



APPENDIX 1

Blaenau Gwent Common Housing Register

Common Housing Allocation Policy

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Section 1: Introduction and Background

1.1 The Purpose of the Allocation Scheme

Blaenau Gwent Common Housing Register is a service that enables people seeking social rented housing to exercise choice where they will be offered a tenancy, and has been developed in the context of:

- Relevant legislation and guidance;
- Our Local Housing Strategy;
- The current need for, and demands on, social housing within Blaenau Gwent; and
- Equality of opportunity legislation and guidance.

The administration of this scheme is the responsibility of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. All homeseekers within Blaenau Gwent will be assessed on the same basis and will be considered for vacancies across the County Borough.

The following are members of the “Blaenau Gwent Partnership”.

- Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
- Tai Calon Community Housing
- Linc Cymru
- Melin Homes
- United Welsh

Each of these housing associations have voluntarily signed up to this common policy to ensure that all applicants applying for social housing in the County Borough are provided with a single route of access and assessed using a single policy.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council no longer owns a housing stock. The scheme formally applies to all properties to which Blaenau Gwent Council have rights of nomination (whether by way of a legally enforceable arrangement or not) of the tenant; except those, which are reserved for special housing needs groups. Properties to which the County Borough Council have rights of nomination of the tenant include properties owned by Tai Calon, Linc Cymru, Melin Homes and United Welsh.

Although the Council has nomination rights to a percentage of vacant properties held by the Registered Housing Association Providers each association has agreed to join the Common Housing Register Partnership and allocate their vacant accommodation through one housing register and to an agreed set of rules.

To improve the service to applicants and to avoid duplication an applicant must be registered by the Housing Access Team at Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council and will receive a mandatory **Housing Solutions Interview**.

When a person seeking a home (called a 'Homeseeker' in the policy) applies to join the register an assessment will be made of both their eligibility as defined in Section 5, and their priority under the scheme. Reasonable preference will be given to Homeseekers that satisfy the categories identified in the Housing Act 1996.

Making changes to the Policy

The policy cannot be amended until a copy of the proposed amendments has been sent to every housing association in the County. They must be given a reasonable opportunity to comment on the proposals.

All major changes will be approved by a meeting of the Full Council and will be subject to consultation with all Registered Social Housing Providers in the County Borough, regardless of whether a provider is a member of the Common Housing Register Partnership.

For minor changes to the policy decisions will be delegated to the member responsible for the housing portfolio in the County Borough. For minor changes to procedure decisions will be delegated to the Head of Service responsible for Housing in the Blaenau Gwent Council who will consult on any minor changes to procedure with the Chief Executives of the Registered Housing Associations or their delegated officer.

The relevant decision-making bodies of Registered Social Landlords, namely their Boards, will also need to consider and endorse any major changes that the Council or a member of the Partnership wish to see. For more minor changes this may be delegated to the Chief Executive of a partner housing association depending on the governance rules that operate for that association.

The Council will notify in writing, and within a reasonable period, any major changes in policy to those it may affect. Any major changes will require a full and detailed consultation process for those potentially affected by the changes. The Council will fully consider the Housing Act 1996 Part 6 and the relevant sections of the Code of Guidance 2015 relating to amending an Allocations Policy when deciding the appropriate level and method of consultation for any changes.

1.2 Principles and scope of the allocations scheme

This allocation scheme is based on a number of principles:

- To give reasonable preference to the groups set out in the Housing Act 1996
- Customer choice and empowerment

- Making effective use of the housing stock
- An understandable and transparent system for users
- The provision of accurate and up to date information to homeseekers on their housing options, enabling them to exercise informed choice
- Contributing to the creation of sustainable communities
- Improved quality and delivery of service
- Ensuring the extension of choice to vulnerable customers
- Equality of opportunity

1.3 Legal Background

In developing this policy the Council has followed and fully considered the following housing legislation and guidance:

The allocation scheme has been designed to ensure that reasonable preference is given to all of the following categories of people, as set out in s.167(2ZA) of the Housing Act 1996. These are:

(i) People who are homeless (within the meaning of Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014;

(ii) People who are owed a duty by the local authority under section 66, 73 or 75 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014;

(iii) People occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions;

(iv) People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds including grounds relating to disability.

(v) People who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the Council, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or to others).

The detailed criteria the Council will use to assess whether an applicant should be awarded one of these 5 reasonable preference categories is set out in appendix 1.

For people unlikely to be offered accommodation through the scheme there will be advice about alternative housing options. There will be information on the Common Housing Register website and available in written material covering options such as; mutual exchanges, the private rented sector, low cost home ownership and the availability of shared ownership properties.

The Council acknowledges that some customers applying to the scheme will not be eligible to register under the qualification rules due to unacceptable behaviour, such as anti-social behaviour, or significant rent arrears. The policy aims to be open and transparent as to the reasons for any exclusion

and gives advice on the possible actions a customer can take to gain acceptance onto the register.

Although the Council has nomination rights to a percentage of vacant properties held by the Registered Housing Association Providers each association has agreed to join the '*Common Housing Register Partnership*' and allocate accommodation through one housing register and to an agreed set of rules.

As part of the operational implementation of the new scheme the Council and Housing Association Partners will seek to agree an *Exclusions Policy* so that as far as possible there is also agreed criteria and a process for allocating accommodation when an applicant's circumstances require further consideration. This would be for example circumstances where an applicant may be excluded from being considered for an offer of social housing until they have addressed any concerns to the satisfaction of the Council and, or, a Housing Association Partner.

1.4. The Council and Partners' Agreed Policy Statement on Choice for Applicants

A Local Authority's Allocation Scheme must include a statement of the Authority's Policy (in this case the Partnerships' Common Housing Allocation Policy) on offering applicants a choice of housing accommodation or the opportunity to express preferences about any accommodation to be allocated to them.

The Council wishes as far as possible to give choice to customers who are looking to obtain an offer of social housing. The housing pressures faced limit the degree of choice that the Council is able to offer along with the responsibility the Council has to some groups in urgent housing need. The Council believes that any applicant considered to be eligible under this Scheme should be able to express a preference over the type of property and the area in which they would like to live but should be fully aware that the Council's ability to satisfy their preference might be severely limited.

The Council will ask all applicants to state those areas where they believe they cannot live due to fear of violence, harassment or domestic abuse. The Council must be satisfied such factors exist and that it should on the facts take into account these concerns.

Giving choice must be set against the need for the Council to resolve some applicant's housing situation urgently, for example, where there is a homeless households to whom there is a statutory duty to provide housing or households at risk of violence. In cases where the Council has accepted a homeless duty under sections 66, 73 or 75 of the Housing Wales Act 2014 home seekers will normally be able to exercise choice for a period of 13 weeks, after which time regardless of whether suitable properties have become available, the Council may choose to make an offer of accommodation anywhere which is suitable applying the homelessness law

and this will fully discharge any one of the homeless duties owed, as long as the applicant/s has sufficient priority under the scheme at that date for re-housing to enable a direct offer to be made.

Please note whilst in bed and breakfast accommodation the Council may make an offer of accommodation at any time to end any one of the homeless duties under the Housing Wales Act 2014.

The decision to make an offer outside of an area where the applicant has expressed a choice could be where:

1. An applicant is not being realistic in the areas they are requesting for accommodation and as a result they may be occupying a temporary accommodation unit that may be needed for another newly presenting homeless applicant.
2. Where for financial or operational reasons the Council needs to house households owed a homeless duty.

Those households 1) owed a homelessness duty under sections 66, or, s73, or s75 of the Housing Wales Act 2014 or applicant's who are considered homeless within the meaning of Part 2 of the Housing Wales Act 2014, will lose their priority status banding if the duty owed to them is ended due to the refusal of a suitable offer of accommodation. Thereafter, unless they have another reason to awarded one of the priority bands they will be able to be registered in the Bronze non reasonable preference priority band. The offer of suitable accommodation made will also bring to an end any statutory homeless duty owed under s66, s73, or s75 and they will be warned in writing of this consequence at the point a property is formally offered to them.

With the exception of the rules that apply to applicants owed one of the relevant homelessness duties listed above under the Housing Wales Act 2014 all other applicants on the Housing Register are able to specify any areas at street, estate or community level where they do not want to be offered housing. The scheme allows them to be considered only for property types that would suit the size of the household. The intention therefore is to make offers of accommodation that meet the preferences of applicants and provide suitable accommodation. As a result, when applicants refuse three offers of accommodation without offering a valid reason they will be demoted to the next band down. In these circumstances the demotion will be removed 12 months after the last offer unless their circumstances have changed and the Local Housing Panel determines that the change in circumstances is sufficient to allow the reduced preference to be removed.

1.5 How the scheme aims to offer fair and equal treatment to all types of applicant

This scheme has been designed to ensure fairness and consistency in allocating housing, through setting a fair and transparent framework for assessing housing need.

The Council's aim is to deliver services that recognise the needs of different groups within the County Borough. To meet this aim the Blaenau Gwent Partnership will ensure that no applicant is treated less favourably on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation. The eligibility criteria, set out in appendix 2, will be used to make decisions on allocations under this scheme.

Applicants will be able to apply for housing in the County Borough using a range of methods. In addition to this interpretation services such as language line, availability of large print information or Braille and printed information in ethnic minority languages will be available when requested.

The scheme will be widely promoted to ensure that no individual or group is excluded from accessing services due to a lack of information. To ensure that the services offer equality of opportunity, service provision and satisfaction they will be monitored by age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

Under the Equality Act 2010 and in particular section 149 of the Public Sector Equality Duty, Local Authorities are required to give due regard to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, in their exercise of a public function.

The protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

The Council will ensure that its policy complies with the current equality legislation and with the relevant statutory codes and guidance. The new policy will be subject to an Equality Audit before it is adopted and this will be regularly reviewed.

1.6 Properties not included in the scheme

The following properties **will not be** included as part of the banding scheme:

1. Properties required for decants (such as for regeneration schemes or emergency essential repair works, which would in any case be outside of the allocations scheme);
2. Properties required for emergency re-housing e.g. witness protection, urgent management transfers; and
3. Any other exceptional circumstances identified by the Council's Housing Solutions Manager and relevant Senior Manager from the Housing Association.

Section 2: Who can apply to the Housing Register and the criteria for assessing qualification

2.1 Those who are eligible to join the housing register

Any Homeseeker over the age of 16 can apply to join the register. However if applicant is under 18 years of age their ability to manage a tenancy will need to be assessed. This is to make sure that they can cope with being a tenant at a young age and that they do not lose any tenancy offered through a lack of support. This may include a referral to Social Services or other support services to ensure the appropriate support is in place. If a person is 16 and if they are given a tenancy, this will be held in trust until they reach 18. This means that another suitable person (such as a parent, legal guardian, social worker or relative) will be responsible for the property.

All individuals or households owed any homelessness duty by the local authority under sections 66, or, s73, or s75 of the Housing Wales Act 2014 will automatically be registered with the scheme, with a registration date when they presented as homeless to the Council. They will be placed in the Gold Band (See Appendix 1).

Married, civil partners and co-habiting couples, same sex couples, family members, friends and brothers and sisters, who wish to live together, can make joint applications. In such cases, it is usual for a joint tenancy to be granted in the event of an offer of accommodation being made. The Welsh Code of Guidance for Allocations 2006 lays down the rules for the recognition of refugees and those in need of Subsidiary Protection.

2.2 Those who are not eligible to join the housing register

Everyone can apply to join the register but there are some groups of people who by law cannot join the register regardless of their housing need or circumstances. These are people who:

- Come under various immigration rules and cannot claim housing help;
- Do not live permanently in the Common Travel Area (UK, Channel Islands, the Isle of Man or the Republic of Ireland) for tax purposes;
- Who do not have the right to live in the UK;
- Plus other categories of people who the Secretary of State or the Welsh Government has, or may in the future, decide are not eligible for housing.

The Council will also choose not to register applicants where it is satisfied that a person meets the criteria set down in the policy for unacceptable behaviour.

See appendix 2 for more details on the rules the Council will apply to determine whether a person is eligible to join the register due to the Welsh Government's rules for deciding if a person is able to join the register

2.2.1 Unacceptable behaviour

Most applicants for social housing will not be persons from abroad, and will have been resident in the UK (or elsewhere in the CTA) for 2 years prior to their application. Such applicants, together with eligible applicants from abroad may, at the discretion of the Authority, be treated as ineligible by the Housing Authority on the basis of unacceptable behaviour. There is no obligation on Local Authorities to implement these provisions and where they do robust procedures are needed to ensure compliance with the law, this Code and the fair and consistent treatment of applicants.

The Council has adopted the power to make ineligible applicants to the register where it is determined there is unacceptable behavior. The rules adopted concerning eligibility to join the register, or to receive an offer of accommodation, where there is unacceptable behavior are set out in appendix 2 and follow the guidance set down in the Allocations Code of Guidance issued by the Welsh Government in 2015.

Any cases that may be considered as ineligible for accommodation due to their unacceptable behaviour will be discussed at the monthly Local Housing Panel and all partners will need to agree to either suspension or reduced preference. All applicants have the right to request a review of any decisions as to eligibility and a right to be informed of the decision of the Local Housing Panel and the grounds on which that decision was made.

Section 3: The Banding system and how Homeseekers who are eligible to join the Common Housing Register will be assessed.

3.1 The Banding System

A banding system will be used to decide when to make an offer of accommodation and to whom.

All social housing in Blaenau Gwent will be allocated using a banding system (there may be some exceptions see below). The bands distinguish between the different needs of applicants and they will usually only be re-housed when they are at the top of their band to qualify for an offer in one of their chosen areas. The bands are arranged to reflect housing priority, with the highest band including those applicants who have the highest priority for housing. The banding system is designed so that each band includes applicants who have a similar level of housing need.

All Homeseekers will be placed into an appropriate band utilising the information that they have provided. Applicants will be prioritised within their band based on the date that their application was received for housing. When a property becomes available the Common Housing Register partner will go to the relevant band and, in most cases, select the applicant with the longest waiting time suitable for that property.

The scheme uses a quota banding system to prioritise applicants. This means that each band will be allocated a target indicating the percentage of allocations to be shared between the different bands. The Common Housing Register partners will then use these targets when making their allocations. The indicative number of lets that go to each band are outlined in the Annual Lettings Plan set out in section 6.2.

The table below outlines the banding system and the circumstances used to allocate an applicant the appropriate band. The principle of this scheme is that an applicant's priority for housing should reflect both their level of housing need and length of time spent in need. Therefore priority will increase with time and a new applicant should not normally overtake an existing applicant within the same band. The circumstances where an allocation can be made to an applicant who is not at the top of the band will be monitored by the Council. Applicants with no local connection will move down to the next band.

There are four bands: Emergency, Gold, Silver, and Bronze. Properties will be normally be allocated in the following order:

1. The Emergency band – Very urgent priority: These are applicants that are owed a statutory award of reasonable preference but whom the Council believes should also be awarded additional preference based on their urgent housing needs.
2. The Gold band – High priority: These are applicants that are owed a statutory award of reasonable preference under the policy.

3. The Silver band – Medium priority: These are also applicants that are owed a statutory award of reasonable preference under the policy.
4. The Bronze band – Low Priority: These are applicants who have not been assessed as being in the additional preference group or the reasonable preference group.

Banding Summary Table

Note the descriptions used below are a summary of the criteria for qualification under each Band. This is not a substitute for the full detailed policy on how an applicant's housing needs will be assessed to decide what Banding will be awarded. This is fully set out in appendix 1 of the Policy.

Blaenau Gwent Partnership Banding Scheme Summary Table

Emergency Band. This Band covers the circumstances where an applicant has been granted a statutory Reasonable Preference plus an emergency Additional Preference because of the emergency need to be housed

These are time limited cases to be reviewed at 3 months and then, if the award continues, every 3 months

Local Connection Criteria will apply except for MAPPA and Homelessness Cases

Homeless due to fire, flood or disaster

- The applicant has suddenly lost their existing home as a result of disaster and requires accommodation in a short period of time.

Armed forces applicants leaving or bereaved spouses or partners

- Applicants who require accommodation as a result of leaving the Armed Forces and the loss of military accommodation and Bereaved spouses or civil partners of those serving in the regular forces

Impact of property condition

- The applicant currently occupies a property that is in such poor condition as to impose extreme or imminent risk to the health and safety of its occupants
- The applicant currently occupies a property where there is a statutory requirement due to prohibition order / demolition order / compulsory purchase
- The applicant is a currently under occupying social housing by one or more bedrooms and needs to transfer to a smaller property

Need to move on medical or disability grounds

An applicant who has an extremely urgent and immediate need to move for medical reasons or due to a disability, which is being exacerbated by their current housing situation including:

- The applicant's health condition is terminal and re-housing is

required to provide a basis for the provision of suitable care

- The applicant's health condition is so severely affected by the accommodation that it is likely to become life threatening
- Where overcrowding in the property leaves the applicant at risk of infection, for example, where an applicant is suffering from late-stage or advanced HIV infection
- Disabled people whose current accommodation completely restricts them from carrying out day-to-day activities both internally and outside the home and they require urgent re-housing into a property that is suitable to their needs
- Applicants who have nowhere to live when they are discharged from hospital where their current property is no longer suitable for their needs and cannot be made suitable and all other housing options have been explored

Local Priorities

Need to move on urgent welfare grounds

- The applicant is a Housing Association tenant and is a high risk management transfer, who is receiving support from a professional agency or who is subject to a MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) that is making a recommendation of housing need. The transfer will enable the applicant's existing property to become available for an allocation to another applicant on the waiting list.
- The occupant of the property no longer requires the adaptations and will therefore be releasing an adapted property by moving and there is a suitable applicant on the waiting list for the adapted property which will be released through the move.
- There is a likelihood of a child being accommodated by the Local Authority if re-housing is not made.
- The applicant's circumstances are not dealt with under any of the other circumstances in Emergency Band, however their housing need has been assessed by the Local Housing Panel as urgent and they require immediate re-housing.

Gold Band: This Band covers the Circumstances where an applicant has been granted reasonable preference and a high priority

Applicants owed certain homelessness duties under the Housing Wales Act 2014

- Applicants owed a S75 duty because they have been assessed as eligible, homeless, in priority need and not intentionally homeless
- Applicants owed a S66 threatened with homelessness duty, or S73 homeless duty but only for as long as that duty is owed to the applicant

Need to move due to impact of overcrowding

- The applicant is occupying accommodation which is short by 2 or more bedrooms suitable to their needs.

