

Sevenoaks District Housing Allocations Policy

1 May 2019

SEVENOAKS DISTRICT HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY

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1. Introduction and Background

1.1. What is an Allocation?

Sevenoaks District Council is a local housing authority. This policy sets out who qualifies for social housing in the Sevenoaks District and how we will make this assessment. It covers how applicants can apply for and access social housing, the priority they will be given and the order in which any offer of social housing will be made.

Sevenoaks District Council no longer owns its own social housing, having carried out a transfer of its housing stock to West Kent Housing Association in 1989. However, the District Council has set up an independent affordable housing company (Quercus Housing) and will increasingly own and manage more new affordable housing in the future. This Allocation Policy therefore applies to all social housing properties to which we have rights of nomination (whether by way of a legally enforceable arrangement or not).

Prior to 2 January 2020, West Kent Housing was the appointed 'Managing Agent' for the Sevenoaks District Housing Register (SDHR) and administered the Sevenoaks District Housing Register and the Kent Home Choice Based Lettings (CBL) scheme on behalf of this Council. However, as of 2 January 2020, a change in arrangements has taken place and this function is now fully undertaken by the Council. The Council's Housing Register Team is responsible for assessing new applications and will assess whether an applicant qualifies for the Housing Register using this policy to assess housing needs and will award any priority Band to an application if the criteria set out in this policy are met.

1.2. Legal Framework

This Council, as a local housing authority, has a legal duty to develop and publish a Housing Allocations Policy. The legal requirements for this duty, including the Housing Act 1996 Part VI (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002), Localism Act 2011, the Equalities Act 2010 and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, have been considered when developing this Policy. This Policy will be reviewed on a regular basis and updated if there are any changes to relevant legislation or operational processes. Minor changes or amendments can be made at any time to update the Policy and approved by the Council's Portfolio Holder responsible for Housing.

The Government's code of guidance has also been considered when drafting this Policy including:

- a) Allocation of Accommodation: Guidance for Local Housing Authorities in England (2012, DCLG/MHCLG) "the Code";
- b) Providing social housing for local people: Statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England (DCLG/MHCLG, December 2013) "Supplementary Code".

The following statutory regulations have also been considered when developing this Policy:

- a) Allocation of Housing (Procedure) Regulations 1997, SI 1997/483;

- b) Allocation of Housing (England) Regulations 2002, SI 2002/3264;
- c) Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (England) Regulations 2006, SI 2006/1294;
- d) Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012, SI 2012/1869;
- e) Housing Act 1996 (Additional Preference for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012, SI 2012/2989;
- f) The Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Right to Move) (England) Regulations 2015;

To ensure this Policy meets all data protection requirements, it is regularly monitored and reviewed. This Council is committed to ensuring that this policy is non-discriminatory and that customers can access the service taking account of any vulnerability or other specific housing needs. This includes reasonable preference categories (as defined in Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996) and protected characteristics (as defined in the Equality Act 2010), as well as being provided with a Statement of Choice through the Kent Homechoice System (www.kenthomechoice.org.uk) .

2. Eligibility to join the Housing Register

2.1. Who can join the Sevenoaks District Housing Register (SDHR)

Subject to the exclusions outlined in section 5 below, anyone living in the United Kingdom who is over the age of 16 can apply to join the housing register if they:

- a) have a genuine reason for seeking affordable housing in Sevenoaks District;
- b) have a local connection to the Sevenoaks District (see section 3.1 for full details);
- c) are applying for a social housing property to use as their only or principal residence; and
- d) are capable of maintaining a tenancy.

Local housing authorities may only allocate accommodation to people who are defined as ‘qualifying persons’ under the Housing Act 1996. The Government has granted all housing authorities, including this Council, the power to decide the criteria of people who are, or are not, classed a qualifying person for the register. It should be noted that individual Housing Providers might have their own letting and eligibility rules.

Sevenoaks District Council is part of the Kent Homechoice Partnership that advertises vacant properties in this District using an online Choice Based Lettings Scheme. Some exceptional circumstances, as outlined in this Policy, may mean that properties are advertised or allocated in partnership with the relevant housing provider.

Once an applicant has been accepted onto the Housing Register, a decision will be made as to the size of property they are eligible to bid for under the Kent Homechoice Lettings Scheme using the National Bedroom Standard.

All applications to the register should be made by completing an on-line application available at <http://www.kenthomechoice.org.uk/register.aspx>.

Those without access to the internet should contact The Housing Register Team at Sevenoaks District Council, Council Offices, Argyle Road, Sevenoaks TN13 1HG for assistance.

2.2. 16 and 17 year olds and Care Leavers

Applicants aged 16 and 17 can join the Housing Register. If they are successfully offered a property, the tenancy will be held in trust until they reach the age of 18. There is no legal necessity for a guarantor for this age group, but a guarantor (such as a parent, legal guardian, social worker or relative) would be beneficial to ensure the young person is able to successfully manage being a tenant. If a 16 or 17 year old is successful for a tenancy, they will be referred to Kent County Council to assess if they require any additional support, particular at the outset of the tenancy. Standard affordability criteria will apply.

Care leavers and 16/17 year olds applying to join the Housing Register will be considered in accordance with the relevant Kent Housing Group protocols in place between Kent County Council and Kent district and borough councils.

