must always be provided to the relevant lead authority to enable the banding to take place.

When determining what banding to award, staff should approach the matter from the standpoint of assessing what degree of need exists and, secondly, what adverse effect this has on the lifestyle of the household as a whole?

The following case examples are provided for guidance only.

Urgent Problems – Emergency Band.

This band is reserved for applicants where the issue of life threatening or it is causing bed blocking.

Emergency Band	Example Case Detail
Example 1 Emergency	An elderly applicant who the medical specialists will not allow to be discharged from hospital back to a second floor split-level flat which necessitates the climbing of stairs both to gain access and also within the flat itself. This person suffers from a chronic heart condition and the only accommodation available to them would place their life at risk. This view is amplified when further research reveals that the applicant lives alone, has virtually no contact with any neighbours, becoming in effect, a prisoner within the flat should the medical authorities decide to discharge him/ her from hospital
Example 2 Emergency	Mr Stevens, a frail, elderly gentleman, lives on his own in an old caravan in the grounds of a house in a country area. The only mains service is electricity. He fetches his water from an outside cold water tap and must use an Elsan bucket toilet situated some distance from the caravan. Mr Stevens suffers from dizzy spells, arthritis and was admitted to hospital as a result of the cold during the winter and the danger of falls when collecting water or using the outside toilet.

Serious Problems – Gold Band. This band will be reserved for those cases where an applicant's or tenant's housing need is seriously affected by their medical issue(s) or make it unreasonable to remain in their current accommodation.

Please note that gold band will only be made where the property cannot be adapted to meet the applicants needs or funds are not available for such adaptations or landlord permission cannot be obtained.

Gold Band	Example Case Detail
Example 1 Gold	Mrs Smith, an elderly widow, lives on her own in a first floor flat. She suffers from severe rheumatoid arthritis, and is unable to climb stairs. As a consequence she is housebound. This is clearly not putting her life at risk, but is having a serious effect on her lifestyle, which a move to ground floor accommodation would resolve. [Note the key fact here is that the applicant is housebound because of their condition – were the applicant able to move around more freely this case would likely to be banded in silver]

Gold Band	Example Case Detail
Example 2 Gold	Mr and Mrs Brown, are both aged 70, are the owner-occupiers of a large Victorian property. Mrs Brown also suffers from osteoarthritis and now finds mobility painful, which is aggravated by this large dwelling, where only the WC facilities are on an upper floor. Mr Brown has a blood disorder and has considerable problems keeping warm, which is aggravated by this old property with its large rooms and high ceilings. The GP is concerned on both accounts and has advised the Housing Team accordingly.
Example 3 Gold Band	Mr Jones is a 30 year old single man who has just had his right leg amputated because of an accident. He is currently living in a 2nd floor flat with no lift.

NOTE: It is expected that any medical award, which is assessed to be a serious problem, will be linked to medical or social service recommendations that have been received by the Housing Team.

Medium/Moderate Problems – Silver Band. This again is a high banding award and should only be used to reflect moderate medical difficulties that have a clear relationship to existing housing circumstances.

Silver Band	Example Case Detail
Example 1 Silver Band	Mrs Coles is living with her common-law husband in a rented property. Mrs Coles considers that their relationship has broken down, although her common-law husband refuses to accept this fact. Whilst she has not been subjected to physical violence, there is a great deal of mental cruelty which has led to Mrs Coles seeking the help of a Consultant Psychiatrist and being unable to work for several months. She has been advised that her mental health is being affected by her relationship with her common-law husband. In a case such as this, it would be essential for the Housing staff to consult the Community Physician before making a banding award.
Example 2 Silver Band	Mrs Coles and her daughter are living in a property where Mr Coles (husband and father) died of cancer. The young child (7 years old) is now constantly looking for her father in the property and this is causing considerable upset.

Low/Minor Problems – Bronze Band. The degree of the problem is minor.

Bronze Band	Example Case Detail
Example 1 Bronze Band	A couple in their early 60s have signs of generalised arthritis and rheumatics. There are some difficulties with the accommodation because it is difficult to maintain a constant temperature during winter months. The garden is also becoming an increasing chore, but out of a sense of pride the occupants continue to try and keep on top of it.