Housing is unsuitable for medical reasons, or due to a disability

Applicants who are not housebound, or whose health, or safety is not at such a risk level to require urgent housing including where the applicant's current accommodation is unsuitable and is having a serious detrimental impact on their own/household member's existing health condition and the ability to live independently, which will deteriorate in the long term if more suitable accommodation is not offered.

Examples of when Gold Banding will be awarded are:

- a) The applicant currently occupies a property that is in such poor condition as to impose significant risk to the health and safety of its occupants
- b) The applicant's current accommodation is in such a condition that it contributes to causing serious ill health
- c) Disabled people whose current accommodation presents some barriers, such as steps, stairs or situated on a hill, to carrying out day-to-day activities and they require re-housing into a property that is suitable to their needs
- d) The applicant has an urgent need to move on welfare grounds due to any of the following:
- e) The applicant is at risk of being admitted to residential care or hospital if re-housing is not made.
- f) The applicant needs to move due to relationship breakdown and a need has been identified to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child.

Care Leavers - The applicant is a care leaver, vulnerable and has a high housing need that is best met by the provision of long term settled housing and the applicant has been assessed and approved by the Move On Panel as ready for re-housing. Applicants must be a former 'Relevant Child' as defined by the Children Leaving Care Act 2000.

Leaving Supported Housing - The applicant is in supported accommodation in Blaenau Gwent and also the Amber House Project and is ready for independent living.

Support Hardship - The applicant is giving or receiving essential support, which can only be delivered if they live in a specific locality within the area.

Employment Hardship - The applicant has permanent employment that

cannot continue unless they live in a specific locality within the area and are otherwise adequately housed.

Financial Hardship – Alternative accommodation is required due to exceptional financial hardship relating to the accommodation the applicant currently occupies.

Local Priorities

Need to foster or adopt - The applicant has been recommended by the Director of Social Services to foster or adopt children and whose current accommodation is not large enough

Forced to live apart - The applicant, their partner or children are forced to live apart because their current accommodation is unsuitable

*This does not apply to those who are legally separated or are living apart due to relationship breakdown or family dispute

Silver Band: This Band covers the circumstances where an applicant has been granted reasonable preference with a medium priority to be housed.

Applicants owed certain homelessness duties under the Housing Wales Act 2014

- The applicant has been assessed as homeless and not in priority need
- The applicant has been assessed as intentionally homeless and in Priority Need

Unfit or overcrowded accommodation

- The applicant is occupying insanitary or unfit accommodation and living in unsatisfactory housing conditions that present some risk to the health and safety of the occupants.
- The applicant is living in accommodation which is not suitable to their needs because it is short by one bedroom which is suitable to their needs
- The applicant's current accommodation is unsuitable and exacerbates the applicant's or other household members' health condition and more suitable alternative accommodation is required to improve the health condition□

Reduced preference Silver band award

Applicants whose housing circumstances have been assessed as meeting the criteria to be awarded silver band reduced preference. Applicants awarded reduced preference will sit at the bottom of the Silver Band

| |
|---|
| |
| Local Priorities |
| Tenants wishing to move with a good rent record The applicant is an existing social housing tenant who does not qualify for Emergency Band or Gold Band, who wishes to transfer and has no rent arrears and have been a tenant for 12 months. |
| Bronze Band All other Applicants who have not been awarded reasonable preference Plus Applicants awarded Reasonable Preference for a Silver Band category but have no local connection with the Council. (Except cases owed any homelessness duty by the Council under the Housing Wales Act 2014) Plus those applicant's owed a Reasonable Preference but have had that preference reduced (adjusted preference) due to the circumstances set out in the Policy |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The applicant is an owner occupier and does not qualify for Emergency Band, Gold Band or Silver Band • The applicant has the financial resources to meet their own needs • All other applicants not dealt with in Emergency Band, Gold Band or Silver Band • Applicants whose housing circumstances have been assessed as meeting the criteria to be awarded Bronze band reduced preference |

Priority within a Band will be determined by the length of time the application has been placed in that Band and most allocations will be made by band and the time they have waited within that Band. In some circumstances an offer will be made to an applicant outside of the priority band and 'time registered' procedure. This is where there is an urgent need for an individual household to be housed or where there is an operational or financial need to house certain categories of applicants.

For example, where an applicant has been given additional preference due to an exceptionally urgent need for housing they may be placed at the front of the priority band and made an offer of housing as soon as possible. A decision that a person's need to be housed is exceptionally urgent would be made by the Letting Panel or can in urgent cases be made by the Chief Officer responsible for the Council's allocation policy.

In addition there may be other circumstances where there are urgent operational or financial reasons to make a direct offer of housing outside of the band and date order criteria. The qualifying criteria for awarding additional preference are set out in appendix 1. Specifically, examples of the circumstances where there may be urgent operational or financial reasons to allocate outside of the band and date order criteria are:

- People that need to move due to a fire or flood, or severe storm damage to their home.
- People who are at imminent risk of violence and are to be housed through a witness protection programme.
- People who it has been agreed must be housed urgently as part of a for example – a multi-agency protocol such as a MAPPA, MARRAC case or a protocol between the Housing and Social Care Departments of the Council where there is a need agreed between housing and social services to provide a specific property for a vulnerable individual.
- Where an applicant is homeless and in temporary accommodation that would not be suitable for more than a short period of time or where the Council needs to move applicants out of temporary accommodation to manage the budgetary impact on the Council as a whole.
- Where a vacant adapted property or a property designed to disability standards becomes available it may be offered to those customers with a need for this property type regardless of the date they were registered.

3.2: Local lettings policies

The legislation enables Housing Authorities to allocate accommodation to people of a particular description who may not be at the top of their Band.

From time to time new Local Lettings Policies may be agreed with a Housing Association, to deal with specific local issues at a street, estate or community level. The details of these will be made public alongside the scheme. The policy for local lettings is set out in appendix x

These plans will be developed and approved in accordance with an agreed procedure, which considers the specific aims and justification of the plans. The plans will be reviewed on an annual basis. All local lettings policies are evidence based with the aim of achieving community sustainability and ensure that they fit with and inform strategic priorities. We will ensure local lettings policies do not discriminate and that they are monitored and evaluated to assess their impact.

Ongoing monitoring of the outcomes of lettings against lettings Policy targets will be undertaken and progress in achieving the lettings Policy targets will be closely monitored by the Council.

3.3 New developments

When registered social landlords are in the process of or have completed new developments, the initial lettings can be made via a local lettings Policy, created in partnership with the Council. This is to ensure balanced and sustainable communities are created.

3.4 Size of accommodation

Applicants can apply for any area and type of property that is suitable to their needs. However, the size of accommodation that can be allocated to an applicant will be calculated according to the standard set out in the following sub section and Appendix 4 – Bedroom Standard. There may be circumstances where a larger size property may be allocated than what is needed. In such cases applicants will be made fully aware of the financial implications of having a property, which may be larger than their household size. However, landlords have discretion to allocate their properties to maximize occupancy and a financial assessment of affordability will be made by an association willing to let an applicant occupy accommodation that is larger than their requirements.

In addition, some types of accommodation will only be allocated to certain groups of applicants.

The following criteria will be used to determine the size of accommodation to be allocated to the applicant:

| Household Size | Accommodation Type |
|--|--------------------|
| Single Person | 1 Bedroom |
| Couple | 1 Bedroom |
| Joint tenant (non partners) | 2 Bedroom |
| Single parent or couple with one child | 2 Bedroom |
| Single parent or couple with two children of the same sex | |
| - both aged under 16 | 2 Bedroom |
| - *one or both aged over 16 | 3 Bedroom |
| Single parent or couple with two children of opposite sex | |
| - both aged under 10 | 2 Bedroom |
| - one or both aged 10 or over | 3 Bedroom |
| Single parent or couple with three children | |
| - if two are able to share a room (under 10) | 3 Bedroom |
| - none are able to share a room | 4 Bedroom |
| Single parent or couple with four children | |
| - If all children are under 10 | 3 Bedroom |
| - all other | 4 Bedroom |

Household members who are temporarily living away from home, for example in further education or the armed forces, will be included as part of the household. The individual currently living away will need to confirm in writing that they wish to be considered as part of the household and until the letter is provided the application will be considered as the individual not being part of the household.

Each application is assessed on the individual needs of the applicant in recognition that individual needs vary. There may be circumstances where a larger house size than which an applicant is entitled to may be awarded as outlined below:

- Expectant mothers must provide a copy of their Maternity Certificate (MAT B1) so that a property can be allocated according to their current needs plus an additional bedroom for the unborn child/children.
- Due to limited stock, where a home seeker is separated or divorced but has regular access to children as determined by a Court Order or Solicitor's letter, they will only be able to apply for a house suitable to the needs of the applicant(s) but requests can be made for the case to be heard by the Local Housing Panel if special circumstances apply.
- Where the applicant has a disability and a non resident-carer, the applicant will be entitled to extra funding for an extra bedroom (Welsh Government changes to Housing Benefit).
- Where there is a medical reason for requiring a separate or additional bedroom – this will be considered on an individual basis.

- Where there is no stock of a suitable size – in some areas, where landlords do not own properties of a smaller size, smaller households may be entitled to be considered for the next suitable size property.

In some cases applicants may be offered a larger property if, for example, a property becomes available in a low demand area and there are no suitable applicants for that size property. In such cases that a larger property is provided to an applicant which is larger that they are entitled to, the applicant will be made fully aware of any implications in relation to Housing Benefit.

3.5 Type of Accommodation

Applicants can usually apply for any type or size of accommodation that is suitable to their needs. However, some types of properties may only be designated to certain client groups, for example bungalows and level access accommodation will usually be offered to applicants requiring an adapted property in the first instance and sheltered or older persons accommodation will usually be offered to people over 55.

3.6 Areas with greater availability of housing

In some areas of Blaenau Gwent there are areas of housing that have a very short waiting lists or even no waiting list at all. In these circumstances the Council may agree with the landlord a local lettings Policy that does not rely on the Housing Allocation Scheme but allows instant access without the need for any assessment beyond eligibility. The aim of such local lettings policies will be to establish a viable community in the location. If demand increases then lettings may be brought back within the scheme.

3.7 Access to Children

The primary carer will be classified as the parent who receives Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit or Working Family Tax Credit in respect of the child / children.

Applicants who are separated or divorced, have joint custody, and can evidence via a Court Order or legal agreement that they provide essential support to the primary carer may be considered for a property based on the family size. Applicants who do qualify for this reason for a larger property will be awarded reasonable preference and placed in the Gold Band. Applicants will need to provide evidence, such as birth certificate, to support their application and each application will be assessed individually. An applicant would still have to pass the test of being able to afford the rent for any larger accommodation.

Access cases, where there is no essential support being provided, will be assessed by the Local Housing Panel according to the applicants housing need and may be entitled to a property with one bedroom more than the permanent family's needs.

The changes in Housing Benefit have implications on the size of a property that is offered to applicants. Applicants need to be fully aware of these changes and the cost implications of having a larger property as Housing Benefit for a larger property will only be paid to the primary carer.

3.8 How will medical or disability cases be assessed to see if they qualify for an Emergency or Gold Banding award

The following procedure will be applied. Full details of the assessment procedure and guidelines for officers is set out in appendix 9

- 1) Homeseekers who indicate that they or anyone in their household have an illness or disability which is affected by their current home they will be asked to complete questions on their application form relating to their medical condition or disability.
- 2) The Housing Access Team Officers will carry out an initial assessment using the standard assessment criteria set out in this appendix to the policy. An applicant may need to be further interviewed by an Access officer or OTT officer to help make the assessment.
- 3) Where a Homeseeker's health is not so urgent and immediate that they are unable to live in their current home but their medical condition would be significantly improved by alternative housing a Gold Banding will be awarded. This will be determined by the Housing Access Officer and checked and signed off by the Housing Solutions Manager based on the evidence provided.
- 4) Where the Council believes there may be an urgent and immediate need due to the severity of the impact of their current housing on their medical condition or disability and the applicant may be unable to continue to live at their present home the case will be submitted to the Occupational Therapy Team (OTT) who will determine whether to place the Homeseeker in the Emergency Band. In order to do this the OTT will potentially visit the home of the Homeseeker or tenant household, consider any supporting information that has been requested or provided, and decide whether Emergency Band priority should be awarded, based upon the severity of the case and the urgency of the need for re-housing.
- 5) The OTT will also recommend the type of housing that the homeseeker needs to resolve the urgent circumstances.
- 6) Where priority is awarded on the basis of medical circumstances applicants can only be considered for the type of properties identified by the OTT, so for example, if someone needs to move to a bungalow because they have suddenly become a wheelchair user, they will only be considered for suitable properties within the Gold Band.

Section 4: The Process for offering Accommodation

4.1: How accommodation will be offered

Officers from the Housing Association partners use Blaenau Gwent's database to prepare a 'short list' of applications when a property is ready to let. If a Housing Association makes an offer of accommodation to an applicant, a formal offer of housing will be made. This may be in the form of a telephone call (if we have been provided with phone number) or a written offer may be sent in the post.

The correspondence from the Housing Association will set out clear steps to enable the applicant to arrange a viewing of the property when it is available. Additional information will also be given, such as: -

- the address of the property;
- the number of bedrooms it has;
- what type of property it is (such as a flat or a house);
- how much rent you will have to pay if you accept the offer;
- the date the property is expected to become available; and
- the last date you must contact the Housing Association by if you want to view the property.

The applicant must inform the Housing Association within three working days of receipt of the offer, if he/she would like to view the property. If following confirmation of an offer of accommodation the applicant does not respond, this will be treated as a refusal of the offer.

Applicants will get up to three offers of accommodation that the council is satisfied were reasonable and if 3 offers are refused, the application will receive reduced preference and be demoted to the next band down.

Formal offers of accommodation are subject to the Housing Associations carrying out pre tenancy checks as circumstances can often change from the time of completion of the application to a prospective offer of accommodation.

4.2 How Lettings to Councillors and Council Staff and Housing Association Board Members and Staff are made

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council and its partners are committed to providing a fair and equitable housing allocation scheme to all its applicants. We do not exclude any employee, Council Member, Board Member, close relatives of employees, Council Members or Board Members, or former staff from applying for a tenancy.

All persons eligible are entitled to apply to the scheme and all applicants will undergo the same assessment procedure.

Staff, Board Members and Council Members and their relatives will be treated the same as any other applicant and must not be seen as receiving any preferential treatment.

However, the following steps will be followed when a member of Staff, Board Member or Council Member submits an application:

- The applicant will have no involvement in any decisions or the inputting of their application;
- The applicant will have no involvement in the awarding of priority or band;
- Applications should be clearly marked that the application is that of a staff member, Board Member, Council Member or a relative; and
- At the point of offer the relevant form must be completed and signed off before the offer is complete.

Guidance on permitted payments and benefits to staff and board members of Housing Associations in Wales states that when an offer is made there is an exemption to permit the grant of a tenancy or the disposal of a house to an officer or to a close relative of an officer provided that the written consent of the Welsh Government has been obtained.

4.3 How Lettings to Applicants Requiring Adapted Properties are Made

Applicants requiring adapted properties will apply for housing in the same way as applicants requiring general needs properties. Applications will be awarded priority in accordance with the banding system as set out in Section 3. However, at the point of application, such applicants will be required to complete a self assessment form. The purpose of the self assessment form is to identify the appropriate classification of the disability needs of the applicant which will identify the type of property required.

When an adapted property becomes available for allocation the relevant housing officer from the Housing Association will identify applicants requiring an adapted property, which are at the top of the relevant band. The housing officer will follow the process used for selecting an applicant for a general needs property i.e. identifying an applicant from Emergency Band first and if there is no suitable applicant in this band, moving to Gold Band and so on (dependant on the current quota system in place).

When a general needs property becomes available for allocation this will be allocated to the person at the top of the relevant band in accordance with Section 3. Some applicants requiring adaptations may not necessarily need a bungalow, level access or a fully adapted property and a general needs property, which can be adapted, may be suitable. If the applicant at the top of the band requires an adapted property, the housing officer will assess the suitability of the property to identify if the property can be adapted to meet the needs of the disabled applicant who is at the top of the list. Where the Housing Officer assesses the property as being suitable, an Occupational Therapist will be required to undertake a verification visit. The Housing Officer

and the Occupational Therapist must consider the, suitability, practicality and the cost effectiveness of adapting the available property.

4.4 How Lettings to Applicants Requiring Older Persons and Sheltered Housing Accommodation are made

Sheltered Housing offers of accommodation, often within complexes, specifically designed with the needs of older people in mind.

It aims to provide a safe environment where people can make friends and enjoy a range of social activities while living independently. In some cases, a warden service is supplied for greater reassurance and better security.

To be eligible for Sheltered Housing applicants must be:

- aged 55 or 60 and over or an relevant support need, depending on the accommodation and Housing Association (Appendix 6)
- eligible for housing as detailed in the Scheme and appear in an appropriate band as set out in the Scheme
- be made aware of the cost of moving into a Scheme before a letting is carried out

A list of these schemes can be seen in Appendix 7.

4.5 How Lettings to the Council's Gypsy Traveller Caravan Site are made

Lettings to the Council's Gypsy Traveller Caravan Site will be made in accordance with this Allocation Policy.

Section 5: How to apply to join the Common Housing Register

5.1 How to Make an Application

Homeseekers need to complete an initial assessment form that is available at the Council and all partner Housing Association offices. However, the supply of vacant social housing for letting varies greatly across the County Borough and in some areas, or for some types of property, the waiting times are long. For this reason applicants will not be able to complete a full application form until a personal housing solutions interview is undertaken, whereby applicants will be given housing advice to help them make informed choices about their area preferences, explore other options for accessing housing within the County Borough, and carry out verification checks of:

- identity – staff will accept a passport, driving license, utility bills, post office statements or bank statements;
- household details including income;
- details of current address and family circumstances;
- housing circumstances.

Applications can be made face-to-face at the Housing Solutions Office, 20 Church Street Ebbw Vale NP23 6BG or by telephone (01495 354600). Alternatively, some applicants may require an officer to visit them at home. This can be arranged by telephoning the Housing Access Team on (01495 354600).