3. Qualifying to join the Register

Only those who:

- Can demonstrate a local connection to the District through current or past residency, employment, family associations or other special circumstances and;
- Have been assessed as having an identified housing need, and;
- Are not currently suitably housed are eligible to apply for inclusion on the Sevenoaks District Housing Register, full details on the qualifying criteria and definitions are set out below.

Suitability/adequacy of current home

Only those who are not currently suitably/adequately housed will be eligible to apply to join the Housing Register. An applicant will be considered to be suitably/adequately housed if all the following apply:

- The number of bedrooms in the home is sufficient for the household, in accordance with the Bedroom Standard (see paragraph 7.4);¹
- The household spends 35% or less of their gross household income (including any benefits other than those excluded benefits listed in paragraph 3.3) on the rental costs of their home;
- The applicant and their household are able to reside together (except as set out in paragraph 6.6);
- The property is fully accessible to all members of the household;
- The property is located within the Sevenoaks District

If an applicant's circumstances means that any one of the elements listed above are missing, the applicant will not be considered to be suitably/adequately housed as part of this Policy.

3.1. Local Connection

¹ In accordance with the 'Bedroom Standard' formulas in Part 10 of the Housing Act 1985 and the Housing Benefit Regulations

An applicant can only join the Housing Register if they have a local connection to the Sevenoaks District and are assessed as having a housing need, as defined by this Policy.

There are a number of defined exceptions to the local connection qualification rules. Full details can be found below.

To demonstrate a local connection to the District, applicants must meet at least one of the following criteria:

- a) Have lived permanently in Sevenoaks District for at least 6 months during the previous 12 months, or 3 years in total out of the last 5 years.
- b) Be in paid full or part time employment in Sevenoaks District, for a minimum of 16 hours per week. See section 3.2 below for further details. This relates to adults of a working age, for details relating to older people see sections 3.4, 4.2 and 6.7.
- c) Have close family (typically but not exclusively relating to mother, father, brother, sister, son or daughter) that has lived in Sevenoaks District for a minimum of the last 5 years and the circumstances are that they need to give or receive essential care and/or support for the foreseeable future. It is the responsibility of the applicant to provide documentary evidence to show the level of required support to demonstrate it is significant and ongoing and is not short term or low level (e.g. occasional or infrequent help with a task). This would be assessed on a case-by-case basis. This may include older people needing to move to the District to be closer to family and/or social networks; this would also be considered and assessed on a case-by-case basis.
- d) Applicants to whom the Council has accepted a full homelessness duty under section 193 (2) of the Housing Act 1996.
- e) A local connection is automatically applied for any serving or ex armed forces personnel or War Widows/Widowers, see section 4.1 below for full details on the criteria.
- f) A local connection is automatically applied for applicants fleeing domestic abuse or violence. Documentary evidence may be required to support the application. See section 4.3 below for full details.

For the purposes of determining a local connection, the Council will not consider a holiday let, including bed and breakfast accommodation booked for holiday purposes, as a local connection.

There may be times when it is not appropriate to apply the local connection provision set out within this Policy. In these circumstances, the Council can exercise discretion not to apply the local connection provisions in exceptional circumstances. Each case will be assessed on its merits.

For properties on Rural Exceptions Sites, different local connection criteria will apply. See Section 3.6 for full details.

3.2. Employment in Sevenoaks District

Working age applicants will be considered to have employment in the District and therefore may meet the local connection criteria if they are:

- a) In paid full or part time permanent employment for 16 hours or more per week and their actual working location is within Sevenoaks District; or
- b) Working in Sevenoaks District on a temporary or zero-hour employment contract that has been in place for at least 6 months and can demonstrate they have worked at least 16 hours per week since starting the employment contract;
- c) Self-employed applicants are required to demonstrate that their permanent base of operations is within the Sevenoaks District, even if their work requires them from time to time to work outside of Sevenoaks District;
- d) The employment must be the actual place of work in Sevenoaks District and not employment based on a head office or regional office situated in the District but from which they do not work. For those with a caseload or have a roving remit (e.g. district nurses, social workers, police officers, etc) the applicant will need to obtain written confirmation from their employer that a substantial (a minimum of 64 hours per month) amount of their day-to-day duty falls within the District;
- e) Where an applicant can provide evidence that they are unable to engage in paid work, a community contribution including substantial voluntary work, employment related training and registered foster carers. See the criteria below for full details.
- f) Priority will also be given to applicants who meet the ‘Local Essential Worker’ criteria, as set out in the Sevenoaks District Local Plan².

To qualify for the Register through an employment connection, at least one adult member of the household must be employed at the point of application and at the point of nomination for a property, in accordance with validation process of the relevant housing provider. The applicant must provide evidence that a permanent job offer has been accepted and meets the above criteria. It will be the applicant’s responsibility to provide documentary evidence to satisfy this Council that the work or job offer is genuine. Appropriate evidence could include:

- a contract of employment
- wage/salary slips or bank statements covering the last three months;
- Tax and benefits information - e.g. proof that the applicant is in receipt of working tax credit (if eligible).

Where the employment status of an applicant does not meet the criteria in 3.2 a) to d) above, a decision on local connection will be made by the Council.

This criterion only relates to adults of a working age, for further details relating to older people see sections 3.4, 4.2 and 6.7.

For details, relating to employment can be found under the ‘Right to Move’ section of this Policy (Section 3.5).