Example 2 Bronze Band	Minor problems relating to recurring colds/asthma or regular depression or unusual allergies could be pointed under this heading providing a link to the existing accommodation could be demonstrated.
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These examples are provided for guidance only – each case will be reviewed by housing staff on its own merits. Please note that any assessment will also take account of learning disability.

The Housing Team will carry out the majority of assessments under the Medical Consideration element. However, there will be occasions when external expert advice will need to be sought or a referral made to the medical Assessment Panel. For example, where an applicant’s housing circumstances are affecting their mental health, or where a GP considers a patient requires over-riding priority as a result of a medical problem.

We may seek an independent medical opinion whenever an applicant does not normally fall within one of the priority categories under part VI and VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the homelessness Act 2002) and/or experiences health problems which are likely to make them vulnerable in a homeless situation. This information will be used to inform the relevant local authority officer to decide the Local Authority obligations.

The important aspect is to make a decision on what banding should be awarded and when. The Visiting Officer’s report (where applicable) should set out in the rationale as to why bandings have been pitched at that particular level.

The following list covers some of the main factors, which can be reflected in a banding award under medical considerations.

1. Mobility - Inability to manage stairs/control-heating (e.g. put on extra clothing or adjust fire). size of accommodation, garden.
2. Applicants or tenants who are more or less confined to their existing accommodation, or where they depend on others to enable them to leave the dwelling.
3. Where present accommodation is causing the applicant’s mental or physical disability, which could be overcome by a move to more suitable accommodation. The approach in this instance is to focus on how the applicant or tenant’s circumstances could be improved by a move to alternative accommodation - banding will be awarded accordingly.

Welfare Banding Assessment Guidance

Level	Description	Banding
Urgent	Severe and persistent welfare risk to the applicant	Emergency
High	Serious and persistent welfare risk to the applicant	Gold
Medium	Moderate and/or intermittent welfare risk to applicant	Silver
Low	Minor and or occasional welfare risk to applicant	Bronze

These examples are provided for guidance only – each case will be reviewed by housing staff on its own merits. Please note that any assessment will also take account of learning disability.

Band	Example Case Detail
Emergency Band	A family living in Sherborne. Son has severe illness that requires access to Dorchester hospital. Family car is in use for work, mother looking after children doesn't drive and isolation from medical care is causing problems for other children.
Gold Band	A child within an applicants family has been abused outside of the family home. The child is now seeing the abuser regularly in the local community and this is causing serious hardship to the child. An applicant has a terminal illness and the management of their condition would be improved if they could move to a different property.
Silver Band	An applicant is isolated in a rural area with no family to provide support and no transport to enable them to visit Doctor regularly.
Bronze Band	Applicant has a low level medical condition which requires periodic (quarterly trips to the hospital for check ups and lives in a rural location with only limited public transport.

Staff will need to assess the whole situation in terms of the way in which welfare can impact on medical considerations and vice versa.

Appendix 7 – Eligibility Guidance

Dorset Home Choice partners will exclude from the scheme people who are not resident in the United Kingdom at the date of their application. In line with Government legislation the Dorset Home Choice partnership will also exclude people who are subject to immigration control or who are not habitually resident in the Common Travel Area or who only have limited rights of residence in the Common Travel Area under European Union law, unless they have been prescribed as eligible by regulations, or unless they are already secure, introductory or in certain cases assured tenants. The Dorset Home Choice partnership will have due regard to any future changes to European Union law / Rights to Reside legislation.

Please see

http://england.shelter.org.uk/get_advice/homelessness/eu_and_eea_nationals and annex 2-4 of <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/2171391.pdf> for further guidance.

Appendix 8 – Statement on Decision Making Process

All applications are banded and given a bedroom eligibility by a member of the Registration Team of the managing partner for the application based on the information provided at the time of registration by the applicant or applicant's representative and the applicant's household make-up. The applicant is notified in writing of the Registration Teams decision.

If an applicant wants the band or bedroom eligibility awarded by the Registration Team reviewed a written request they must be made within 28 days of being advised of the decision. The decision will be reviewed by another Officer who was not involved in making the original decision.

If additional information is received with the review request a review may not be required as the new information will be treated as a change in circumstances and in the first instance the banding/bedroom allocation will be reconsidered by the Registration Team.

If the applicant is not satisfied with the other Officers decision the Local Authorities complaints procedure may be followed.