Applicants are encouraged to complete the initial assessment form themselves. However, if completed at the Housing Office, staff will be available to go through the form with the applicant to ensure that the required information is collected. Staff are also available to give support in completing the applications if requested by telephone and translation services are available at the Housing Office via language line, where needed.

As part of assessing eligibility to join the Common Housing Register applicants are initially asked the four following questions:

1. Have you resided in the UK for the past 5 years?
 - a. If 'yes' are you British?
 - b. If 'no' what is your nationality?
2. Are you threatened with Homelessness?
3. Have you committed an act of unacceptable behaviour?
4. Do you have an unspent criminal conviction?

If an applicant answers 'yes' to any of the above questions they are required to contact the Housing Access Team on 01495 354600, who will then direct the applicant to the most appropriate officer. Applicants who answer 'yes' to questions 1 and 2 are required to make an appointment with a Housing

Options Officer and applicants who answer 'yes' to questions 3 and 4 are required to make an appointment with the Housing Access Team. The purpose of the appointments is to fully assess the applicant's eligibility and provide advice and assistance on their eligibility.

Applicants with a criminal conviction will be referred to the Local Housing Panel. The Local Housing Panel is responsible for confirming eligibility based on the following tests of unacceptable behaviour:

- Has the applicant been evicted for neighbour nuisance / and or anti social behaviour?; or
- Has the applicant been convicted of specified conduct or in view of the panel have been guilty of such conduct?; or
- Has the applicant made a clear attempt to obtain accommodation by deception?

Where the Local Housing Panel assesses the applicant or member of their household as having unacceptable behaviour, where the behaviour is serious enough to make them (the applicant) unsuitable to be a tenant and where the behaviour is still deemed to be unacceptable at the point of application, the applicant may be determined to be ineligible to join the scheme.

Where the Local Housing Panel has assessed the application as ineligible, the Senior Housing Access Officer will write to the applicant to advise them of this, providing full reasons for the decision and advising of their right to ask for a review of this decision.

Where an applicant is deemed eligible the Housing Access Team will continue the application process and inform the applicant of this decision. Applicants who are required to provide any supporting evidence are advised of this in writing once their application has been assessed and need to present this evidence to the Housing Access Team. Upon receipt of all supporting evidence the application is completed and a band is awarded. The decision is confirmed in writing to the applicant and includes information on the applicant's right to appeal.

All applicants are required to undertake a Housing Solutions Interview where the applicant's housing needs and housing options are discussed in detail. The purpose of the Housing Solutions Interview is to determine whether or not applying to the Common Housing Register is the most appropriate housing option for the applicant.

Following verification of an application form, the Housing Access Team will confirm the band that has been awarded in writing, along with advising the applicant on their right to appeal.

5.2 Making an Application by Telephone

All applicants are encouraged to attend a Housing Solutions Interview, following completion of an initial assessment form. However, on occasions

there may be certain circumstances, such as medical circumstances or living outside of the County Borough, that mean the applicant cannot attend the interview. Therefore, the housing solutions interview will be undertaken over the telephone by contacting the Housing Access Team on 01495 354600.

Applicants are initially asked the four eligibility questions mentioned above and if they answer 'yes' to any of the questions the Housing Solutions Team will direct the applicant to the most appropriate officer. Applicants who answer 'yes' to questions 1 and 2 are required to make an appointment with a Housing Options Officer and applicants who answer 'yes' to questions 3 and 4 will be asked a series of question to determine their eligibility and be referred to the Local Housing Panel.

Where supporting evidence is required applicants will be advised of this and asked to present the evidence to the Housing Access Team and the band will not be confirmed until the evidence has been assessed.

Upon completion of the above, if the housing option is to join the Common Housing Register the applicants will be advised of their band and the Housing Access Team will confirm this in writing.

5.3 Making an Application In Person

Applications can be made by visiting the Housing Access Team based at the Housing Solutions Service, 20 Church Street Ebbw Vale NP23 6BG. As previously mentioned all applicants are asked the four eligibility questions upon which the Housing Access Assistant filters the applicant to the most appropriate officer.

Applicants threatened with homelessness or have not resided in the UK for the past 5 years are required to make an appointment with a Housing Options Officer. Applicants who have an unspent criminal conviction or have committed an act of unacceptable behaviour are required to undertake a Housing Solutions Interview.

All applicants making an application in person are also required to undertake a Housing Solutions Interview, and depending on the outcome of the consultation are filtered to the most appropriate housing option. If the housing option is to join the Common Housing Register the application is completed and a band assigned.

Where supporting evidence is required applicants are advised of this and asked to present the evidence to the Housing Access Team, where upon receipt the Band will be confirmed.

5.4 Home Visits

Some applicants require a home visit and therefore at the point of contact to the Housing Solutions Team, the team will:

- Undertake a brief telephone assessment to assess eligibility and identify any supporting evidence that may be required, and can be presented at the home visit;
- Once eligibility has been confirmed, undertake the home visit and verify supporting evidence;
- Complete the application process;
- Following completion of this process the housing access team will confirm the band in writing and advises of the applicant's right to appeal.

5.5 Housing Solutions Interview

Every applicant, except in exceptional circumstances, is required to undertake a Housing Solutions Interview. The Housing Solutions Interview is an informal discussion and its purpose is to understand the applicant's housing need and to offer advice on alternative housing solutions. The Housing Solutions Interview will also determine whether applying to the Common Housing Register is the most appropriate housing solution for the applicant.

Where this is not the case the applicant is advised of other housing options such as low cost home ownership or private rented accommodation.

During the Housing Solutions Interview applicants are provided with very detailed information regarding social housing within the County Borough. Applicants are advised of high and low demand areas and the average waiting times that applicants have to wait before being housed in certain areas. As a result of this, applicants may find that their prospects of being housed through the Scheme are better in some areas than others.

All applicants are signposted to the Housing Solutions website (www.blaenaugwenthousing.co.uk) and may be provided with hardcopies of information, where required, which includes information on a range housing options, including those mentioned above.

All interviews and home visits will also be used to check and enquire about current or previous rent arrears or other breaches of tenancy, current or previous damage to property and harassment/anti-social behaviour or relevant criminal activity. Contact will also be made with current and previous landlords in relation to these issues.

5.6 The Provision of Advice and Information

The Housing Access Team aims to provide advice and assistance to enable applicants to make informed choices and to ensure that no applicant is disadvantaged.

Applicants can also meet with an independent housing advisor at either Shelter Cymru or Citizens Advice Bureau. The sort of advice that the Council will provide includes:

- How to apply to join the housing register and the sorts of supporting information that will be required;
- Assistance to complete the application form if required;
- Explanation of the priority bands;
- How to exercise choice of area;
- Options advice to consider other forms of housing such as private renting or low cost home ownership;
- Information regarding the implications of over-occupation and the bedroom tax.

If there is a difficulty in understanding any aspect of our Allocation Policy, the Council will arrange for a member of housing staff to provide advice and guidance on the Policy, and answer any questions applicants may have. There is also access to 'Language Line' for those individuals whose first language is not English.

5.7: The Homeseekers responsibility to provide information

The Housing Access team responsible for assessing new applications will assess whether the person qualifies for the Housing Register and, if they do, will use the policy to assess the person's housing needs and will award any priority to that persons' application if they meet the criteria set out.

Applicants will be required to sign a declaration to:

- Confirm that the information given is correct and that they will notify the Council of any change in their circumstances.
- Give consent to allow enquiries to be made concerning their eligibility for housing and level of priority.
- Give consent to allow information to be provided to another partner organisation in the scheme.

It is the responsibility of the applicant to provide the Council with all the information and to provide any supporting information or documents as requested. Incomplete applications will not be made active until such time as the Council is satisfied that it has in its possession all of the information it requires to complete its assessment. All incomplete applications will be cancelled after a period of 28 days of inactivity from the applicant from the date information has been requested and not been provided. This cancellation does not prevent the applicant making a subsequent application at a later date, although all applicants should note that in such cases the effective date of registration would not be backdated to the earlier application date.

All applicants must provide the information that is requested so that the Housing Access Team can confirm their details and award the appropriate

Band. If supporting evidence is not provided then this will delay the application process and therefore hold up any potential allocation.

Applicants will be provided with information regarding their own applications as follows:

- Unique Reference Number;
- What band they have been awarded;
- What information they need to supply for verification purposes;
- If the applicant has been awarded reduced priority or are found to be ineligible what actions, if any, need to be undertaken to resolve this;
- Registration date (the registration date of all 'trade-down'¹ tenants who will be placed in the Emergency Band) will be the date that their tenancy commenced with the participating registered social landlord.

5.8 Checks into any court cases or unspent criminal convictions

In the interests of assessing an applicant's eligibility to join the register all applicants and members of their prospective household will be requested but not required to disclose any pending court cases or unspent criminal convictions.

The Council may use any information disclosed, or any other information obtained during the assessment or following registration, to ascertain whether the applicant should be disqualified from joining or remaining on the register due to serious unacceptable behaviour and/or because depending on the facts they may pose a serious risk to a community where they might be housed. Where a criminal conviction is spent the Council will not take into account that an applicant had received a criminal conviction is assessing that person's eligibility to join the register. The assessment will reflect whether there is evidence of any current serious unacceptable behavior regardless of whether a person has been convicted in the past for that behavior.

If the Council decide on the information obtained during the assessment process that there is a real pressing need for a police check an approach may be made to the Disclosure Scotland agency for information but only to establish whether the person has been involved in a serious crime(s) that may come under the unacceptable behaviour non-qualification criteria.

Information gained will not automatically exclude an applicant from the register. It may also be used to make informed decisions about any nomination for vacant property.

All assessments will be carried out in accordance with the data protection and information sharing policies and legal requirements.

¹ Someone who moves to a smaller property e.g. moves from a 3 bedroom house to a 2 bedroom house.

5.9 Notification of Registration

When an application has been fully assessed the person who applied will be notified in writing and this notification will include the following information:

- Whether they qualify for the register and if not why not
- If they do qualify they will be informed in the notification of their registration date and their registration reference number and
- The Band they have been placed into according to their housing need, and the type of property for which they may bid for

5.10 The requirement to inform the Council of any change of circumstances

It is the responsibility of the applicant to inform the Council of a change of circumstances and, where requested, provide proof of the change. Notification of a change in circumstances should be done without undue delay and within 2 weeks of the change. Examples of a change in circumstances include but are not limited to:

- (i) A change of address or contact details, for either themselves or members of their prospective household;
- (ii) A change in their medical condition or disability (either existing or newly acquired);
- (iii) Additional family members or other people they wish to add to their application (It will be for the Council to decide whether they will allow additional people to join the application);
- (iv) Any family member or any other person on the application who has left the accommodation; and
- (v) Any significant changes in income, savings or assets, which is likely to have a material effect on the application.

It does not follow that every change in circumstance will result in a change in priority. However, a change may mean an applicant qualifies for additional preference or may mean that an applicant no longer qualifies for the priority band. The Council will verify and assess the extent of the change to ascertain whether this will result in a change in priority. Applicants will not actively be considered for housing whilst the change of circumstance is being verified and the Council will endeavor to assess the change as quickly as possible.

5.11 Giving False Information

Under section 171 of the 1996 Housing Act it is a criminal offence for anyone applying for housing from a housing authority to knowingly give false information or to withhold information relevant to their application. An offence

is also committed if a person allows a third party to provide false information on their behalf.

Customers who are found to have withheld or given false information may be removed from the register and will not be able to reapply for a period of 12 months. Decisions to remove the person from the register will be made based on the seriousness of the false information given and an assessment of why the information was withheld.

5.12 Deliberate Worsening of Circumstances

Where there is evidence that a customer has deliberately made their housing situation worse in order to gain a higher priority on the register, they will be assessed based on the circumstances before their situation changed.

Examples of this are:

- Customers who have allowed family members or others to move into their property, who previously had suitable accommodation or the financial means to secure their own accommodation, and this has resulted in the property being overcrowded.
- Customers who have moved from previously suitable or more suitable accommodation which it were reasonable for them to continue to occupy, into a less suitable property.
- Homeowners who have transferred their property to another family member within the last 5 years from the date they make their application to the Register.
- Giving up affordable and suitable private rented accommodation which they are able to maintain, to move in with other relatives or friends, creating a situation of overcrowding and/or sharing of bathroom/kitchen and/or a split household;
- Requesting or colluding with a landlord or family member to issue them with a Notice to Quit;

Section 6: Service Standards, Annual Letting Plans and Reviewing the Common Register

6.1 The Service Standards applied to the Scheme

The Council is no longer a social landlord and does not own any domestic properties. In December 2010, the Council transferred all of its housing stock to Tai Calon Community Housing, which has been set up to specifically manage all of the Council's transferred housing stock.

If you were a Council tenant in Blaenau Gwent at the time of transfer, you automatically became a Tai Calon tenant.

The Council still has responsibility to ensure the needs of residents are met through housing services provided locally and has a duty to help people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

The Council as administrators of the Common Housing Register will consider every application received and will:

- Provide free advice and information about the right to apply for accommodation;
- Provide detailed advice on eligibility to join the Common Housing Register;
- Provide free assistance to applicants who may have difficulty in making an application;
- Ensure that all information is easy to understand and is readily accessible
- Outline how choice is offered and the ability of applicants to indicate their preferences;
- Provide detailed advice on the types of accommodation that is available throughout the County Borough;
- Provide detailed information on the length of time applicants are likely to have to wait to be re-housed in their area of choice, and also information on the length of waiting time for any other area;
- Provide a full copy or summary of this Scheme to all households that request them and always provide a summary of the Scheme to people accepted as being owed a full duty as statutorily homeless;
- Treat applicants equally in accordance with their housing need and where possible their choices, regardless of race, religion or creed, ethnic or national origin, disability, gender, sexual orientation or marital status or age;
- Regularly monitor all nine equality strands of applicants;
- Ensure that all information provided by applicants will be treated with strict confidentiality.

6.2 How the Annual Lettings Plan Works

The Scheme will use a targeted banding system to prioritise applicants. This means that each band will be allocated a target (or a set of lettings indicators) indicating the number of allocations to be shared between the different bands.

The Common Housing Register Partners will then use this plan when making their allocations to ensure that the Scheme meets its legislative and contractual requirements by housing those in greatest housing need and helps to build sustainable communities.

This Scheme is substantially different to the one previously in operation due to the change from a points based system to a banding system. In order to determine the targets for each band, the Council has undertaken an analysis of the points of the applicants who were allocated a property over the last two years under the previous scheme and matched these points broadly to the new banding system. This has allowed the Council to identify which band these applicants would have been awarded under the banding system. Using trends in this way has allowed the Council to set appropriate targets for each band and will ensure that the Council will continue to meet its statutory obligations towards homeless households whilst also assisting other reasonable preference applicants, local strategic priority applicants and will contribute to achieving sustainability.

The targets for this period have been set as follows:

- Emergency Band 25%
- Gold Band 60%
- Silver Band 10%
- Bronze Band 5%

The targets will be reviewed after the first six months of operation of the Scheme and annually thereafter to ensure that the targets for each band have been set appropriately.

6.3 How Future Lettings Plans will be developed

After the first year of operating the revised Policy, accurate data will be available on the allocations made under each band and this will inform any future amendments to targets if necessary. This data will also allow for considering other monitoring options such as:

- Current applicants on the Common Housing Register split by band;
- The split of need within band i.e. how many applicants have Reasonable Preference and for which reasons;
- The percentage of a particular Reasonable Preference group that has been re-housed within the year; and
- The percentage of allocations made under each Band broken down by area

6.4 Reviewing who is on the Common Housing Register

Each customer on the Housing Register will have their application reviewed annually. This may be based on an annual review date or a rolling review 12 months from the applicant's date of registration. A letter will be sent to all

customers requesting confirmation of their current circumstances and that they wish to remain on the register. Applicants will be sent a reminder after 14 days. If they fail to respond within a further 14 days, this will result in the applicant being deleted from the scheme.

All deleted applicants will be notified in writing. If the applicant can provide a good reason, such as being on holiday, for not responding to the review request in time then the application may be reinstated with their original application date.

6.5 The Procedure for Dealing with Changes in Circumstances

All homeseekers must keep the Housing Access Team at the Council informed of any changes in their circumstances. Amongst the more detailed information described below, this also includes details such as contact telephone numbers.

Where a change of circumstances leads to a change in band, the homeseeker will be advised in writing of the new band, the reason for it and the applicable priority date. As noted previously in this Policy, homeseekers have a right to request a review of this decision.

Where a change of circumstances leads to a homeseeker being moved into a higher priority band, the registration date will become the day the Council received notification of the homeseekers change in circumstances.

If a homeseeker moves into a lower band as a result of a change in circumstances, then the original registration date will be used as the priority date.

Applicants must immediately notify the Housing Access Team of any changes in their circumstances and provide evidence to support these changes as a change in circumstances could alter an applicant's position on the Housing Register.

Any applicants that do not respond within the timescale for providing additional information may be removed from the Scheme. Applicants will not be considered for an offer of accommodation whilst the Housing Access Team is awaiting the required information. Applicants who have been removed from the register have the right to a review of the decision within 21 days.

If a household deliberately worsens their circumstances (see the relevant section in this policy) following a voluntary change of address, the application may, for a period of not more than 12 months, be awarded reduced preference. Anyone forced to leave their home through violence or a genuine fear of violence will not be considered to have deliberately worsened their circumstances.

6.6 Cancelling Applications

An application will be cancelled from the housing register in the following circumstances:

- a) At the customers request.
- b) If the customer becomes ineligible for one of the qualification grounds.
- c) When the customer has been housed.
- d) On failure to reply to a review letter or requests for further information within a given time period.
- e) An applicant has been housed in a secure or assured tenancy by another Local Authority or other Housing Association not part of the Common Housing Register;
- f) Where an applicant leaves temporary accommodation without a forwarding address;
- g) When the applicant moves to a new address and does not complete a new application form.
- h) Where it is discovered that the customer has given false or misleading information

Section 7: Reviews and Appeals

7.1 Reviews and Appeals

As noted throughout this Policy, homeseekers have the right to request a review of decisions made about their eligibility, their priority and their removal of priority. Any homeseeker that wishes to ask for a review of a decision must make this request in writing to the Housing Solutions Manager. Reviews will be heard by the Local Housing Panel the terms of reference and scope are set out at Appendix 6.