Community Contribution

Where an applicant can provide evidence that they are unable to engage in paid work, a community contribution including substantial voluntary work, employment related training and registered foster carers. This contribution must be within the District and would be considered on a case-by-case basis.

² For full details of the criteria and definitions, see the Council’s Local Plan at <https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/localplan>

To qualify for the Register through a community contribution, at least one member of the household must meet the following criteria:

- Carry out volunteering or community activities for at least six months; and
- For a minimum of 64 hours per month, up to the time of application; and
- For at least six months up to when a property is offered.
- Volunteering must be with a recognised not-for-profit organisation, charity or faith-based community group/organisation.
- Provide required evidence that the contribution meets this criteria.
- Be able to provide at least one reference to confirm the circumstances of the volunteering/community activity and to determine the future longevity of this activity.

3.3. Income and Asset Thresholds

Maximum income limits have been set as part of this Policy and anyone above these limits will not qualify to access the Housing Register. This is to ensure that social housing is allocated to those in the greatest need due to their housing priority and affordability.

The Council has the authority to decide who will or will not qualify to join the Register as part of its housing duties³, this includes whether an applicant has financial resources available to meet their needs. An applicant may not be deemed as a 'Qualifying Person' if:

- The household income exceeds the income limited (benefits are included with the exception as set out below);
- Have the means to purchase property on the open market or via shared ownership.
- Have the means to privately rent suitable accommodation for a minimum of one years.

The income and saving/asset limits, together with the exceptions, are set out in this Policy below.

Due to the pressure on social housing in this District, those with sufficient assets and/or income will not be allowed to access the Housing Register as they can pursue other housing options. If an applicant is unsure if they qualify because of their household income and asset thresholds, they should contact the Council's Housing Register Team for further advice. If they are above the thresholds and unable to access the Register, Housing Advice Team at Sevenoaks District Council can assist with other available housing options. The Housing Advice Team can be contacted on 01732 227000.

It is the applicant's responsibility to provide all financial information and supporting evidence relating to all members of the household and to update the Council of any changes from the original housing application immediately. Any person who knowingly withholds or falsifying any financial information, on their housing application about their total household finances, may be guilty of committing a criminal offence and could face a conviction or fine if prosecuted.

³ In accordance with Section s.160ZA (6)(a) Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Localism Act 2011) which allows the authority to decide who will be or will not be a qualifying person and section 166A (5)(a) of the Housing Act 1996

This will also result in a disqualification or suspension from the Housing Register, withdrawal of a tenancy offer or further legal action. See Section 6.14 for full details.

3.3.1. Income Limit Summary

A household cannot qualify if they have a total gross household income that exceeds that set out below. Income that is assessed will include both gross earned income and income from benefits (excluding disability related benefits). This is the total combined income across all members of the household and is based on the household size and bedroom need⁴:-

Household size	Maximum Income Limit (per annum)
1 bedroom need	£30,000
2 or more bedroom need	£40,000

This gross income of all household members will determine eligibility and will include:

- Gross wages or income;
- Any regular cash deposits from others;
- All Benefits and Allowances received by all members of the households (including those that are means tested but excluding disability related benefits). Exclusions from this calculation are listed below.

Financial payments excluded and therefore not included within this calculation are:

- Guardians or Fostering Allowance;
- Disability Living Allowance (DLA);
- Attendance Allowance (AA);
- Personal Independence Payment (PIP);
- Armed Forces war pensioners' mobility supplement (AFIP);
- Armed Forces Independence Payments;

These are all payments designed to help people with the extra costs they have to incur because of a disability or some other specific living arrangement.

Therefore, other payments of this nature may also be excluded and considered on the evidence provided by the applicant. It is the responsibility of the applicant to provide the relevant evidence and documents to enable the income calculation to be undertaken.

3.3.2. Capital Assets and Savings Limits

In addition to the income limits above, applicants applying for general needs properties cannot have capital assets or savings that exceed £16,000 in total across all members of the household (for all general needs household sizes). This figure is in line with the current housing benefit savings limit. Assets include equity in any home owned.

⁴ In accordance with the 'Bedroom Standard' formulas in Part 10 of the Housing Act 1985 and the Housing Benefit Regulations

Applicants applying for housing that is designated specifically for those aged 55+ (including sheltered, supported housing and extra care schemes) may have savings and/or assets up to the value of £350,000.

3.3.3. Limited Exceptions - Income and Asset Thresholds

Fostering/adopting - Applicants who are approved foster carers or a prospective adoptive parent with appropriate supporting documentation, who do not meet the financial limits, but who can clearly demonstrate that they are not able to access the open housing market, may be considered for inclusion on the register. A full financial assessment will be undertaken and the application may be considered by the Social and Welfare Panel (see Appendix 4 for Social and Welfare Panel details). Confirmation in writing will be requested from the relevant County Council or adoption agency.

Help to Buy (Low Cost Ownership Schemes (LCHO)) - This restriction does not prevent applicants being considered for any Help to Buy schemes as set out in section 5.3.2 (e.g. Shared Ownership and Intermediate Rentals). The rules for being accepted onto the Help to Buy Register are different and are applied on a scheme by scheme basis. These rules also apply for Rural Exceptions Site Homes, see Section 3.6 for full details.