Customers who want to review a decision made in relation to their application to join the register and certain subsequent decisions have a right to ask for a formal review of the decision.

There is a legal right to a review of a decision in the following circumstances:

- a) The customer disagrees with a decision not to place them in a band or disagrees with the band they have been placed in. This includes where an applicant has been awarded adjusted preference meaning a reduced preference award.
- b) The customer considers that a decision has been reached based on incorrect information.
- c) The customer has been treated as ineligible on the basis of their immigration status.
- d) They have been treated as ineligible to join the register due to serious unacceptable behaviour.
- e) Their priority on the register has been given no priority status due to unacceptable behaviour.

The review procedure

1. Customers will be notified in writing of decisions made in respect of the review.
2. Customers must request a review of a decision within 21 days of being notified in writing, unless there are exceptional circumstances that they did not request a review within that timescale. They must give reasons why they wish to have the decision reviewed including where they believe an incorrect decision has been made on the facts.
3. A senior officer in Blaenau Gwent Housing Service who was not involved in assessing the case will informally consider the case and may provide an informal view to the applicant. Where the applicant wishes to proceed with a review this will be considered by the Local Housing Panel.
4. The review will be considered on the basis of the authority's allocation scheme, any legal requirements and all relevant information. This will

include information provided by the applicant on any relevant developments since the original decision was made

5. The Council will aim to complete and inform the applicant in writing of the decision within 21 working days depending on the frequency of the Local Panel meetings, after taking into account any additional information that has been provided by the customer. Alternatively, the customer will be advised of any time extension required to make the decision. There is a further right of appeal to the Housing Appeals Panel.

Appendix 1: Assessment criteria for when an applicant's housing needs be awarded the Emergency Priority Band for additional preference, or the Gold or Silver reasonable preference bands.

The allocation scheme has been designed to ensure that reasonable preference is given to all of the following categories of people, as set out in s.167(2ZA) of the Housing Act 1996:

(i) People who are homeless (within the meaning of Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014;

(ii) People who are owed a duty by the local authority under section 66, 73 or 75 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014;

(iii) People occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions;

(iv) People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds including grounds relating to disability.

(v) People who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the Council, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or to others).

These reasonable preference groups have been reflected in the Allocation Policy through a Banding system. Anyone with an award of reasonable preference plus additional preference to reflect their very urgent housing needs will be placed in the Emergency Band. All other applicant's owed a statutory reasonable preference will be awarded either Gold, or Silver depending on the Council's assessment of their relative housing need. Homeseekers not assessed as being owed a reasonable preference or have been assessed as being owed a reduced preference will be granted Bronze Banding. The summary table set out in the main body of the Policy records when Emergency, Gold, Silver or Bronze banding will be awarded.

Below are the detailed criteria that will be used to assess whether an applicant should be awarded one of the statutory reasonable preference categories and what Band will be awarded to reflect this. Note once an applicant is awarded reasonable preference they will receive no more priority if they would qualify for more than one priority category unless their housing circumstances are so urgent that they qualify for an award of additional preference – the Emergency Priority Band. The Emergency band is time limited and cases will be assessed after 3 months and if allowed to remain in the band their case will be reassessed every 3 months to determine whether the award of Emergency band status should still apply.

Reasonable Preference Group 1 - People who are homeless within the meaning of Part 2 of the Housing Wales Act 2014

Circumstances when the Emergency Band (additional preference) will be awarded

Homeseekers who have become homeless due to a fire, flood, or disaster and require accommodation within a short time period.

Circumstances when Gold, or Silver Banding to reflect a reasonable preference will be awarded

Customers assessed, as meeting the criteria for this reasonable preference category will be.

- a) People who are homeless and have been assessed as not being owed a s75 duty because they are not to be in priority need – **Silver band**
- b) People where it has been verified by the authority that they are rough sleeping in Blaenau Gwent County Borough and owed a section 73 duty – **Gold Band**
- c) Applicants who live in accommodation that is a moveable structure, like a caravan, but there is no lawful place they can lawfully place it and live in it – **Gold Band**
- d) Applicants who have made a homelessness application and have been determined by any Council to be homeless but not owed a s75 duty because they have been found to be intentionally homeless – **Silver or Bronze banding or no priority depending on the circumstances of their case.**

Note: those found intentionally homeless may be granted reduced preference or even not eligible or eligible but granted no priority by virtue of any unacceptable behaviour that led to the intentional homeless decision. This will be decided by applying the unacceptable behaviour criteria set out in the policy. They will remain under that reduced preference or no priority award until the matters that have led to that decision have been successfully resolved by that applicant to the satisfaction of the Council.

Reasonable Preference Group 2 - People who are homeless and are owed a duty by the local authority under section 66, 73 or 75 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014

Note: The reasonable preference award will only apply whilst any of the duties listed are still owed. Once an applicant is no longer owed a duty, (say for example where an applicant who was owed a s73 duty because they are homeless but where that duty has come to an end for any of the rules set out in the legislation including where a period of 56 days have elapsed, no duty will then be owed and the applicant will no longer be entitled to an award of reasonable preference for being owed a s73 duty to relieve homelessness).

Circumstances when the Emergency Band for additional preference will be awarded

There are no additional preference criteria for this category

Circumstances when Gold or Silver Banding to reflect a reasonable preference will be awarded

Applicants who will be given this preference are:

- a) Applicants owed a S75 duty because they have been assessed as eligible, homeless, in priority need and not intentionally homeless – *Gold banding*
- b) Applicants owed a S66 threatened with homelessness duty, or S73 homeless duty but only for as long as that duty is owed to the applicant – *Gold banding*
- c) Applicants owed a S66, or S73, or S75 duty by another Council not Blaenau Gwent Council will be given reduced preference and will sit at the bottom of the Silver band and will only be considered for an offer of accommodation in the circumstances where no other applicants in priority bands emergency, Gold or Silver with a local connection have expressed a preference for a vacant property. They do, however, remain able to be considered for any property where no one in the Emergency, Gold or Silver bands have expressed a preference for and will be considered for any such property before applicants in the Bronze band.

Note: Proof of other Local Authority homelessness duty owed will be required before the application is processed and further proof will be requested to continually monitor that the correct band has been awarded. If the information requested is not supplied, then application will be put on hold until the circumstances can be determined.

Reasonable preference group 3: People occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions

Circumstances when the Emergency Band for additional preference will be awarded

Customers will be awarded additional preference in the following circumstances:

- a) Households living in conditions which give rise to an imminent risk of serious harm and where the Local Authority has served a Prohibition Order under Part 1 of the 2004 Housing Act.
- b) Demolition or Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO). Where the applicant's property is subject to demolition or subject to a Compulsory Purchase Order for redevelopment.

Note 1: For tenants of a Council or another Registered Social Housing Provider in another local authority council accommodation the imminent risk of harm will be assessed taking into account the responsibility on that landlord to resolve the problem or transfer the tenant immediately. Therefore only in an absolutely exceptional case will additional preference be awarded.

Note 2: Applicants guilty of deliberately worsening their circumstances will not be given additional preference.

Note 3: Children will only be included in the overcrowding calculation at their main place of residence.

Note 4: The assessment applied by the Council will be to consider the facts and information received from the applicant and from any other Council department (such as the private sector housing team) or from any other organisation and the officer assessing the impact will apply the test set out below.

Assessment check 1: The officer will decide on the facts known what the seriousness of the impact is on the applicant and, or, any member of the household – the typically impact could be on the applicant's health for example.

Assessment check 2: Then the officer will consider what can be done to 1) immediately lessen or remove the impact and 2) in the near future to lessen or remove the impact e.g. action that can be taken by a landlord or the team responsible for private sector enforcement work in the council.

Assessment check 3: The officer will assess the new likely impact following any actions that can be carried out immediately and in the near future to lessen or remove the impact and will decide if there is still an imminent risk of serious harm.

Circumstances when Gold or Silver Banding to reflect a reasonable preference will be awarded

Applicants will be awarded reasonable preference in the following circumstances:

a) Applicants without access at all to any of the following facilities. No access to:

- a. A bathroom or kitchen
- b. An inside WC
- c. Hot or cold water supplies, electricity, gas or adequate heating.

Applicants who have access to shared facilities in shared accommodation will not qualify under these criteria – **Gold band**

b) Where an officer from the Council has determined that a private sector property (tenanted) contains one or more serious Category 1 hazards as defined by the Housing Health & Safety Rating System that are having a severe impact on the household. The awarded is made in respect of a significant risk to the health and well being of the occupant(s), and where there is no prospect of the issues being remedied in a period of time that the Council considers reasonable – **Gold Band**

c) The applicant is occupying insanitary or unfit accommodation and living in unsatisfactory housing conditions that present some risk to the health and safety of the occupants – **Silver Band**

d) Overcrowding of 2 bedrooms or more measured by the bedroom standard i.e. Where a Local Authority officer has made an assessment using the Housing Health and Safety Rating system and concluded there is a serious high risk of harm due the impact of severe overcrowding – *Gold Band*

e) The applicant is living in accommodation that is not suitable to their needs because it is short by one bedroom which is suitable to their needs – *Silver Band*

The standard used to assess overcrowding is as follows:

A separate bedroom should be allocated to the following persons:

- ✓ A person living together with another as husband and wife (whether that other person is of the same sex or the opposite sex).
- ✓ A person aged 16 years or more.
- ✓ Two persons of the same sex aged less than 16 years.
- ✓ Two persons (whether of the same sex or not) aged less than 10 years.
- ✓ Any person aged less than 16 years in any case where he or she cannot be paired with another occupier.

Note 1: For tenants of a Council or another Registered Social Housing Provider in another local authority area who apply to join the Blaenau Gwent Register the imminent risk of harm will be assessed taking into account the responsibility on that landlord to resolve the problem or transfer the tenant immediately. Therefore only in an absolutely exceptional case will reasonable preference be awarded.

Note 2: Applicants guilty of deliberately worsening their circumstances will not be given reasonable preference.

Note 3: Children will only be included in the overcrowding calculation at their main place of residence.

Note 4: The assessment applied by the Council will be to consider the facts and information received from the applicant and from any other Council department (such as the private sector housing team) or from any other organisation and the officer assessing the impact will apply the test set out below.

Assessment check 1: The officer will decide on the facts known what the seriousness of the impact is on the applicant and, or, any member of the household – the typically impact could be on the applicant's health for example.

Assessment check 2: Then the officer will consider what can be done to 1) immediately lessen or remove the impact and 2) in the near future to lessen or remove the impact e.g. action that can be taken by a landlord or the team responsible for private sector enforcement work in the council.

Assessment check 3: The officer will assess the new likely impact following any actions that can be carried out immediately and in the near future to lessen or remove the impact and will decide if there is still an imminent risk of serious harm.

Reasonable preference group 4: People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds including grounds relating to disability.

Circumstances when the Emergency Band for additional preference will be awarded on medical or disability grounds

A customer who has an extremely urgent and immediate need to move for medical reasons or due to a disability, which is being exacerbated by their current housing situation will be awarded additional preference and placed at the top of the list.

An officer of the Council in the Housing Access Team will make the initial assessment of whether the applicant's medical circumstances qualify for an award of additional preference or reasonable preference or do not meet the criteria to be awarded any priority. All officers will have received training on assessing such cases. They will assess cases according to clear criteria. The assessment will not be of the customer's health but how their accommodation affects their health. The criteria to be used to assess cases is attached at appendix 4.

If the medical impact lies outside of the criteria set out in the policy the assessing officer may take further advice from the Council's Occupational Therapist Service. Where it is felt necessary further information may be required from the applicant's Doctor or Health Specialist.

The following are examples of cases that may qualify for additional preference Emergency Band priority. It may apply to the applicant or a member of their household:

- 1) An immediate life threatening condition which is seriously affected by the current housing and where re-housing would make it significantly easier to manage
- 2) A serious illness, is currently receiving palliative care and urgently requires rehousing to facilitate the on-going provision of this care;
- 3) A life limiting condition and their current accommodation is affecting their ability to retain independence or enable adequate care;
- 4) The applicant's health is so severely affected by the accommodation that it is likely to become life threatening, e.g. applicant has severe mental health problems that are significantly exacerbated by their accommodation;
- 5) A new and life-changing condition that severely impairs their mobility, meaning they are unable to carry out day-to-day activities or have difficulty accessing facilities inside and outside of their accommodation and requires rehousing into accommodation suitable for their use;
- 6) Where their current property leaves a person at risk of infection, e.g. where an applicant is suffering from late-stage or advanced HIV infection
- 7) A member of the household cannot be discharged from hospital until a suitable adapted property is provided.

- 8) Due to limited mobility a person is unable to access essential parts of the property e.g. bathroom/toilet and requires re-housing into accommodation suitable for their use.
- 9) A member of the household is elderly or disabled or has a progressive illness and is likely to require admission to hospital or residential/nursing care in the immediate future and re-housing would enable the person to remain at home.
- 10) Armed forces personnel who need to move to suitable adapted accommodation because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability he or she, or a member of their household, has sustained as a result of service.
- 11) Veterans who have seen active service within the armed forces and are suffering from post traumatic stress disorder or serious illness directly related to service in the Forces
- 12) People who have a severe mental health or learning disability which significantly affects their ability to lead a normal life and which puts them at risk of admission to hospital or residential care.
- 13) People living in a mobile home, caravan or converted vehicle which, due to medical conditions, does not meet their needs
- 14) The applicant or household member requires significant disabled adaptations to meet their needs and this is not possible in their current accommodation or would not be cost effective.

All of the above examples would be granted Emergency Band Priority

Circumstances when Gold or Silver Banding to reflect a reasonable preference will be awarded

Customers whose housing is unsuitable for medical reasons, or due to a disability, but who are not housebound, or whose health, or safety is not at such a risk level to require urgent housing will be awarded Gold band reasonable preference priority if they meet the criteria set.

The following are examples that may qualify for the Gold reasonable preference priority band:

- 1) Children with severe conditions such as autism, or cerebral palsy where their long term needs cannot be met without settled accommodation.
- 2) A person whose disability means that re-housing would enable them to overcome physical barriers created by their current accommodation e.g. stairs and steps.
- 3) A person with a severe disability requiring substantial adaptations to a property not provided for in their current accommodation.
- 4) A person with a terminal illness or long term medical debilitating condition whose current accommodation is not having a significant impact on their condition but where their quality of life would be significantly improved by moving to alternative settled accommodation which may or may not be closer to support.

The applicant's current accommodation is unsuitable and exacerbates the applicant's or other household members' health condition and more suitable alternative accommodation is required to improve the health condition □-
Silver Band

Circumstances when the Emergency Band for additional preference will be awarded on welfare grounds.

1) Need to move on welfare grounds - Domestic abuse, extreme violence or extreme harassment.

Applicants who need to move immediately due to domestic abuse, extreme violence or extreme harassment will be awarded additional preference. This includes hate crime, disability, racial, homophobic or transgender harassment and will be awarded for exceptional circumstances where there is a high risk to the tenant or their family's safety if they remain in the property/area and they therefore require an immediate move.

The assessment will be made by a senior officer within the Council and will be based on evidence provided by the customer and other appropriate statutory and voluntary agencies. This would include, the Police, Social Services, referrals by MARAC, Domestic Violence organisations and Lesbian and Gay support groups.

For tenants of a Council or another Registered Social Housing Provider in another local authority area that apply to join the Blaenau Gwent Register the imminent risk of harm will be assessed taking into account the responsibility on that landlord to resolve the problem or transfer the tenant immediately. Therefore only in an absolutely exceptional case will reasonable preference be awarded.

2) Need to move on welfare grounds – high risk management transfer

The applicant is a Housing Association tenant and is a high-risk management transfer, who is receiving support from a professional agency or who is subject to a MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) that is making a recommendation of housing need. The transfer will enable the applicant's existing property to become available for an allocation to another applicant on the waiting list.

3) Need to move on welfare grounds – a social housing tenant wishing to move where that move would release an adapted property needed by another applicant

The occupant of a social housing property within the County Borough no longer requires the adaptations and will therefore be releasing an adapted property by moving and there is a suitable applicant on the waiting list for the adapted property that will be released through the move

4) Need to move on welfare grounds – risk of a child having to be taken into care

There is a likelihood of a child being accommodated by the Local Authority if re-housing is not made

The applicant's circumstances are not dealt with under any of the other circumstances in Emergency Band, however their housing need has been assessed by the Local Housing Panel as urgent and they require immediate re-housing.

5) Need to move on welfare grounds - Applicants who require accommodation as a result of leaving the Armed Forces and the loss of military accommodation and Bereaved spouses or civil partners of those serving in the regular forces

Where an applicant requires accommodation as a result of leaving the Armed Forces and the loss of military accommodation and this has not been as a result of a dishonourable discharge. Or

Where their spouse or partner's death is attributable (wholly or partly) to their service and the bereaved spouse or civil partner's entitlement to reside in Ministry of Defence accommodation then ceases.

Circumstances when Gold or Silver Banding to reflect a reasonable preference will be awarded

1) Need to move on welfare grounds - Move on from supported housing projects – Gold Banding

Applicants who are moving on from a specified list of supported housing projects in Blaenau Gwent (and also the Amber House Project) and are ready for independent living will be awarded additional preference if they meet the following criteria:

They must have vulnerability and urgent housing need that is best met through the provision of long-term settled housing. To qualify for this additional preference the support provider will provide a completed Move On from Supported Accommodation Request Form which provides evidence that the Council will use to assess whether the applicant:

- a) Has successfully completed a minimum of 6 months in the supported housing scheme (except in proven exceptional circumstances when a lesser period may be considered).
- b) Is ready to move to independent settled accommodation and is required to move on by the project to free up the unit for another individual in need.
- c) Specifically requires social housing to move onto because their circumstances make a move on option of private rented housing unsuitable
- d) Has a support package that has been assessed and is in place.

Customers can register when they move into supported accommodation and if they qualify for the priority band criteria they will be awarded the priority band when there is evidence that the person is ready to move on and can sustain a tenancy. Where the assessment is that the person is not ready to move on and is unlikely to sustain a tenancy they will be granted no priority until the time when they are assessed as ready to move on and can sustain a tenancy.

2) Need to move on welfare grounds - Move on from Care for a young person – Gold Banding

The applicant is a care leaver, vulnerable and has a high housing need that is best met by the provision of long term settled housing and the applicant has been assessed and approved by the Move On Panel as ready for re-housing. Applicants must be a former 'Relevant Child' as defined by the Children Leaving Care Act 2000.

These young people in care and ready to move out of care must be referred by Social Services in accordance with the move on protocol will be awarded additional preference.

Referrals will be made where a young person is ready to leave care. The criteria for the award of additional preference are:

- a) The young person is ready to move to independent settled housing and is genuinely prepared for a move to independent living.
- b) They possess the life skills to manage a tenancy including managing a rent account.
- c) The young person is in need of medium or long-term tenancy support.
- d) The support package has been assessed and is in place.
- e) Their needs are such that accommodation in the private rented sector, through its short-term nature, would have a detrimental effect on their move to independent living.

3) Need to move on welfare grounds - Recommended by the Council for fostering or adopting children

The applicant has been recommended by the Director of Social Services to foster or adopt children and whose current accommodation is not large enough

4) Need to move on welfare grounds - Forced to live apart because current accommodation is unsuitable

The applicant, their partner or children are forced to live apart because their current accommodation is unsuitable

*This does not apply to those who are legally separated or are living apart due to relationship breakdown or family dispute

Reasonable preference group 5: People who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the Council, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or to others).

Circumstances when the Emergency Band for additional preference will be awarded

There are no additional preference criteria for this category

Circumstances when Gold or Silver Banding to reflect a reasonable preference will be awarded

The categories of people who will be awarded reasonable preference on the grounds of hardship are:

- a) People who need to move for employment purposes
- b) People who need to move near relatives to give or receive support
- c) People who need to move to access medical treatment/social service facilities

a) Employment Hardship - Priority will only be given in exceptional circumstances and customers will need to show that they need to move to take up or continue an employment opportunity not available elsewhere. They will only be considered where they do not live within a reasonable commuting distance and will be required to provide confirmation of employment details from the employer – *Gold Band*

b) Support Hardship - Priority will only be given in exceptional circumstances and customers will need to show:

That they require substantial and ongoing support from relatives or friends or it is essential that they give substantial and on-going support to relatives. This will only be considered where there is a severe mental health, medical or welfare issue and there are reasons why this support cannot be achieved or maintained through reliance on public transport or the customer's own transport – *Gold Band*

Example of the information required in order to assess the priority include:

- Confirmation of name and address of the person who is to provide the care and the person who is to receive care
- Evidence of their care requirements (Doctor, Social Services)
- Evidence of links to care groups
- Other forms of support or care available to the applicant or the person to whom it is claimed support is required.
- Benefits relating to any disability or care. Disability living allowance information

c) Need to move to access medical treatment/social service facilities

Priority will only be given in exceptional circumstances and customers will need to show that they have a need to access medical care and/or social services facilities and that cannot be met through reliance on public transport,

the customer's own transport, or through provision put in place by health or social services – *Gold Band*

The Council will apply the following test:

- Confirmation of name and address of the medical or social provision to which they need access
- Evidence of their care requirements (Doctor, Social Services)
- Evidence that no other provision is available and no assistance can be provided to enable them to access the service
- A determination by the Council that the need to access the medical treatment/social services facilities is essential

d) Reasonable preference for financial hardship

Cases of financial hardship, following assessment, an applicant living in the private rented sector may be awarded reasonable preference. This is defined in the policy as working families whose income levels and hours worked qualify for Working Families Tax Credits and who are struggling to meet their housing costs in the private rented sector – *Gold Band*

Local priority banding award where an applicant does not meet a reasonable preference criteria

Where an applicant is an existing social housing tenant who does not qualify for Emergency Band or Gold Band but who wishes to transfer and has no rent arrears and have been a tenant for 12 months or more – *Silver Band*.

When will Reduced Preference be awarded?

The Council can grant applicants who would be owed either Emergency, Gold or Silver banding no priority or an adjusted priority (commonly referred to as reduced preference) in certain circumstances. The rules relating to when no priority will be awarded for unacceptable behaviour are set out in the eligibility section appendix 2 of the policy.

Reason 1: No Local Connection

The Council will give reduced preference for applicant's whose housing needs qualify for a reasonable preference award but where they do not having a local connection with Blaenau Gwent.

Applicants without a local connection whose housing needs would qualify for the additional preference band under the scheme will not be awarded additional preference unless the Council considers their circumstances to be absolutely exceptional. This will be decided on a case-by-case basis by the Service Manager responsible for the operation of the scheme.

The factors that will be taken into account in determining whether or not an applicant has a local connection with the County Borough include, but are not

limited to, whether they or a member of their household included in their application:

- 1) Has lived in the County Borough for a certain period of time, the more recent past being most relevant, in particular the last 12 months.
- 2) Has close family living in the County Borough, who have lived here for at least the previous five years
- 3) Has settled employment (paid or unpaid) in the County Borough; or
- 4) Have special circumstances that give rise to a local connection.

Note: Living in the County Borough means living in permanent accommodation, and will not include occupation of a mobile caravan, or motor caravan that is not on a residential site, or occupation of a holiday let which includes a hotel, bed and breakfast accommodation, hostel or permanent building whilst on holiday.

Circumstances may arise where it is not appropriate to apply the local connection Policy therefore the Housing Solution Manager discretion will evaluate each case on its own merit:

- MAPPA cases whereby Blaenau Gwent has agreed to assist another Local Authority will not be subject to local connection.
- Applicants who have been placed outside of Blaenau Gwent while being looked after by Children Services
- Homeless Applicants owed a S66, S73 or S75 duty by the County Borough under the Housing Wales Act 2014

MAPPA stands for Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements – a set of arrangements established by Police, Probation and the prison services (known as the responsible authorities) to assess and manage the risk posed by sexual and violent offenders. A number of agencies are under a duty to co-operate with the responsible authority, these include: Local Authority Social Services, Primary Care Trusts, Strategic Health Authorities, Youth Offending Team, Local Housing Authorities, Registered Social Landlords, Local Education Authorities, Job Centre Plus, and electronic monitoring providers. The purpose of MAPPA is:

- to ensure more comprehensive risk assessments, taking advantage of co-ordinated information sharing across the agencies; and
- to direct the available resources to best protect the public.

Where an applicant qualifies for an award of reasonable preference but that applicant does not have a local connection with the Council as defined above, they will sit at the bottom of the Silver Band and will only be considered for an offer of accommodation where no other applicants in the priority Bands above them (including silver band) with a local connection have expressed a preference for a vacant property.

Reason 2: Owed a Homelessness duty under the Housing Wales Act 2014 or by the Housing Act 1996 by another Council in Wales or England

Applicants owed a S66, or S73, or S75 duty by another Council in Wales or a full homelessness duty by a Council in England or Scotland by another Council and not Blaenau Gwent Council, will be given reduced preference and will sit at the bottom of the Silver Band

Reason 3: Refusing accommodation offered

The scheme allows applicants to specify any areas at street, estate or community level where they do not want to be offered housing. The scheme allows them to be considered only for property types that would suit the size of the household. The intention therefore is to make offers of accommodation that meet the preferences of applicants and provide suitable accommodation. As a result, when applicants refuse three offers of accommodation without offering a valid reason they will be demoted to the next band down. In these circumstances the demotion will be removed 12 months after the last offer unless their circumstances have changed and the Local Housing Panel determines that the change in circumstances is sufficient to allow the reduced preference to be removed.

A reasonable offer of accommodation is one that meets the housing need, size and location. In addition, applicants may request a larger property, and if following a financial assessment this request is granted a property is offered and refused, this will be deemed as an unreasonable refusal.

Reason 4: Adequate Financial Resources to resolve their own housing situation

The Council will take into account a Homeseeker's financial resources in determining where an applicant would qualify for reasonable preference, whether their preference should be reduced. Regard will be given to any resources wherever in the world they are situated. This will apply to households whose total gross income from all sources exceeds £40,200 or whose household's capital assets or savings exceeds £75,000.

Applicants with no reasonable preference, who are adequately housed and/or with the financial resources to meet their needs will be placed in Bronze Band. Applicants with a reasonable preference but have the financial resources to access suitable accommodation will be assessed in accordance with the banding system but will be demoted to the next band down.

This restriction does not prevent applicants being considered for any Low Cost Home Ownership/Shared Equity schemes, and the rules for these schemes are applied on a scheme-by-scheme basis.

If there are significant medical needs that mean the Homeseeker needs a specialised property, this will be given due consideration outside the scope of the Policy. Where a Homeseeker feels that their social or medical circumstances are such that they should be considered, despite their financial resources exceeding the financial thresholds outlined above, they will have

the right to request a review at the Local Housing Panel and Housing Appeals Board if necessary.

Reason 5: No Permanent Address in the UK

Homeseekers that are not currently living permanently in the UK will be suspended from consideration.

Reason 6: False and withheld Information

Section 171 (false statements and withholding information) makes it an offence for anyone seeking assistance from a Housing Authority under the 1996 Act, Part 6 to:

- a) Knowingly or recklessly give false information; or
- b) Knowingly withhold information, which the Housing Authority has reasonably required the applicant to give.

This would apply whether the false information was provided at the time of application, at renewal stage when the annual review of circumstances letter has been sent, in change of circumstances or during the proceedings of a review.

Where there is suspicion, or an allegation has been made that a person has either provided false information, or has withheld information, the application will be suspended pending the outcome of the investigation. If an offer of accommodation has been made at this point, the Housing Solutions Manager will hold discussions with the relevant housing association and subsequently the offer could be retracted.

If the outcome of any investigation reveals that they did not provide false information, or the withholding of information was found to be inadvertent, then the application will be reinstated from the date of registration. However, where the investigation shows that false information was provided on the application form, or was deliberately withheld, then the application will be determined to be not eligible and removed from the register and there will be no right to re-register for a period of 12 months.

Ground 5 in Schedule 2 to the Housing Act 1985 (as amended by the 1996 Act, s.146) enables the landlord to seek possession of a property where it has been granted as a result of a false statement by either the tenant or a person acting at the tenant's instigation.

Reason 7: A Homeseeker who deliberately makes their circumstances worse

If a household deliberately makes their circumstances worse following a voluntary change of address, the application may, for a period of not more than 12 months be awarded reduced preference. Anyone forced to leave their home through violence or a genuine fear of violence will not be considered to have deliberately worsened their circumstances.

Reason 8: Former or current Social Housing Tenancy related debt, or unacceptable behaviour or non compliance with a former social housing tenancy agreement

A decision may be made to:

- 1) To reduce an applicants preference, or
- 2) To decide that the applicant is not eligible to join the register, or
- 3) To decide that an applicant may join the register but be given no priority until they have resolve the issue in question to the satisfaction of the Council.

One of these outcomes will apply where the Council and partners are reasonably satisfied that the Homeseeker (or a member of their prospective household) has failed to maintain any previous social rented or private sector rented property within the terms of their tenancy agreement, or has committed acts causing or likely to cause nuisance or annoyance to their neighbours or others in the locality of where they live or where they previously have lived.

Decisions on these cases as to whether one of the 3 outcomes should be applied, are to be taken by the Local Housing Panel. That outcome will then apply until the applicant (or a member of their prospective household) has demonstrated, to the reasonable satisfaction of the Local Housing Panel, the necessary ability to modify their conduct. In some cases this will include co-operating with debt services, support agencies, or other services as directed

At any time during this period a Homeseeker is entitled to request that the Council reconsider their circumstances to determine whether the issues resulting in their being allocated a lower priority have been resolved to their satisfaction.

The Criteria that the Panel will apply to assess former or current Social Housing Tenancy related debt, or unacceptable behaviour, or non-compliance with a former social housing tenancy agreement is detailed in the Eligibility section at appendix 2 of the Policy

Appendix 2: Detailed information on the rules that will be applied to deciding whether an applicant is eligible to join the register.

The Eligibility rules set by the policy

Where a person applies but is deemed to be ineligible due to the application of the Government's rules for allocating housing accommodation to persons from abroad or persons subject to immigration control they will not be able to join the register. The rules are complicated and anyone who is impacted or believes they may be impacted by the rules can approach the Council for advice on the rules.

Section 166(3) of the Housing Act 1996 obligates the Council to consider all applications for social housing that are made in accordance with the procedural requirements of this policy. It must, however, when considering applications, ascertain if an applicant is eligible for accommodation or whether they are excluded from allocation under s.160A of the same Act.

The following is a summary of the main categories of eligible applicants to whom the Council may allocate accommodation under Part VI of the Housing Act 1996, taking account of nationality and immigration status. For the full criteria please refer to Chapter 2 of the Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation & Homelessness 2015:

- (i) Existing tenants;
- (ii) A person from abroad other than a person subject to immigration; and
- (iii) Persons subject to immigration control prescribed as eligible.

Welsh Ministers have prescribed classes of person who are to be considered eligible Allocation of Housing & Homelessness (Eligibility) (Wales) Regulations 2014. These are:

- (i) Refugees;
- (ii) Exceptional leave;
- (iii) A person with current leave to enter or remain in the UK with no condition or limitation, and who is habitually resident in the UK, Channel Islands, the Isle of Man and the Republic of Ireland;
- (iv) Persons who have been granted Humanitarian Protection; and
- (v) An Afghan citizen who, as a result of serving in the UK Government, has been granted permission to relocate to the UK, Channel Islands, the Isle of Man and the Republic of Ireland, and who is habitually resident in one of those areas will be eligible.

Applications received from asylum seekers will not be eligible to be admitted onto the common housing register until a positive decision on their claim for asylum is received and they are awarded refugee status, humanitarian protection or discretionary leave to remain.

Not eligible due to unacceptable behaviour

Under s.160A(7) of the Housing Act 1996, the Council, where it is satisfied that, an applicant or a member their prospective household, is guilty of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable to be a tenant, the council may treat the applicant as ineligible for an allocation and therefore ineligible to join the Council's allocation scheme Housing Register. All decisions will be made by the Letting Assessment and Exclusions Panel.

Section 160A(8) of the Housing Act 1996 provides that the only behaviour which can be regarded as unacceptable for these purposes is behaviour by the applicant or by a member of their household that would, if they had been a secure tenant of the local authority at the time, have entitled the local authority to a possession order under s.84 of the Housing Act 1985 in relation to any of the discretionary grounds in Pt I of Schedule 2, other than Ground 8. These are fault grounds and include behaviour such as:

- (i) non-payment of rent;
- (ii) breach of tenancy conditions;
- (iii) conduct likely to cause nuisance or annoyance; and
- (iv) use of the property for immoral or illegal purposes.

It is not necessary for the applicant to have actually been a tenant of the local authority when the unacceptable behaviour occurred. The test is whether the behaviour would have entitled the local authority to a possession order if, whether actually or notionally, the applicant had been a secure tenant.

Applicants will be notified in writing of the Council's decision that they are ineligible due to:

1. The application of the Welsh Government's rules for allocating housing accommodation to persons from abroad or persons subject to immigration control; Or
2. They are ineligible on the grounds of unacceptable behavior.

Applicants will have the right to request a review of any decision made by the Council regarding their eligibility within 21 calendar days of receiving their notification letter.

The criteria that will be applied to assess unacceptable behavior.

Serious behavior or former rent arrears: the rules that will be applied

This will apply where an applicant, or any member of their current or prospective household, has a history of serious behavior or former rent arrears, which in the view of the Council makes the applicant unsuitable to be a tenant until the issue has been resolved to the satisfaction of the Council. This includes, but is not limited to:

- The level of former or current rent arrears and/or any recoverable housing related debt. (See below for how these rules will be applied)
- Serious behaviour including non-compliance with a current or former tenancy agreement. (See below for how these rules will be applied).
- Where they, or any member of the household, have assaulted a member of staff and an injunction is being sought or has already been obtained
- Where they, or any member of the household, who have knowingly given false or misleading information, or withheld information, that has been reasonably requested

A decision will be taken by the Council on the facts whether the unacceptable behavior either:

- 1) So serious that the applicant is ineligible to join the register, or
- 2) Is not so serious to make the applicant ineligible to join the register but is serious enough that it comes under the criteria set by the allocation policy whereby an applicant will be granted no priority and will not be made any offer of accommodation until they have addressed the concerns of unacceptable behavior to the satisfaction of the Council, or
- 3) Is not so serious to make the applicant ineligible to join the register or serious enough that it warrants an applicant being granted no priority but does in the view of the assessing officer mean that the person should be granted reduced preference.

The decision to make an applicant not eligible to join the register or eligible but to be awarded no priority, or eligible but to be awarded reduced preference will be taken by the Housing Panel and in full consideration of the test of eligibility set out in Section 160A(8) of the Housing Act 1996. This provides that the only behaviour which can be regarded as unacceptable for these purposes is behaviour by the applicant or by a member of their household that would, if they had been a secure tenant of the local authority at the time, have entitled the local authority to a possession order under s.84 of the Housing Act 1985 in relation to any of the discretionary grounds in Part 1 of Schedule 2, other than Ground 8

Guidance on the criteria that will be applied to decide whether an applicant is ineligible for unacceptable behavior, or that the applicant is eligible but will be granted no priority until the concerns are satisfactory addressed, is set out below.

1 – The criteria to be applied for considering whether an applicant is not eligible, (or is eligible but will be granted no priority, or is found to be eligible but to be granted reduced preference) for current or former rent arrears or any recoverable housing related debt.

For the purpose of this policy the Council, when carrying out an assessment, will take into consideration all property related debts that are both recoverable and not statute barred. This includes any:

- (i) Current or former tenancy rent arrears;

- (ii) Outstanding re-chargeable repairs;
- (iii) Current and former housing related service charge arrears;
- (iv) Bed and breakfast or other temporary accommodation charge arrears
- (v) Housing benefit overpayments; and
- (vi) Associated court costs.

Recoverable property related debts apply to both the applicant and any members of their household included in their application for housing.

The following procedure will be applied to applicants whose housing needs mean that they would be awarded a priority band but where there are current or former rent arrears, or any recoverable housing related debt:

- This will be a decision of the Housing Panel
- The Council will consider whether the applicant still owes arrears/debt, and if they do, the extent of the arrears/debt and whether any housing related debt is recoverable.
- Any recoverable arrears/debts of over £500 may result in the applicant being ineligible to join the register depending on the level of arrears. However, wherever possible the applicant will be allowed to join the register but will be awarded no priority until the arrears/debts have been resolved. This will mean that once the arrears have been resolved an applicant who would have been awarded a priority band Emergency, Gold or Silver will join that band with the effective date they joined the register and not the date the arrears/debt had been resolved.
- The Council will also consider whether the claimant has taken debt advice acted on it, and entered into and begun to implement any arrangement to clear the arrears.
- The Council will also consider whether an arrangement has been made, the amount of arrears paid off, any debt outstanding, and the regularity of any payments made.