If the gross annual household income exceeds the Income and Asset limits in this Policy, but is £80,000 or less (the current government set 'Help to Buy limit), the applicant may apply to Register under 'Help to Buy', see <https://helptobuyagent3.org.uk/>, to access Help to Buy products, i.e. shared ownership and intermediate rental homes. The rules for being accepted onto the Help to Buy Register are different from those applying to this Register. Those with a gross annual household income of over £80,000 will not be eligible to access any affordable housing options through Help to Buy or the Kent Homechoice System. The gross income amount is subject to change in line with the government's 'Help to Buy' limits.

The Help to Buy gross annual household income limit also applies to Rural Exceptions Site Homes, regardless of tenure, see Section 3.6 for full details.

Special Circumstances - The Council and/or the housing provider may choose not to apply these criteria where the applicant or a member of their household, despite having the financial means to resolve their housing situation, cannot resolve the situation in a reasonable period of time and their housing needs are so urgent and exceptional as to require social housing.

Vulnerability - Vulnerable clients whose income exceeds the financial limits but who have documentary evidence to show that they cannot access private rented accommodation or LCHO may be assessed by the Social and Welfare Panel to be able to join the Housing Register.

3.4. Older People's properties

Anyone who is over the age of 55 and meets the qualification to join the Housing Register can apply for sheltered or supported housing (specifically for this age group) if they:

- are either aged 55 or over or;
- can provide evidence that their projected income is anticipated to fall below the current income limit at the time of retirement.

The size of the housing specifically designed for over 55's (including sheltered or Extra Care), may include one bedroom more than they require e.g. enabling the applicant to bid on two bedroom sheltered housing even if they only have a one bedroom need. Any offer is subject to an affordability assessment to ensure ongoing rental costs can be met.

The support and housing needs of an applicant will be assessed by the sheltered housing team of the relevant housing association. Where it is identified that an applicant is bidding on accommodation that is not suitable for their needs, an assessment will be made to support them to identify a suitable home. Individual housing associations may vary this age criteria.

Applicants for extra care housing schemes in the District will be assessed by a Joint Allocations Panel who will consider the applicant's care, support, social and housing needs. The Panel will include representatives from Sevenoaks District Council, Kent County Council, housing association and care provider. On occasions, extra care properties may be advertised and allocated outside the Choice Based Lettings scheme.

If required, the Council will support the applicant to apply and bid on properties advertised via the Choice Based Lettings scheme. Where applicants are a current tenant of a housing association, this support should be provided by their existing landlord.

3.5. Right to Move Applicants

The Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Right to Move) (England) Regulations 2015 (SI 2015/ 967) and corresponding statutory guidance, allow existing social housing tenants to be allocated social housing across local authority boundaries within England for work related reasons. This may include a need to move to be closer for work or to take up a job offer.

The onus is on the applicant to provide the information needed to evidence the 'Right to Move' to alleviate hardship. In determining hardship, this Council will take into account:

- a) Distance and/or time taken to travel between work and home;
- b) The availability and affordability of transport, taking into consideration the level of the applicant's earnings;
- c) The nature of the work and whether similar opportunities are available closer to home;
- d) Other personal factors, such as medical conditions and child care, which would be affected if the tenant could not move;
- e) The length and type of the work contract;
- f) Whether failure to move would result in the loss of an opportunity to improve the applicant's employment circumstances or prospects, for example, by taking up a better job, a promotion, or an apprenticeship.

Priority will be given to Local Essential Workers, as defined in the Sevenoaks District Local Plan (www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/localplan). These factors will be taken into account when considering each applicant on a case-by-case basis. It will be up to the applicant to provide evidence to support their application. Work that is short term and voluntary (unpaid) is not included. The work should be for at least 16 hours per week and for at least the minimum wage, or an apprenticeship, and expected to last for at least a year.

3.6. Rural Exception Site Homes and Parish Connection

Some properties or developments have a specific local connection requirement in their planning or funding conditions, such as rural exceptions sites and those developed under planning agreements. In these cases, there will be restrictions on who can bid for the home and this will be made clear in the advert for the vacant property. This type of qualifying criteria is usually agreed as part of planning or funding conditions (known as a Section 106 Agreement). In these circumstances, local connection criteria will usually mean connection to a village or parish rather than the district as a whole.

Applicants who are only interested in Rural Exceptions Sites homes must clearly state this on their Housing Register application form. Such applicants will not be considered for any social housing properties advertised through the Housing Register for Sevenoaks District. Income limits and restrictions for Rural Exceptions Site Homes will comply with the 'Help to Buy' limits, as set out in Section 5.3.2, i.e. an annual gross household income of £80,000 or less.

The District Council's Local Plan (Policy SP4) establishes the local connection criteria for Rural Exceptions Site homes⁵. This criterion is then set out in the planning permission (Section 106 agreement) applying to each Rural Exceptions Site home. These are available from the District Council's Housing Policy team on 01732 227000 or email: housing.policy@sevenoaks.gov.uk.

An applicant can demonstrate a local connection for a home on a Rural Exceptions Site if they:

- Live in the Parish and have done so continuously for the last three years to date; or
- Have lived in the Parish for at least five out of the last ten years to date; or
- Have been a member of a household currently living in the Parish and have close family resident in the Parish for a minimum of 10 years continuously; or
- Are employed full time in the Parish on a permanent basis or those who will be taking up such employment and whose main place of work is within the Parish; or
- Are providing an important service in the Parish requiring them to live locally.

The Section 106 agreement will set out which is the primary Parish (i.e. normally, this is where the homes are located). Applicants from the primary Parish will have priority over all other applicants on the Housing Register who have made a bid for the vacant home. All applicants from the primary Parish will then be considered

⁵ For full details of the criteria and definitions, see the Council's SP4 Policy within the Local Plan at <https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/localplan>

in order of the Banding Criteria. The current Policy is that the home will be allocated to the applicant with a local connection to the primary Parish, who has the highest Banding and earliest date of registration under the Housing Register.

If no applications are received from those with a local connection to the primary Parish, applications will then be considered from those with a local connection to a Neighbouring Parish (these are specified in the Section 106 Agreement). All such applicants will be considered in the same way as described above.

If no applications are received from those with a local connection to the primary Parish or Neighbouring Parishes, the Council may consider:

- Applications from all other applicants from the Housing Register who have made a bid for the vacant home;
- Use other means of identifying a suitable application for the property, as there are no interested, relevant or suitable Register applicants;
- Offering a direct let from a Housing Provider's waiting list or advertising the properties using other methods.

The District Council's Local Plan is being updated and a new Plan is due to be adopted in 2020. Priority will still be given to those with a local connection to the primary Parish. However, how applications are then considered may change and this Policy will be updated to reflect any changes within the new Local Plan.

All applicants for Rural Exceptions Site homes will need to provide proof of their local connection to the Parish/Neighbouring Parish. Very strict turnaround times apply when homes become vacant. Applicants must therefore be ready to provide proof of their local connection when asked to do so by the housing association landlord within 3 working days of a request being made. Failure to do so may result in an application being rejected or overlooked. Due to the very strict turnaround times, it is therefore recommended all correspondence and proof of connection is done via email.

3.7. Alternative Affordable Housing Options

Often renting privately can be a quicker route to accessing rental properties that are affordable, particularly as the demand for social housing far outweighs the supply. The Council may offer applicants a property in the private rented sector, subject to eligibility and affordability. These offers are subject to specific regulations put in place by the Council to protect the health and safety of tenants. Other affordable housing solutions are subject to availability and where applicants can be matched to available affordable and suitable homes, for a longer term or an interim period.

As part of the Council's housing advice and support duties, Register applicants may be contacted with alternative housing options suitable to their needs, such as low cost home ownership options (Help to Buy) and private sector renting, as opportunities arise. This may include help to access a private rented property, for a minimum of six months, with a tenancy or lease arrangement with a private landlord or alternative housing provider.

The Council may be able to assist an applicant with their upfront financial costs, such as a deposit or required rent in advance, subject to eligibility and affordability assessments. Further details about these Schemes are available at www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/housing. From time-to-time the Council may contact Register applicants to offer them further affordable housing opportunities including affordable and private rental properties, rural exception properties and shared ownership, which is often a quick route to finding the right home.

4. Exemption to the local connection rules

4.1. Armed Forces Personnel

One exception to the District's local connection criteria is Armed Forces Personnel⁶ or War Widows/Widowers meeting the criteria below. The following people are able to apply to the Housing Register in this District regardless of whether or not they meet the District local connection criteria. This exception is set by housing legislation⁷ and has not been decided locally. This includes:

- Those who are currently serving in the regular forces or who were serving in the regular forces at any time in the 5 years proceeding their application to the Housing Register;
- Bereaved spouses or civil partners of those serving in the regular forces where (i) the bereaved spouse or civil partner has recently ceased to be, or will cease to be, entitled to reside in Service Family Accommodation following the death of their service spouse or civil partner, and (ii) the death was wholly or partly connected to their service;
- Serving or former members of the Reserve Forces who need to live in the District because of a serious injury, illness, medical condition or disability that is wholly or partly connected to their service.

4.2. Over 55's wishing to downsize

If an applicant is aged over 55 and currently living in Sevenoaks District wishes to downsize, they may be considered for sheltered or supported housing (specifically designated for this age group) even if they do not meet the local connection rules. This will apply to all applicants over 55, including homeowners and tenants. The income and asset limits for over 55's will apply, see Section 3.3.2 for full details. This would ensure that their required support and housing needs are met and to release another property in this District.

Households applying for extra care housing will be subject to a Joint Allocations Panel when allocating properties. See section 3.4 above for full details relating to properties for older people.

4.3. Threats of violence and/or domestic abuse

Applicants who are victims of domestic abuse, at risk of threats of domestic abuse/violence or those who escaping domestic abuse, may be exempt from requiring a local connection. The Council will support an applicant who is homeless and require urgent re-housing as a result of violence or threats of

⁶ as defined by S.374 of the Armed Forces Act 2006

⁷ The Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012 (SI 2012/1879)

violence. This includes intimidated witnesses and those escaping serious anti-social behaviour or domestic violence or abuse.

A person has a homelessness priority need if they are vulnerable as a result of having to leave accommodation because of violence from another person, or threats of violence from another person that are likely to be carried out. An assessment of this risk will be carried out as part of any homelessness approach made to the Council, under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 assessment of priority need.

In cases involving violence, the safety of the applicant and ensuring confidentiality is the paramount concern. Advice and guidance on local services including the Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC), specialist refuges and support services will be available from the Council's Housing Advice Service.

4.4. Exceptions process

Sevenoaks District Council retains the authority to exercise its discretion when making decisions with regard to someone being accepted or banded awarded on the Housing Register. This will be related to 'exceptional circumstances' which is defined as an additional social and/or welfare need above the housing need which has been evidenced by the Housing Officer, support or partner agency. See Appendix 4 for further details regarding social and welfare needs.