Where the current or former rent arrears or any recoverable housing related debt is over £500 is in existence an applicant who is found to be ineligible, or an applicant who is eligible but has been awarded no priority, must meet the following criteria before they can be considered to be eligible on a subsequent application or to have the no priority status removed. They will need to have:

- (i) Entered into a repayment plan
- (ii) Made a minimum of 13 consecutive weekly payments, at an agreed level; and
- (iii) Repaid a minimum of 25% of the debt.

This process can only be circumvented where the debt is repaid in full. In order to encourage good financial management and discourage applicants from using doorstep lenders, who may charge excessively high interest rate loans, lump sum payments of above 25% of the total debt owed would not apply unless the 13 - week minimum re-payment period has been satisfied.

Applicants with a housing related debt up to £500 will be allowed to qualify if their housing needs or circumstances qualify but they may be awarded no priority, or reduced preference (i.e. a band lower than the band they would have been awarded for their housing circumstances). This will depend on the level of debt and the actions they have or are committed to take to resolve that debt. Adherence would normally be considered to be adherence with a repayment plan over a 13-week period. This process can only be circumvented where the debt is repaid in full. In order to encourage good financial management and discourage applicants from using doorstep lenders, who may charge excessively high interest rate loans, lump sum payments of above 25% of the total debt owed would not apply unless the 13 - week minimum re-payment period has been satisfied.

2 - The criteria to be applied for considering whether an applicant is not eligible or is eligible but will be granted no priority for serious behaviour including non-compliance with a current or former tenancy agreement:

This applies where the Council is satisfied, having considered all available evidence, that an applicant (or a member of their current or prospective household) has:

1. Failed to adhere to the terms of any current or previous social housing or private rented sector tenancy agreement. This includes failing to maintain any previous social rented or private sector rented property within the terms of their tenancy agreement, or committing acts causing or likely to cause nuisance or annoyance to neighbours or others in the locality of where they live or where they previously have lived. It includes serious breaches of a social or private sector tenancy agreement – for example operating a business from the premises, having an unreasonable numbers of pets at the property despite being warned of the breach of tenancy.
2. A decision that the applicant is not eligible to be registered will normally apply until the applicant (or a member of their prospective household) has demonstrated, to the satisfaction of the Council, that circumstances have changed such that the previous conduct is unlikely to reoccur. In many cases this could include demonstrating cooperation with support agencies leading to a substantial improvement in behaviour.
3. Conduct likely to cause nuisance or annoyance – this is conduct or behavior that does not only relate to a previous social housing or private rented sector tenancy agreement. This includes where an applicant or a member of their current or prospective household is the subject of actions being taken by the Council (or some other competent body) on grounds of alleged Anti Social Behaviour (ASB). It includes criminal behaviour that was relevant to the tenancy and/or locality, for example being in possession of illegal drugs, acts of public disorder. This also includes behaving in a threatening, abusive or obstructive manner towards staff of the Council and or their contractors.
4. Where on the facts it is decided that despite the unacceptable behavior an applicant is able to qualify for the register they will normally be granted no priority and will not be made any offer of accommodation until they have addressed the unacceptable behavior to the satisfaction of the Council.

Where the Council is satisfied that some attempts are being made to address their behavior they may make an award of reduced preference resulting in the applicant being granted a band lower than the band they would have been awarded for their housing circumstances

5. Where an applicant is found to be ineligible any new application will normally only result in eligibility where there has been no reasonable cause for complaint or concern against the applicant (or members of their prospective household) for a continuous period of 12 months.

Appendix 3: How local lettings policy be applied and reviewed

Local Letting Initiatives may be applied to meet the particular needs of a local ward or to address sustainability and community issues to ensure that the housing allocation scheme is able to contribute to building sustainable communities.

They will be tailored to fit local situations in well-defined communities (such as a particular block of flats, an individual street, or new housing development. Or may be applied to a parish or a village in a rural area). Each local letting initiative will be based on a detailed analysis of relevant information gathered from a variety of sources and may include for example evidence from internal departments, partner Housing Associations, local Councillors, and the community itself. (Evidence may include information such as tenant profiling, the incidence of anti-social behaviour, and stock turnover in a particular block, street or area, or the need to provide housing for local people in rural villages and parishes).

The following are examples of local letting policies that may be deployed under the Allocation Policy. The list is for illustrative purposes and is not exhaustive.

- Age restrictions.
- Policies that are geared towards encouraging applicants who work or volunteer to live in an area where for example there may be an area, or street with high numbers of working age households not in work.
- Prioritising applicants who are key workers as defined by the Council.
- Restrictions on lettings to vulnerable households where there are already a concentration of supported tenants/residents in a street or block.
- Lettings to childless households where there are high concentrations of children and young people living on a specific estate, street or block.
- Disregarding household type or property matching rules to allow for example under-occupation to reduce child density or to account for future family growth
- Ensuring that there is a balance of working and non-working households allocated to a new build scheme.

How will a local letting policy be assessed and agreed?

The Council and the Housing Association Partner will come to an agreement on the villages, estates, blocks or streets where a local letting policy may be appropriate and why.

There must be a clear evidence base for adopting a local letting policy. Agreement as to whether a local letting policy is appropriate will be based on the following test:

1. That there is a clear definition of the objective to be achieved by that particular local letting policy

2. That there is a clear evidence base to back up the need for a local letting policy.
3. That any potential equality impact has been considered.
4. How long the local lettings policy is intended to operate
5. When the policy should be reviewed

A written record of each policy adopted or rejected should be kept.
It is the intention that local letting policies will be fluid with new policies being added as are required and existing policies being deleted once the objective for that policy has been met.

All current local letting policies will be listed as a link to the online version of the Council's Allocation Policy so the public can see which policies are in operation at any point in time.

Appendix 4: The Bedroom Standard for general needs and older person housing

| Property size and Type | Household Size |
|--|---|
| Bedsit | Single person |
| 1 bedroom elderly persons flat or bungalow or 2 bedroom bungalow | Single person or couple (Dependent on age criteria listed below or disabled) |
| 1 bedroom flats | Single person or couple |
| 2 bedroom flats | Family needing 2 bedrooms or 2 adults sharing accommodation |
| 1 bedroom houses and maisonettes | Single person, couple, or single person |
| 2 bedroom houses and maisonettes | Family needing 2 bedrooms or 2 adults sharing accommodation |
| 3 bedroom houses or maisonettes | Family requiring 3 bedrooms or 3 adults sharing accommodation |
| 4 bedroom house | 1 or more adult with 4 or more children |

The size criterion allows one bedroom for each person or couple living as part of the household with the following exceptions:

- Children under 16 of the same gender are expected to share
- 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.

This means those tenants whose accommodation is larger than they need may lose part of their Housing Benefit. Those with one spare bedroom will lose 14 per cent of their Housing Benefit and those with two or more spare bedrooms will lose 25 per cent. However, if applicants are in full time

employment and are able to pay the full weekly rent, they will be eligible to apply for any house size they wish.

| Age criteria for sheltered accommodation | |
|--|-------------|
| Linc Cymru | 55 and over |
| Melin Homes | 55 and over |
| Tai Calon Community Housing | 55 and over |
| United Welsh | 55 and over |

Appendix 5: The Local Housing Panel

The Local Housing Panel will meet on a monthly basis, or more frequently if required. The role of the Panel will be to consider and make decisions on applications that have been forwarded to it under the criteria set out below.

The Panel will be responsible for making decisions on the following issues. This list is not exhaustive. Written representations can be received from an applicant and their representative and or professional body:

- 1) The award of Emergency Banding due to exceptionally urgent welfare or medical/disability circumstances.
- 2) Needing more settled accommodation in order to deal with child protection issues arising under the Children Act
- 3) The household seeking accommodation has welfare needs so severe that the protection of vulnerable adults or children is only possible if the household were to move to a new home and where the present circumstances could deteriorate to such an extent as to place household members at risk, or in need of residential care unless re-housing is offered.
- 4) Families with a child with behavioural difficulties, which may require an additional bedroom or particular type of accommodation.
- 5) Requiring additional space such as for a carer or to foster.
- 6) The risk level of a potentially vulnerable person continuing to live in his/her current address.
- 7) The need for rehousing due to irreconcilable neighbour difficulties.
- 8) Requests to agree exceptions to certain policies set out in the scheme for example where an award of reduced preference has been given due to former or current rent arrears.
- 9) Requests to agree an applicant for any type of special housing provision, for example, floating support, supported housing because of a learning difficulty, mental health problems, alcohol or drug misuse, sensory difficulties, a need for low-rise or low density accommodation or accommodation in specific areas of the borough to give or receive support etc.
- 10) Requests to transfer following harassment including, verbal abuse, insults, intimidation, damage to property or possessions, threatening or abusive behaviour, racist, homophobic or other abusive graffiti, unprovoked assaults including common assault, actual bodily harm and grievous bodily harm, use of dogs, arson and attempted arson, threatening letters, witnesses of crime, or victims of crime, who would be at risk of intimidation

amounting to violence or threats of violence if they remained in their current homes.

- 11) Requests for a transfer or rehousing where there has been a bereavement or personal tragedy in the property or area.
- 12) May be ineligible due to unacceptable behavior including rent arrears and a recoverable debt;
- 13) May be allowed to qualify but be given no preference due to unacceptable behavior or any other criteria outlined in the policy
- 14) Worsens their own circumstances to increase priority;
- 15) Knowingly or recklessly makes a statement which is false, or knowingly withholds information;
- 16) Requires a risk assessment before being rehoused
- 17) The Panel will also review cases that may be due an offer of accommodation where circumstances exist that may lead to the applicant being bypassed.

Composition of the Panel

- Local Authority Housing Manager with responsibility for Housing;
- Housing Association Manager with responsibility for Housing;
- Supporting People Officer;
- Additional members will be co-opted as and when required.

Frequency of Meetings

The Panel will meet monthly or more frequently as required. The Panel will receive the case and supporting evidence in a standard format. Where a case cannot wait for the monthly panel a decision can be made by circulating evidence relating to the case on a standard form to panel members who will make their recommendation by e-mail.

All decisions and reasons for that decision will be recorded and an applicant informed of the decision. In exceptional cases an applicant may be asked to attend the panel to provide clarification on their case.

The decision reached by the Panel can still be subject to appeal to the Housing Appeals Board

Monitoring

The number of cases dealt with by the Panel, along with the decisions made and reasons will be monitored and reported annually to the Customer Services Scrutiny Committee and boards of relevant Registered Social Landlords.

Appendix 6: Housing Appeals Board

Terms of Reference

1. Composition of the Appeals Board

The Board will consist of the following Officers and elected members:

- Housing Solutions Manager;
- Council Executive Member with responsibility for Housing;
- Head of Service from the participating Registered Social Landlords.

2. Role of the Appeals Board

The Appeals Board will:

Consider appeals from homeseekers against any decision made by the Local Housing Panel following a request for a review to the Council for any of the statutory reasons set out in 7.1 of the Policy

The decision reached by the Appeals Board will be final.

3. Frequency of Meetings

The Board will meet within 28 days of the Council receiving a request in writing to appeal a decision made by the Local Housing Panel following a request for a review of any statutory decision set out in 7.1 of the Policy.

4. Conduct of the Meetings

The homeseeker will be able to attend the meeting and bring a representative to the meeting to assist them in putting forward their case. The homeseekers' representative can be either a relative or friend or a professional representative such as a Housing Rights Worker or Solicitor.

The Appeals Board will firstly consider the case put forward by the homeseeker and/or their representative.

The homeseeker and/or their representative must set out why the decision made is incorrect and provide evidence to support their case.

Representatives from the Local Housing Panel, to include as a minimum the Council's Housing Solutions Manager and one housing association representative will then be provided with the opportunity to set out the reasons why the original decision was made by the Local Housing Panel, along with the evidence upon which they based their decision.

The Appeals Board will then, meeting in closed session, consider the merits of the arguments put forward by both the applicant and the Local Housing Panel

and reach a final decision. Where the Appeals Board is unable to reach a unanimous decision, a majority decision will suffice.

The homeseeker will be advised of the decision of the Appeals Board in writing. The letter notifying the homeseeker of the decision will state the Appeals Board's reasons for reaching its decision.

5. Monitoring and review

The number of appeals requested, decisions made and reasons will be monitored and reported annually to the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Committee and Boards of local Registered Social Landlords.

Appendix 7: Sheltered Housing and Extra Care Schemes

Sheltered Housing

Melin Homes

Llys Ebwy, Briery Hill, Ebbw Vale
Roderick Hill Court, Dukestown, Tredegar
Ty Pendry Thomas, Briery Hill, Ebbw Vale
Howell Griffiths Court, Roseheyworth, Abertillery

Eligibility Criteria - 55 years old and above or relevant support need

Linc Cymru

Bill Harry Court, Dukestown, Tredegar
Llys-Yr-Efail, Westside/South, Blaina
Ty Scott, Tredegar Town Centre

Eligibility Criteria - 55 years old and above or relevant support need

United Welsh Housing Association

Cronin Court, Tredegar Town Centre
George Parry Court, Ebbw Vale Town Centre
Gwern Las, Cwmtillery, Abertillery
Saxon Court, Brynmawr Town Centre
Wesley House, Brynmawr Town Centre
William Adams Court, Ebbw Vale Town Centre

Eligibility Criteria - 55 years old and above or relevant support need

Tai Calon Community Housing

Cwmrhydderch Court, Cwm, Ebbw Vale
Davey Evans Court, Abertillery Town Centre
Grace Pope Court, Llanhilleth, Abertillery
Glanffrwd Court, Glyncoed, Ebbw Vale
Glanrafon Court, Glyncoed, Ebbw Vale
Llandafel Court, Cwm, Ebbw Vale
Llys Cwm Llwydrhew, Six Bells, Abertillery
Llys-Y-Capel, Westside/South, Blaina
Peacehaven Court, Cefn Goula, Tredegar
Riverside Flats, Westside/South, Blaina

Eligibility Criteria - 55 years old and above or relevant support need

Extra Care Schemes

United Welsh – Llys Nant Y Mynydd, Hospital Road, Nantyglo

Linc Cymru – Llys Glyncoed, Off College Road, Ebbw Vale

Appendix 8: Outline of Financial Assessment Criteria

| | |
|--|--|
| Rent | Actual |
| Mortgage | Actual |
| Life Insurance | Actual |
| House Insurance | Actual |
| Water Rates | Actual |
| Gas | £10.00 a Week |
| Electricity | £10.00 a Week |
| Council Tax | Actual |
| Food Single Person Couple Each additional member of the household | £25.00 A Week £50.00 A Week £10.00 A Week |
| Cigarettes | Dependant on circumstances and evidence supplied |
| Television License | Actual |
| Home Telephone (including mobile) | £10.00 A week |
| Car Road Tax Insurance Petrol | Actual Actual Up to £15.00 a week dependant On circumstances and evidence supplied |
| Bus Fares | Up to £15.00 dependant on circumstances and evidence supplied |
| School Dinner Money | £2.00 per child per day |
| Clothes | £5.00 per household per week |
| Childcare charge | Actual |
| Maintenance Payments | Actual |
| Loans | Actual |
| Credit Cards | Minimum Payment |
| Sky | Lowest Package |
| Catalogues | Minimum payment |
| Pet Costs | Dependant on circumstances |
| Other | Dependant on circumstances |

All of the above are guidance for the dedicated officer assessing an individual needs and the final decision will be on dependant on the individual circumstances.

Appendix 9 Assessing whether to award a priority banding on the grounds of a medical condition or disability impact

Awarding Medical Priority for a significant medical condition or disability that is being made worst by an applicant's housing conditions or circumstances

Introduction

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 either the Emergency Band or Gold Band.

To achieve this consistency in the allocation of banding under this heading a descending schedule is detailed below

Emergency Band: Urgent and immediate medical impact problem

This top category will be reserved for exceptional cases where an applicant or tenant's health is seriously at risk (including a risk to life) due to the associated medical and housing difficulties that are inherent in the existing accommodation.

Gold Band: Serious medical impact problem

This again is a high banding category and should only be used to reflect urgent medical difficulties that have a clear relationship to existing housing circumstances.

If the Council decides that the medical condition or disability is not affected by the person's current housing the applicant will not be awarded Emergency or Gold Banding for this criteria.

How will medical cases be assessed?

The following procedure will be applied:

- 7) Homeseekers who indicate that they or anyone in their household have an illness or disability which is affected by their current home they will be asked to complete questions on their application form relating to their medical condition or disability.
- 8) The Housing Access Team Officers will carry out an initial assessment using the standard assessment criteria set out in this appendix to the policy. An applicant may need to be further interviewed by an Access officer or OTT officer to help make the assessment.
- 9) Where a Homeseeker's health is not so urgent and immediate that they are unable to live in their current home but their medical condition would be significantly improved by alternative housing a Gold Banding will be awarded. This will be determined by the Housing Access Officer and

checked and signed off by the Housing Solutions Manager based on the evidence provided.

- 10) Where the Council believes there may be an urgent and immediate need due to the severity of the impact of their current housing on their medical condition or disability and the applicant may be unable to continue to live at their present home the case will be submitted to the Occupational Therapy Team (OTT) who will determine whether to place the Homeseeker in the Emergency Band. In order to do this the OTT will potentially visit the home of the Homeseeker or tenant household, consider any supporting information that has been requested or provided, and decide whether Emergency Band priority should be awarded, based upon the severity of the case and the urgency of the need for re-housing.
- 11) The OTT will also recommend the type of housing that the homeseeker needs to resolve the urgent circumstances.
- 12) Where priority is awarded on the basis of medical circumstances applicants can only be considered for the type of properties identified by the OTT, so for example, if someone needs to move to a bungalow because they have suddenly become a wheelchair user, they will only be considered for suitable properties within the Gold Band.

The Housing Access Team will not as a matter of course request an applicant or tenant to submit medical certificates or to obtain letters from their GP. The belief is held that this is a purely voluntary matter for the GP and patient. The Council has no wish to create further work for doctors by insisting that medical certificates are produced before any application is considered.

However, there will be occasions when the advice of a doctor or consultant will need to be sought. For example, where an applicant's housing circumstances are affecting their mental health, or where a GP considers a patient requires High Priority as a result of a medical problem.

When determining what banding to award, if any, staff will approach the matter from the standpoint of assessing what degree of need exists and, secondly, what adverse effect this has on the ability of the applicant to manage day to day tasks in their current home.

The following list covers some of the main factors, which can be reflected in a banding award under Medical Considerations:

- An applicant's inability to manage stairs, control temperature, etc
- Where an applicant's more or less confined to their existing accommodation
- Where present accommodation is causing an applicant's mental or physical disability.
- An applicant's restricted ability to fend for him/herself

- The need for adapted housing and/or extra facilities
- The need for sheltered or supported housing
- The need for housing as part of a care plan

Medical priority will not normally be awarded in any of the following circumstances:

- Disrepair problems not impacting significantly on the applicants medical condition
- Overcrowding not impacting significantly on the applicants medical condition
- Where the medical condition is as a result of a lifestyle choice (e.g. drug use)

The 4 stage assessment process applied by the assessing officer

When assessing whether to award Emergency or Gold Banding on medical or disability grounds, there is a 4 stage assessment process.

The 4 stage process is:

1. Is the medical condition serious enough for a priority banding to be considered? (This assessment procedure will be used to decide cases more likely to be awarded priority and cases less likely to be awarded priority)
2. If the medical condition is serious enough for a priority banding to be considered the next stage is for the assessment officer to decide if there is a direct link between the identified medical problem and the applicant's current housing accommodation/situation? i.e. Is the applicant's current housing accommodation/circumstances making the medical condition substantially worse or will make it worse.
3. If the assessment officer agrees this to be the cases they will next need to be satisfied that there is a realistic expectation that the identified medical condition would improve if alternative, more suitable accommodation was made available.
4. If the answer is it would be improved the final question will be whether to award the Emergency Band or Gold Band depending on the severity of the condition.

Guidance for the assessing officer

The following are a list of the most common significant medical issues in alphabetical order. The section sets out:

- 1) The condition,
- 2) More information on the condition and impact
- 3) Common treatments
- 4) Questions that can be asked of the applicant and their GP/health professional to help determine the condition, management and impact
- 5) Where a person is less likely and more likely to be a priority case due to the seriousness of the condition

Below are the most common significant medical conditions. There are clearly many more medical conditions that a person may have been diagnosed with or claim to have and if the applicant has a condition not listed below the assessing officer will obtain information on what the condition is, its impact, treatment, how to manage the condition and potential long- term prognosis.

Arthritis

Q - Has the applicant received a diagnosis?

Q - If so, is the condition Osteoarthritis or Rheumatoid arthritis, or another rarer or associated form?

Osteoarthritis

- This is the most common type of arthritis in the UK, affecting around 8 million people.
- Often develops in people who are over 50 years of age. However, it can occur at any age as a result of an injury or another joint-related condition.
- In osteoarthritis, the cartilage between the bones gradually erodes, causing bone in the joints to rub together.

Q Check the joints that are most commonly affected. These are normally the hands, spine, knees and hips.

Q How is it impacting on the applicant?

Q How is the condition (if diagnosed) being treated?

Q For osteoarthritis, painkillers, [non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs \(NSAIDs\)](#) and [corticosteroids](#) are often prescribed.

Q Have these been prescribed?

Q How effective are they?

Q Is the applicant taking their medication

Q Has the applicant undergone any of the following surgical procedures?

- arthroplasty (joint replacement)
- arthodesis (joint fusion)
- osteotomy (where a bone is cut and re-aligned)

Q If so how long ago?

Q How successful was surgery?

Rheumatoid arthritis

- Often starts when a person is between 40 and 50 years old. Women are three times more likely to be affected than men.
- Rheumatoid and osteoarthritis are two different conditions. Rheumatoid osteoarthritis occurs when the body's immune system targets affected joints, which leads to pain and swelling.
- In treating rheumatoid arthritis treatment is often to slow down the condition's progress and minimise damage to the joints.

Q Is the applicant being treated and what form of treatment is it? Common treatments include:

Q Is the applicant prescribed medication to relieve symptoms and slow the progress of the condition - analgesics (painkillers); disease modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs)

Q Is the applicant receiving supportive treatments, such as [physiotherapy](#) and occupational therapy, and regular exercise to help the person keep mobile

Q Has the applicant undergone or is awaiting surgery to correct any joint problems that develop

Less likely to be granted a priority banding

- Completed successful surgery
- On medication and this is controlling the condition and complying with medication and occupational therapy, and regular exercise to help the person keep mobile
- Has undertaken or is undertaking occupational therapy, and regular exercise to help the person keep mobile and has responded well to this treatment
- Medication has reduced the number of incidents of 'flare ups'
- Impact on upper body only and not on lower body needed for mobility

More likely to be granted priority banding

- Awaiting joint replacement
- On a major drug e.g. azathioprine, methotrexate, steroids.
- Where treatment has been unsuccessful that the condition is getting worse and impacting significantly on the ability to get out and perform day to day tasks

- Where for Rheumatoid arthritis it has led to secondary complications that may cause additional problems and can sometimes be life-threatening. Possible complications include [carpal tunnel syndrome](#), - inflammation of other areas of the body (such as the lungs, heart and eyes), and an increased risk of [heart attacks](#) and [strokes](#).

Asthma

- Asthma is a common long-term condition -1 in every 12 adults suffer from it
- Can cause coughing, wheezing, chest tightness and breathlessness.
- The severity of these symptoms varies from person to person.
- Asthma can be controlled well in most people most of the time, although some people may have more persistent problems.
- Occasionally, asthma symptoms can get gradually or suddenly worse. This is known as an "asthma attack", although doctors sometimes use the term "exacerbation".
- While there is no cure for asthma, there are a number of treatments that can help control the condition.

Treatment is based on controlling and relieving symptoms

Q Is the applicant receiving treatment?

Q If so what is it? For most people, this will involve the occasional, or, more commonly, daily use of medications, usually taken using an inhaler. However, identifying and avoiding possible triggers is also important. **Reliever inhalers** are usually blue and are taken to relieve asthma symptoms quickly. **Preventer inhalers** are usually brown, red or orange and reduce the chances of asthma attacks occurring. They must be used regularly (typically twice or occasionally once daily) and indefinitely to keep asthma under control.

Q Is the applicant prescribed oral steroids?

Normally prescribed if severe asthma is not under control. This form of treatment is usually monitored by an asthma specialist and will require further inquiries of that specialist before a granted priority banding decision can be made.

Oral steroids are powerful anti-inflammatory preventers, which are generally used in two ways:

Q Have they been prescribed to regain control of asthma when it is temporarily upset, for example, by a lapse in regular medication or an

unexpected chest infection; in these cases, they are typically given for one or two weeks, then stopped. Or

Q Are they prescribed because long-term control of asthma remains a problem, despite maximum dosages of inhaled and other medication? In these cases, oral steroids may be given for prolonged periods, or even indefinitely, while maintaining maximum treatment with inhalers as this maximises the chance of being able to stop the oral steroids again in the future.

Q Has the applicant been given a personal asthma action plan agreed with their doctor or nurse that includes information about the medicines they need to take; how to recognise when symptoms are getting worse, and what steps to take when they do so.

Less likely to be granted a priority banding

- On medication and this is controlling the condition and the applicant is complying with medication
- Asthma is under control through the combined use of preventer inhaler and reliever inhaler.
- Has not had a severe attack requiring hospital admission ever or not for some time and since the attack the condition is under control with inhalers.
- Have been prescribed oral steroids to regain control of asthma when it is temporarily upset, for example, by a lapse in regular medication or an unexpected chest infection.
- Past asthma condition that has been reversed following treatment and no medication now prescribed

More likely to be granted priority banding

- Permanent narrowing of their airways and secondary problems
- Histories of severe attacks that may have required hospital admission for treatment, as severity of the attack could be life threatening and attacks have happened despite medication.
- Long-term use of oral steroids to try and control the condition (often long term oral steroids may have side effects – check with asthma consultant and or GP).
- Uses a nebulizer

Back Pain, Neck Pain, Shoulder Pain

Backache is most common in the lower back ('lumbago'), although it can be felt anywhere along the spine, the neck down to the hips.

Q - Has the pain been caused by an injury or disease, such as:

- ✓ A slipped disc – when one of the discs in the spine is damaged and presses on the nerves
- ✓ sciatica – irritation or compression of the sciatic nerve, which causes pain, numbness and tingling that travels down one leg
- ✓ Whiplash – neck injury caused by a sudden impact
- ✓ Frozen shoulder – inflammation around the shoulder that causes pain and stiffness
- ✓ Ankylosing spondylitis – a long-term condition that causes pain and stiffness where the spine meets the pelvis

Q - Is the applicant receiving treatment for short-term pain to speed up recovery? Q - If so what is the treatment?

- To remain as active as possible
- To take over-the-counter painkillers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen
- To use hot or cold compression packs

Q – Is the applicant receiving treatment for longer-term pain.

Q - If so what is the treatment?

- Stronger painkillers
- Exercise classes – where they may receive instruction on specific exercises to strengthen muscles and improve posture
- Physiotherapy, osteopathy, chiropractic, acupuncture.
- Support and advice at a specialist pain clinic

Less likely to be granted a priority banding

Most conditions can be treated and are likely to improve, or can be managed to the extent where it should not prevent the applicant from managing despite their current housing conditions.

More likely to be granted priority banding

A chronic condition where confirmed that the applicant requires surgery and impacts to an extent where they are unable to perform basic day-to-day tasks.

Cancer

- Cancer is a condition where cells in a specific part of the body grow and reproduce uncontrollably. The cancerous cells can invade and destroy surrounding healthy tissue, including organs.
- Cancer sometimes begins in one part of the body before spreading to other areas. This process is known as metastasis.

- There are over 200 different types of cancer, each with its own methods of diagnosis and treatment. Surgery is the primary treatment option for most types of cancer, because solid tumors can usually be surgically removed.
- Two other commonly used treatment methods are chemotherapy (powerful cancer-killing medication) and radiotherapy (the controlled use of high-energy X-rays).
- Given the number of types of cancer and treatments and prognosis for cure or remission it is not possible to give any guidelines. You should as with all other serious medical conditions talk to the applicants GP or health professional. Where a person is undergoing or has undergone recent surgery, chemotherapy or radiotherapy they will inevitably be in granted priority banding. Where a particular form of cancer has been cured or is in long-term remission and there are no secondary complications or conditions then they are Less likely to be granted a priority banding.

Depression, Bipolar and Mental Illness

Depression affects people in different ways and can cause a wide variety of symptoms. They range from lasting feelings of sadness and hopelessness, to losing interest in the things a person used to enjoy and feeling very tearful. Many people with depression also have symptoms of anxiety.

There can be physical symptoms too, such as feeling constantly tired, sleeping badly, having no appetite, and complaining of various aches and pains.

The severity of the symptoms can vary. At its mildest, a person may simply feel persistently low in spirit, while at it's most severe depression can make a person feel suicidal and that life is no longer worth living.

Treatment for depression usually involves a combination of medicines, talking therapies and self-help.

The kind of treatment that a doctor recommends will be based on the type of depression a person has. Below is a short description of the types of treatment a doctor may recommend.

Mild depression

Wait and see - If a person is diagnosed with mild depression, it may improve by itself. In this case, the GP may recommend a person should simply be seen again one off or regularly to monitor progress. This is known as watchful waiting.

Exercise – there is evidence that exercise may help depression and it is one of the main treatments if a person has mild depression.

Self-help groups – talking through feelings can be helpful. A person may be recommended by their GP to talk either to a friend or relative, or be referred to a local self-help group. The GP may also recommend self-help books and online cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT).

Moderate depression

Talking therapy – if the person has mild depression that isn't improving, or moderate depression, the GP may recommend a talking treatment (a type of psychotherapy). There are different types of talking therapy for depression, including cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and counseling.

Moderate to severe depression

Antidepressants – tablets that treat the symptoms of depression. There are almost 30 different kinds of antidepressant. They have to be prescribed by a doctor, usually for depression that is moderate or severe.

The GP may recommend that a person take a course of antidepressants plus talking therapy, particularly if the depression is quite severe. A combination of an antidepressant and CBT usually works better than having just one of these treatments.

Mental health teams – if a person has severe depression, they may be referred to a mental health team made up of psychologists, psychiatrists, specialist nurses and occupational therapists. These teams often provide intensive specialist talking treatments as well as prescribed medication.

Bipolar disorder

Formerly known as manic depression, is a condition that affects a person's moods, which can swing from one extreme to another.

If a person has bipolar disorder, they will have periods or episodes of depression – where they will feel very low and lethargic and mania – where they will feel very high and overactive. Symptoms will depend on which mood the person is experiencing. Unlike simple mood swings, each extreme episode of bipolar disorder can last for several weeks (or even longer), and some people may not experience a "normal" mood very often. During an episode of depression, you may have overwhelming feelings of worthlessness, which can potentially lead to thoughts of suicide.

Several medications are available to help stabilise mood swings. These are commonly referred to as mood stabilisers and include:

- lithium carbonate
- anticonvulsant medicines
- Antipsychotic medicines

Types of anti depressants

Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) - Normally a person will be prescribed a modern type called a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) to treat mild or moderate depression. Examples of commonly used SSRI antidepressants are Seroxat (paroxetine), Prozac (fluoxetine) and Cipramil (citalopram).

They help increase the level of a natural chemical in the brain called serotonin, which is thought to be a "good mood" chemical.

Tricyclic antidepressants (TCAs) - This group of antidepressants is used to treat moderate to severe depression.

TCAs, which include Imipramil (imipramine) and amitriptyline, have been around for longer than SSRIs.

SNRIs (serotonin-noradrenaline reuptake inhibitors) - New antidepressants, such as Efexor (venlafaxine), Cymbalta or Yentreve (duloxetine) and Zispin Soltab (mirtazapine), work in a slightly different way

from SSRIs and TCAs. Venlafaxine and duloxetine are known as SNRIs (serotonin-noradrenaline reuptake inhibitors). Like TCAs, they change the levels of serotonin and noradrenaline in the brain. Studies have shown that an SNRI can be more effective than an SSRI, though they're not routinely prescribed as they can lead to a rise in blood pressure.

Q Has the applicant been diagnosed with depression?

Q If so has any treatment been prescribed?

Q What is that treatment – e.g. antidepressant medication, CBT, exercise, talking therapy?

Q If anti depressants what type (see above) and at what level dosage?

Q Has the depression required a referral to a mental health team?

Q What are their symptoms both physical and psychological? (Establish the impact ranging from feelings of sadness, anxiety and hopelessness, feeling constantly tired, sleeping badly, having no appetite, and complaining of various aches and pains).

Q What is the severity of the symptoms? (At its mildest, a person may simply feel persistently low in spirit, while at it's most severe depression can make a person feel suicidal and that life is no longer worth living).

Q Have these symptoms been reduced by the treatment recommended? If not is further treatment recommended from the person's GP?

Q Has the person been diagnosed as suffering from Bipolar disorder? If so what medication are they on? Are they receiving psychiatric services?

Less likely to be granted a priority banding

- Mild to moderate depression treated through anti depressants or other non- medication therapy where the applicant is responding to treatment and is able to undertake day to day tasks
- Feeling of low mood and anxiety but no feelings of self harm or attempts at self harm
- Drug induced illnesses with no secondary complications

More likely to be granted a priority banding

- Severe depression being treated by a mental health service where professional opinion to the severity and impact is that their current housing circumstances are or will have a significant effect on the applicant.
- Recent Psychiatric hospital admission
- Verified history of self harm from GP or other health professional

- On anti psychotic medication
- Evidence of current psychosis
- On injected depot therapy
- Diagnosed condition of bipolar

Diabetes

Type 1 Diabetes – commonly known as insulin-dependent diabetes.

- The body's immune system attacks and destroys the cells that produce insulin. As no insulin is produced, glucose levels increase, which can seriously damage the body's organs. It affects about 10% of all adults with diabetes.
- A person will need insulin injections for the rest of their life.

Q - Consider if there are secondary complications. These could be:

- ✓ Heart disease and stroke
- ✓ Atherosclerosis that is the furring and narrowing of blood vessels.
- ✓ Angina
- ✓ Nerve damage
- ✓ Retinopathy where the retina at the back of the eye is damaged.
- ✓ Kidney disease and in rare cases kidney failure
- ✓ Foot problems - Damage to the nerves of the foot can lead to a foot ulcer and can cause serious infection.
- ✓ Circulation problems – which, in the most serious of cases, can lead to gangrene

Type 2 Diabetes

Q – Have they been referred to a diabetes care team for specialist treatment, or are they receiving treatment from their GP surgery

Q – What treatment has been prescribed?

Making changes to lifestyle such as eating a healthy diet and taking regular exercise, stopping smoking, reducing alcohol intake, losing weight

Q - Have they been prescribed medication to keep their blood glucose at normal levels? This will normally be a tablet.

Q – Is the applicant cooperating with treatment to keep their blood glucose levels as normal as possible, which will control symptoms and minimise the risk of health problems developing later on.

Less likely to be granted a priority banding

- On oral medication only
- Not on medication and advised to change lifestyle by doctor or health professional
- Pre type 2 condition with raised glucose levels only

More likely to be granted priority banding

- Insulin dependent type 1 condition with secondary complications or medical opinion that developing or strong risk of developing secondary complications
- Originally diagnosed type 2 conditions rapidly changing to type 1 condition with complications.

Epilepsy

- Epilepsy is a condition that affects the brain and can cause a one off or repeated seizures referred to as "fits".
- Epilepsy is estimated to affect more than 500,000 people in the UK; one in every 100 people has the condition.
- The severity of seizures can differ from person to person. Some people simply experience an odd feeling with no loss of awareness, or may have a "trance-like" state for a few seconds or minutes, while others lose consciousness and have convulsions (uncontrollable shaking of the body).
- Some people may only have a single seizure at some point during their life. If they do not have a high risk of having further seizures, they may have been medically diagnosed as not being regarded as having epilepsy.
- Treatment for epilepsy is used to control seizures, although not everyone with the condition will need to be treated.
- It may sometimes be possible to control epilepsy solely by avoiding things that trigger seizures, such as sleep deprivation and alcohol.
- While some people may need to be treated for the rest of their lives, this is not always the case. Sometimes people have epileptic seizures at one stage in their life, only for them to become less frequent or disappear, as they get older. This is more common if seizures first occur in childhood or early adulthood.