5. Exclusions - Non-qualification rules

5.1. Housing Register exclusions

Some people are excluded from the Housing Register either due to government regulations or because the Council has decided to exclude them. This could be because they are not considered suitable to be tenants (because of their previous recorded conduct) or because the Council has to prioritise the use of housing stock.

We cannot nominate someone for housing if they are ineligible for an allocation of housing accommodation by being subject to immigration control or a person from abroad who is ineligible⁸. See section 5.2 below for further information.

If it is considered that an applicant is not eligible to apply for the Housing Register, the Council will inform them in writing of this decision, stating the grounds for the decision, within the Notice of Determination letter. This letter will include how the applicant can request a review of this decision

5.2. People who WILL be excluded from joining the housing register

Current legislation states or allows that the following are ineligible to join the Housing Register and they **will be excluded**:

5.2.1. Immigration Status

⁸ Housing Act 1996, s.160ZA (1), (2) and (4) and Regulations 3 and 4 Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (England) Regulations 2006, SI 2006/1294

- People from abroad subject to immigration control or regulations, or people prescribed as ‘ineligible’ by Regulations made by the Secretary of State.
- A person from abroad who is subject to immigration control within the meaning of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 will be ineligible, unless they are of a class of persons prescribed by the Secretary of State who are subject to immigration control but are eligible for an allocation.
- Certain persons from abroad, who are not subject to immigration control, and fail the habitually resident test in the Common Travel Area (as defined in the Allocation of Accommodation Code of Guidance for local housing authorities).
- Any application identified as falling under the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 will be assessed in accordance with the Act.

The Council reserves the right to seek independent advice and assistance to resolve the issue of eligibility. This may mean contacting the Home Office Immigration and Nationality Directorate.

5.2.2. No Local Connection

- Details of local connections are set out in section 3.1.
- Applicants who do not have a local connection with the District will be excluded from the Sevenoaks District Housing Register. They may still be able to access housing advice and support through the Council’s Housing Advice Service. An exception to this is Armed Forces Personnel or War Widows/Widowers meeting the criteria set out in section 4.1 and applicants fleeing domestic abuse or violence, as set out in section 4.3.
- Anyone who is aged over 55 and living in the District already, who wishes to downsize to a smaller property may apply to the Register, even if they do not meet the local connection rules. For example, they have lived in the District less than six months. However, they will only be considered for accommodation specifically designated for this age group and the financial limit rules will apply. This is to assist with freeing up family sized properties in the District.
- Applicants with a local parish connection to a Rural Exceptions Site property, who do not meet the District local connection criteria, will only be eligible to place bids on properties where they meet the criteria and parish connection, as set out in the site specific Section 106 Agreement. Such applicants will not be considered for general properties advertised within the District (see section 3.6 for full details on exception sites).

5.3. People who MAY be excluded from joining the housing register

5.3.1. Home owners

If an applicant (including anyone in the household covered by the application) owns a property, they are not eligible to join the Register (this includes properties owned and rented out to other persons and or properties in other countries). The exemption is **unless** the applicant can demonstrate there are exceptional financial and personal circumstances that prevent them from living in this accommodation or securing other suitable accommodation to meet a housing need. For example: they have insufficient resources to pursue Help to Buy (low cost home ownership) and/or a medical condition or disability, or other vulnerability including risk of

homelessness due to mortgage arrears following illness or job loss). This will be assessed by the Council on a case-by-case basis.

Owner occupiers aged 55 and over whose savings and assets fall within the limits (set out in section 3.3), and they meet the local connection criteria, can apply to the Register, but will only be considered for housing designated for this age group (this includes sheltered or extra care housing).

5.3.2. Help to Buy Shared Ownership

All applicants are required to provide details of their income and assets. If applicants exceed the financial limits for the Register but have sufficient funds to access home ownership options, then the housing advice service can advise accordingly. Those with an income that exceeds the current government 'Help to Buy' limit of £80,000 will not be able to register for LCHO and will not be eligible for any form of affordable housing. This income limit will also apply to applicants for all Rural Exception Site Homes in the District, irrespective of tenure.

Help to Buy is a range of home ownership products designed to assist people who cannot afford to buy a property on the open market.

Local Help to Buy Agents are appointed by the Government to administer the schemes to support how to access these low cost home ownership (LCHO) options. Other options available may include Help to Buy, shared ownership, Intermediate Rents, Local Essential Worker properties and shared equity. For details of the Help to Buy Agent, to register under the Help to Buy and to see available properties, visit <https://helptobuyagent3.org.uk/>

5.3.3. Financial limits

Applicants will be required to provide proof of income and assets for all members of the proposed household over the age of 16. Savings and financial assets will be assessed on a case-by-case basis to determine whether or not the applicant is able to secure suitable housing.

Applicants with a household income above the financial limits, as outlined in Section 3.3 of this Policy, will not qualify to be included on the Housing Register. Applications who are assessed as having savings and/or financial assets (including capital), which are sufficient to allow them to meet their housing needs, will not qualify for the Housing Register.

5.3.4. Unacceptable Behaviour

This will apply where the applicant (including any member of the current or prospective household) has a history of serious unacceptable behaviour or former rent arrears, which in our view makes the applicant unsuitable to be a tenant⁹.

We will determine whether the behaviour and/or former or current rent arrears means that they cannot qualify for the Register. We will not be restricted to applying a test of whether the behaviour would entitle the landlord to a Possession Order (if the applicant were a tenant).

⁹ In accordance with s160ZA (8) of the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002

Whether the behaviour and/or former or current rent arrears means that the applicant cannot qualify for the Register will be decided by a housing officer at the Council. A right to have a review will then be carried out by a senior officer at Sevenoaks District Council.

Reasons for non-qualification, including but are not limited to anti-social behaviour, where:

- i. The Applicant, or any member of the household, has assaulted or been unnecessarily aggressive to a member of staff. This may include an officer employed by Sevenoaks District Council, housing association or partner agency involved in the application. This exclusion may include where an injunction is being sought or has already been obtained. This type of behaviour may include, but not limited to: violence; verbal abuse; threats of violence or other aggressive behaviour or;
- ii. Nuisance or annoyance to neighbours, or any other persons, which includes anti-social behaviour, forms of abuse, discrimination and harassment;
- iii. The Applicant, or any member of the household, have knowingly given false or misleading information or withheld information that has been reasonably requested;
- iv. The Applicant has rent arrears and a recoverable housing related debt (except where this has been verified by the Council as being through no fault of their own). This includes failing to uphold repayments as part of a housing debt repayment plan;
- v. The Applicant has been non-compliant with a current or former tenancy agreement. This may include obtaining a tenancy by deception, allowing the condition of a property to deteriorate, using the property for illegal, criminal or immoral behaviour, including aiding and/or abetting these activities.

As rent arrears or recoverable housing-related debt may prevent the applicant from being considered for an allocation of a property, it is important that the applicant demonstrates they are taking reasonable steps to address the debts. This would be assessed based on evidence provided by the applicant and considered on a case-by-case basis.

For further advice and support can be provided by the Housing Advice Service at Sevenoaks District Council on 01732 227000 or email housing@sevenoaks.gov.uk For independent advice and support, contact a local Citizens Advice service.

Applicants who are excluded will be informed in writing and will be advised of their statutory right to request a review of this decision; see section 9.1 for further details of the review process.

For the applicant to be able to re-apply for the Register at a later date, it is important that they can demonstrate that they have taken reasonable steps to address the issues within the original exclusion.

6. How to Apply for Social Housing

6.1. How to join the Housing Register

Any applicant interested in joining the Register can undertake the pre-assessment process on the Kent Homechoice website at www.kenthomechoice.org.uk to find out whether they qualify. If an applicant qualifies to join the Register, they must apply through the Kent Homechoice website by completing the online application form, this is a choice based lettings scheme, and it is used all across Kent. They must include on the application all members of the household, i.e. people who live with them, or would reasonably be expected to live with them.

Applicants who are verified as meeting the eligibility and qualification rules will be registered on Kent Homechoice. It is the applicants' responsibility to ensure that the information provided on the application form is correct and all the required supporting documents must be provided within 28 days of making the application or within an appropriately agreed timescale. See Appendix 3 for details of the required documents. The applicant will then receive a registration letter and a Welcome Pack that contains a user guide. The letter will also state the Band according to the housing needs, the size of property they are eligible for and a unique Kent Homechoice reference number. This letter may be sent electronically to the applicant's email address on the Register application.

Once registered, the applicant can bid on advertised social housing properties in the area of their choice within Sevenoaks District.

The Council is able to set up an auto-bid process on behalf of the applicant if required, and this can be discussed directly with the Council. This enables bids to be made automatically in the areas specified by the applicant.

Failure to bid on suitable and reasonable properties within the applicants chosen and preferred areas within a 12 months' period may result in the applicant being removed from the Housing Register; see section 10.2 for further details.

Any applicants without access to the internet can contact the Housing Register Team, Sevenoaks District Council, Council Offices, Argyle Road, Sevenoaks, Kent, TN13 1HG, or call 01732 227000 for assistance with applying and bidding on the Register.

6.2. Assessing Applications

In order to assess the applicant's housing need, a housing officer will use a needs based Banding System scheme, Banding A to D. The full details of the Banding system are set out in Section 7.2 and Appendix 2 of this policy.

The Bands are awarded to reflect the applicant's housing need, based on the information provided on the application and supporting documents. The housing needs reflected in the highest Band (A) indicates the greatest need for housing. Usually an application may be linked to several factors across different priority bands; the highest factor that applies to applicant's circumstances will determine which Band they are placed in. For example, an applicant with an emergency medical condition will go into Band A, even if their other circumstances are linked to a lower band.

It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that all the required information and supporting documents are provided to the Council within 28 days from the

original application date, to complete the application. Incomplete applications will not be made active until such time when all information has been received to complete an assessment. If the application is incomplete, it will be cancelled after a period of 28 days from the date the information was requested. An applicant may contact the Council to ask for a pre-agreed reasonable extension to the 28 days, where documents will not be available to them within this period, for reasons above and beyond their control.

A cancellation of this nature does not prevent the applicant from making another application at a later date. In these cases, the effective date of registration will not be backdated to the earlier application date.

If the applicant is a current or previous tenant, a reference may be requested from the current or previous landlord. If applicable, references may also be requested from a recent landlord. Where a landlord does not reply, a reminder will be sent and, if still not forthcoming, any other information or records available will be checked to try to determine whether there have been any concerns over the way an applicant may have conducted their tenancy.