Q Has the applicant been diagnosed with epilepsy?

Q When was the diagnosis – as a child or more recently?

Q When did they last have a seizure and what form did it take e.g. an odd feeling with no loss of awareness, or a "trance-like" state for a few seconds or minutes, or the loss of consciousness and convulsions.

Q If recent was this reported to their GP?

Q Is the applicant under medication for their epileptic condition?

Q Are they on Anti-epileptic drugs (AEDs) to control their seizures?

Q Since being treated with AEDs have they had a seizure?

Q If so did it result in their level of AED being increased and if so have they had a seizure since?

Less likely to be granted a priority banding

- No recent seizures and not on AED medication
- On AED medication and since taking medication has not had any seizures and complies with taking medication
- One off seizure in childhood and no seizures since

More likely to be granted a priority banding

- Uncontrolled recurrent seizures leading to loss of consciousness and convulsions and medication is not able to stop seizures.
- Seizures would be controlled but applicant is not complying or not able to comply with medication leading to recurrent fits.

Heart Problems

There are many conditions that come under the title heart problems so it is important that you are able to assess what the problem is and how it is being treated in order to further assess the question of a priority banding for any impact of their current housing conditions. If the applicant has a heart condition contact with their GP will be essential

Q Have they undergone coronary angioplasty (stenting) to widen blocked or narrowed coronary arteries and was it successful.

Q Have they had or are awaiting by pass surgery?

Q Have they been diagnosed with Coronary Heart Disease? This is the term that describes what happens when the heart's blood supply is blocked or interrupted by a build-up of fatty substances in the coronary arteries.

Q Have they had a heart attack? When and have they had more than one? What is the medical prognosis re the amount of damage this has caused the heart muscle

- Q Have they been diagnosed with a Heart block (where the transmission of the pulse between the nodes and the ventricles is interrupted)?
- Q If so has treatment been thought to be required such as a permanent pacemaker?
- Q Have they been diagnosed with heart palpitations? (Heart palpitations are heartbeats that suddenly become more noticeable where the heart may feel like it's pounding, fluttering or beating irregularly, often for just a few seconds or minutes)
- Q Do they have congenital heart disease (this is a general term for a range of birth defects that affect the normal workings of the heart - people with congenital heart disease often need treatment throughout their life and may require ongoing monitoring during adulthood. People with complex heart problems can develop further problems with their heart rhythm or valves over time).

Less likely to be granted a priority banding

N.B. - Clearly you will need to carefully consider evidence from the applicant's GP or health consultant.

- Medication consists of statins alone
- Has completed successful bypass surgery or stenting and treated by statins since
- Has been diagnosed with heart palpitations with no secondary complications or other heart condition.
- Has been diagnosed with a Heart block condition where no treatment was considered necessary or has been treated by inserting a pacemaker
- Has described their condition as having suffered a heart attack but this is not the conclusion of the GP or medical professional

More likely to be granted a priority banding

- There will be a number of heart conditions where the severity will mean the person is likely to be in granted priority banding. Discussions with their GP or health consultant will enable you to consider the condition, severity and impact on the applicant.
- Awaiting by pass surgery
- On multiple medications or medication for heart failure
- Many congenital heart conditions that the health professional believes have or will result in further heart problems that need or cannot be treated

Hepatitis

- Hepatitis is a term used to describe inflammation (swelling) of the liver. It can occur as the result of a viral infection or because the liver is exposed to harmful substances such as alcohol.
- Some types of hepatitis will pass without causing permanent damage to the liver.
- Other types can persist for many years and cause scarring of the liver (cirrhosis). In the most serious cases, it may lead to loss of liver function (liver failure) or liver cancer. These types of long-lasting hepatitis are known as chronic hepatitis.

Hepatitis A is the most common type of viral hepatitis. It occurs in the UK, but is more common in countries where sanitation and sewage disposal are poor. Around 350 cases are reported each year in England, with most cases occurring in people who have travelled abroad.

It is usually a short-term infection and symptoms will pass within three months. There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A other than to relieve symptoms.

Hepatitis B virus. This is found in blood and body fluids, such as semen and vaginal fluids and can be spread during unprotected sex, by sharing needles to inject drugs, and from pregnant women to their babies.

Hepatitis B is uncommon in England and cases are largely confined to certain groups, such as drug users. It is much more common in other parts of the world, particularly East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

Most people infected with hepatitis B are able to fight off the virus and fully recover from the infection within a couple of months. However, a small minority of people develops a long-term infection. This is known as chronic hepatitis B. In some people, chronic hepatitis B can cause cirrhosis and liver cancer.

Chronic hepatitis B is treatable with antiviral medication.

The majority of people infected with hepatitis B are able to fight off the virus and fully recover from the infection within a couple of months and most people with hepatitis B have very little liver damage. A small minority of people go on to develop cirrhosis of the liver and, in some cases, liver cancer.

Hepatitis C is the most common type of viral hepatitis in England. It is estimated that around 215,000 people in the UK have chronic hepatitis C. The hepatitis C virus can be found in the blood and, to a much lesser extent, the saliva and semen or vaginal fluid of an infected person. It is particularly concentrated in the blood, so it is usually transmitted through blood-to-blood contact. In England, it's most commonly spread through sharing needles to inject drugs, which account for 9 out of 10 cases.

Around one in four people will fight off the infection and will be free of the virus. In the remaining three out of four people, the virus will stay in their body for many years. This is known as chronic hepatitis C. In some people, chronic hepatitis C can cause cirrhosis and liver failure. Chronic hepatitis C can be

treated by taking antiviral medications, although there can be unpleasant side effects.

Hepatitis C can be treated with antiviral medicines designed to stop the virus from multiplying inside the body and prevents liver damage.

Two widely used antiviral medications are interferon and ribavirin.

There are six different strains of hepatitis C, known as genotypes, and some genotypes respond better to treatment than others.

The most common genotypes of hepatitis C in England are genotypes 1 and 3.

With treatment, around half of people with genotype 1 will be cured, and around eight out of 10 people with genotype 3 will be cured. Depending on other risk factors, such as alcohol use, between 10% and 40% of people with untreated chronic hepatitis C will go on to develop scarring of the liver (cirrhosis), often more than twenty years after first catching the virus.

Q Has the applicant been diagnosed with Hepatitis and if so what form?

Q For Hepatitis B and C has their health professional concluded that they have made a full recovery?

Q Are they are receiving antiviral medication?

Q Have they developed a chronic condition with evidence of a diseased or failing liver or liver cancer?

Less likely to be granted a priority banding

- Hepatitis A with full recovery
- Hepatitis B or C where medical view is the applicant has fully recovered or where the condition is under control with or without anti viral medication.
- Hepatitis B carrier status only

More likely to be granted a priority banding

- Chronic condition B or C with medical evidence of diseased or failing liver.

HIV/AIDS

- HIV is a virus, which attacks the immune system, and weakens a person's ability to fight infections and disease. There is no cure for HIV, but there are treatments to enable most people with the virus to live a long and healthy life.
- AIDS is the final stage of HIV infection, when a person's body can no longer fight life-threatening infections. With early diagnosis and effective treatment, most people with HIV will not go on to develop AIDS. Although there is no cure for HIV, treatments are now very effective, enabling people with HIV to live long and healthy lives.

Treatment

Medication, known as antiretroviral, work by stopping the virus replicating in the body, allowing the immune system to repair itself and preventing further damage. These medicines come in the form of tablets, which need to be taken every day.

HIV is able to develop resistance to a single HIV drug very easily, but taking a combination of different drugs makes this much less likely. Most people with HIV take a combination of three antiretroviral and it is vital that the medications are taken every day as recommended by their doctor.

They will be encouraged to take regular exercise, eat a healthy diet, stop smoking and have yearly flu jabs and five-yearly pneumococcal vaccinations to minimise the risk of getting serious illnesses.

Without treatment, the immune system will become severely damaged and life-threatening illnesses such as cancer and severe infections can occur. This is known as late-stage HIV infection or AIDS.

If a person is diagnosed with HIV, they will have regular blood tests to monitor the progress of the HIV infection before starting treatment. This involves monitoring the amount of virus in blood (viral blood test) and the effect HIV is having on the immune system. This is determined by measuring the levels of CD4+ve lymphocyte cells in the blood. These cells are important for fighting infection. Treatment is usually recommended to begin when the CD4 cell count falls towards 350 or below, whether or not the person has any symptoms. In some people with other medical conditions, treatment may be started at higher CD4 cell counts. When to start treatment will be decided by the person's health professional. The aim of the treatment is to reduce the level of HIV in the blood, allow the immune system to repair itself and prevent any HIV-related illnesses.

HIV is treated with antiretroviral (ARVs), these work by stopping the virus replicating in the body, allowing the immune system to repair itself and preventing further damage. A combination of ARVs is used because HIV can quickly adapt and become resistant to one single ARV. Patients tend to take three or more types of ARV medication. This is known as combination therapy or antiretroviral therapy (ART).

Some antiretroviral drugs have been combined into one pill, known as a "fixed dose combination". This means that the most common treatments for people just diagnosed with HIV involve taking just one or two pills a day. Different combinations of ARVs work for different people so the medicine a person will take will be individual to them.

Once HIV treatment is started, they will probably need to take the medication for the rest of their life. For the treatment to be continuously effective, it will need to be taken regularly every day. Not taking ARVs regularly may cause the treatment to fail.

Q Has the applicant received a diagnosis of HIV or AIDS?

Q If HIV how is it being treated? E.g. monitored with blood tests only at this stage or treatment with anti viral drugs?

Q If anti viral drugs is this a combined one pill known as a "fixed dose combination"?

Less likely to be granted a priority banding

- HIV condition controlled by anti viral drugs on a single one pill fixed dose combination and where there are no secondary conditions or lifestyle problems such as drink or drugs and where the person is fully complying and able to comply with taking medication daily without evidence of lapses.
- Not on medication and the CD4 count is significantly higher than 350

More likely to be granted a priority banding

- Diagnosed with AIDS
- CD4 count lower than 350 and just beginning anti viral medication
- On anti viral medication and secondary complications or multiple symptoms or lifestyle issues such as substance misuse
- Risk of not complying with taking anti viral medication due to poor self-medication regime.
- Multiple drug regimes.

Hypertension (High Blood Pressure)

High blood pressure (hypertension) means that the person's blood pressure is continually higher than the recommended level. It rarely has noticeable symptoms. Around 30% of people in England have high blood pressure and if left untreated, high blood pressure increases the risk of a heart attack or stroke.

Q – Do you have high blood pressure and how is it been treated?

Q – Are there any secondary complications such as affecting the kidneys or has it led to a stroke or heart attack?

Less likely to be granted a priority banding

- The majority of cases unless combined with other problems
- Being treated with lifestyle advice and or blood pressure medication

More likely to be granted a priority banding

- Where it has resulted in secondary serious complications re heart, Kidneys, stroke.

Kidney Disease

- A diagnosed condition of kidney disease is termed chronic kidney disease (CKD). Although there is no cure for kidney disease, treatment can help relieve symptoms, slow or prevent progression of the condition, and reduce the risk of developing related problems.
- The treatment will depend on the stage of chronic kidney disease (CKD).

- Stages one, two and three CKD can usually be treated by the applicant's GP. Treatment involves making changes to lifestyle and, in some cases, taking medication to control blood pressure and lower blood cholesterol levels. This should help prevent further damage to the kidneys and circulation.
- Many people with kidney failure can continue with treatment using medicines and will have good-functioning kidneys for the rest of their lives.
- If the applicant has stage four or stage five CKD, they will have usually been referred to a specialist. In addition to the treatments above, they may also have been given several medications to control or prevent the symptoms of CKD.
- Kidney failure, also called established renal failure or ERF, occurs when the person has lost nearly all kidney function and the condition has become life threatening. About 1% of people with stage three CKD develop ERF at some point.
- If the person has kidney failure the choice will be whether to have treatment with dialysis (a means of artificially replacing some functions of the kidney), a kidney transplant.

Q Has the applicant been diagnosed with kidney disease?

Q If so what stage are they at? Stages 1-3 normally treated by their GP or stages 4 or 5 normally through a Kidney Specialist.

Q What treatment are they on? Lifestyle changes only? Medication to control blood pressure and lower blood cholesterol levels? Is this keeping the condition under control?

Q Is the applicant diagnosed as suffering from Kidney Failure (ERF) that does or will require dialysis or a transplant?

Q Has the applicant received a kidney transplant?

Less likely to be granted a priority banding

- Applicants diagnosed as stages 1-3 being treated by their GP. Treatment involves making changes to lifestyle and, in some cases, taking medication to control blood pressure and lower blood cholesterol levels and the treatment is working with the condition under control

More likely to be granted a priority banding

Stages 4 or 5 where there is a diagnosis of kidney failure which is likely to require dialysis, transplant or medication significantly more than that for lowering blood pressure or cholesterol.

- Applicants who have had a kidney transplant

Minor medical conditions

Where the person is suffering from a minor medical condition such as

- ✓ Migraine
- ✓ Hay fever
- ✓ Skin condition or allergies
- ✓ Urinary infection
- ✓ Haemorrhoids
- ✓ Irritable bowel syndrome
- ✓ Fungal infections

None of these are likely to indicate any condition of any severity or relevance to housing as none of the above medical issues, either singly or as a whole, impede a person's reasonable function unless there are secondary conditions or complications.

Stroke

- A stroke is a serious, life-threatening medical condition that occurs when the blood supply to part of the brain is cut off. This can lead to brain injury, disability and possibly death.
- There are two main causes of strokes:
 - Ischemic – where the blood supply is stopped due to a blood clot (this accounts for 85% of all cases)
 - Hemorrhagic – where a weakened blood vessel supplying the brain bursts
- There is also a related condition known as a transient ischemic attack (TIA), where the supply of blood to the brain is temporarily interrupted, causing a 'mini-stroke' often lasting between 30 minutes and several hours. TIAs should be treated seriously as they are often a warning sign that the person is at risk of having a full stroke in the near future.
- Treatment depends on the type of stroke the person has had including, which part of the brain was affected and what caused it. Most often, strokes are treated with medication. This generally includes medicines to prevent and remove blood clots, reduce blood pressure and reduce cholesterol levels. In some cases, surgery may be required to treat brain swelling and reduce the risk of further bleeding in cases of hemorrhagic strokes.

- Around one in every four people who has a stroke will die, and those who do survive are often left with long-term problems resulting from the injury to their brain. Some people need to have a long period of rehabilitation before they can recover their former independence, while many will never fully recover and will need support adjusting to living with the effects of their stroke.

Q Has the applicant had a stroke?

Q If so what type ischemic or hemorrhagic or transient ischemic attack (TIA or mini stroke).

Q What are the long-term problems caused by the stroke?

Less likely to be granted a priority banding

- Where the applicant claims they have suffered a stroke in the past but there is no diagnosis to that effect.
- Mini Stroke where the professional medical opinion is that the applicant has made a full recovery

More likely to be granted a priority banding

- The vast majority of cases where there has been a professional diagnosis.

Tuberculosis (TB)

Tuberculosis is a bacterial infection spread through inhaling tiny droplets from the coughs or sneezes of an infected person.

It is a serious condition, but can be cured with proper treatment.

TB mainly affects the lungs. However, it can affect any part of the body, including the glands, bones, and nervous system.

Typical symptoms of TB include:

- A persistent cough that lasts more than three weeks and usually brings up phlegm, which may be bloody
- Weight loss
- Night sweats
- High temperature (fever)
- Tiredness and fatigue
- Loss of appetite

Treatment for tuberculosis (TB) will usually involve a long course of antibiotics lasting several months.

While TB is a serious condition that can be fatal if left untreated, deaths are rare if treatment is completed.

For most people, a hospital admission during treatment is not necessary.

Pulmonary TB

If the applicant has been diagnosed with active pulmonary TB (TB that affects the lungs and causes symptoms), they will normally be given a six-month course of a combination of antibiotics. The usual course of treatment is:

- Two antibiotics (isoniazid and rifampicin) every day for six months

- Two additional antibiotics (pyrazinamide and ethambutol) every day for the first two months

It may be several weeks or months before they start to feel better. It is important that they continue taking their medicine exactly as prescribed and to complete the whole course of antibiotics, as this is the most effective method of ensuring the TB bacteria are killed. If they have stopped taking their antibiotics before completing the course, or take it intermittently the TB infection may become resistant to the antibiotics. This is potentially serious as it can be difficult to treat and will require a longer course of treatment.

If treatment is completed correctly, an applicant does not normally need any further checks by a TB specialist afterwards and it is rare for the illness to return.

Extra pulmonary TB

Extra pulmonary TB (TB that occurs outside the lungs) can be treated using the same combination of antibiotics as those used to treat pulmonary TB. However, medication needs to be taken over 12 months. If the applicant has TB in areas such as their brain, they may also be prescribed a corticosteroid such as prednisolone for several weeks to take at the same time as the antibiotics. This will help reduce any swelling in the affected areas.

As with pulmonary TB, it's important that they take their medicines exactly as prescribed and to finish the whole course.

Q Has the applicant been diagnosed with TB?

Q If so what form Pulmonary TB or Extra pulmonary TB?

Q Has the applicant undertaken the required course of antibiotic treatment and have they received a medical opinion that this has been successful and no further treatment is required?

Q If the applicant is in treatment at the point they apply do they find it difficult to take their medication every day?

Q If so have they worked with their treatment team to find a solution to take it at the treatment clinic, or somewhere else more convenient?

Q Is there a medical opinion that the TB has been treated late with significant damage to the lungs as a result?

Less likely to be granted a priority banding

- The applicant has undertaken the required course of antibiotic treatment and have they received a medical opinion that this has been successful and no further treatment is required

More likely to be granted a priority banding

- Newly diagnosed and undergoing antibiotic course
- Recently completed treatment and still unwell
- Recently hospitalized as a result of TB
- Recent TB outside of the lungs that is affected the spine, kidneys or brain
- Where the applicant has been treated late with significant damage to the lungs as a result.