The applicant will not be disadvantaged if, despite every effort, it is not possible to obtain a reference from current or previous landlords.

6.3. Data Sharing and Declaration

As part of the online Register application, the applicant will be required to sign a declaration to:

- a) Confirm that the information given is correct and that any changes of circumstances will notified to the Council;
- b) Give consent to allow enquiries to be made concerning their eligibility for housing and level of priority;
- c) Give consent to allow information to be provided to other partner organisations in the scheme.

To determine eligibility for the Housing Register, the Council will make any enquiries they deem necessary in order to assess the application. This may include information sharing with professionals such as health professionals, Kent County Council, other Council departments and the Police etc. By submitting personal information on the Housing Register application form, the applicant is giving permission to share information with other housing providers and statutory agencies as needed to process and verify the application, in accordance with Kent Data Sharing Protocols.

6.4. Applicant checks

In the interests of assessing an applicant's eligibility to join the Register, all members of the prospective household will be requested to disclose any pending court cases or unspent criminal convictions.

The Council may use any information disclosed during the application, assessment and allocation of property processes to find out whether the applicant qualifies for joining or remaining on the Register.

Where a criminal conviction is spent¹⁰, this will not be taken into account. The assessment will reflect whether there is evidence of any current serious unacceptable behaviour regardless of any previous convictions of this nature.

If during the assessment process, it is felt that there is a need for a police check, the Disclosure and Barring Service may be contacted for information. This is to establish if there has been any involvement in serious crimes that constitutes as 'unacceptable behaviour' within the non-qualification criteria of this Policy.

Information gained will not automatically exclude the 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.

6.5. Joint applications

Joint applications will be accepted and will be treated as one application. The housing need of the full household will be considered in assessing housing needs. When allocating to two or more persons jointly, at least one of the persons must qualify and all of them must be eligible (see section 3 for details). However, in relation to the housing associations that are part of this Policy, some individual association may decide whether to allow a joint tenancy depending on their own rules.

6.6. Households with access to children/shared residency order

As part of the assessment process, the applicant will record whether children live with them part of the week, whether or not this arrangement is set by the court or not. All children should be detailed on the application; however, applicants should be aware that this does not automatically mean they will be guaranteed an additional bedroom(s) for the child/children.

Social housing is a scarce resource and therefore social housing can only be allocated to those who have a housing need. In certain situations, a child will have a permanent place of residence with another parent and it will only be in exceptional circumstances that it would be reasonable to expect a child who has a home with one parent to be provided with another home¹¹.

It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure they provide evidence of any court order or residency order and proof of child benefit and tax credits as part of the application process.

6.7. Housing for People Aged 55+

Some housing within the District is advertised and offered to specific target groups. The need for supported/sheltered properties for people aged over 55 is a priority in this District as the older population increases. See section 3.4 above for further information.

6.8. Notification of Registration

¹⁰ In accordance with the 'spent convictions' definitions outlined in the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (ROA) 1974

¹¹ Holmes-Moorhouse v Richmond upon Thames 2009

When an application has been fully assessed, the applicant 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 the applicant does qualify, they will be notified of the registration date and unique Kent Homechoice registration reference number to enable the applicant to start bidding on properties, and;
- The allocated Band according to the assessed housing need and the type of property the applicant can bid for;
- Details of the applicant's right to request a review of the decision. This may include querying the allocated banding or in certain other specified circumstances (see the review section 9.1 below for further details).

6.9. Change of circumstances

It is the applicants' responsibility to let the Council know of any change of circumstances for any and all members of the household and, where requested, provide proof of that change. Notification of a change in circumstances should be done as soon as possible and within 2 weeks of any change. Registered applicants should fill in the online change of circumstances form available at www.kenthomechoice.org.uk and submit evidence. Examples of a change in circumstances include, but are not limited to:

- a. A change of address or contact details, for any members of the prospective household;
- b. A change in medical condition or disability (either existing or newly diagnosed);
- c. A request for additional family members or other people wishing to be added to the application (This will be subject to an assessment and the rules set out in this policy);
- d. Any family member or any other person(s) on the application who is no longer part of the household; and
- e. Any significant changes in income, savings or assets that may require a reassessment of the application.

It does not follow that every change in circumstance will result in a change in priority. The information provided by the applicant will be used to reassess their priority and may result in no change to priority band, change to higher or lower priority or may result in the application being removed from the register if they no longer qualify under this policy.

The applicant will not actively be considered for social housing whilst the change of circumstance is being verified and we undertake to assess the change of circumstances as quickly as possible. Checks will be made on an application's current circumstances before an offer of a tenancy is made. Failure to notify the Council of a relevant change in circumstance may result in the application not being valid at the time of offer and they will not be offered a property.

6.10. Reviewing and Renewing Housing Applications

Every applicant on the Housing Register will have their application reviewed annually or more frequently, as required. This will be on a rolling basis depending

on the operational processes adopted at any time for reviewing the Register. A letter will be sent to all applicants requesting confirmation of the current circumstances and whether they wish to remain on the Register, this may be sent electronically to a given email address. Failure to complete the annual review will result in the application being cancelled and the need to re-apply. If a reply is not received within 28 days of the date sent, the application will be cancelled in line with 6.11 below.

As part of the annual Review, the Council may discuss the applicant's bidding and offers, which may relate to the terms and restrictions detailed of this Allocation Policy, as outlined in Section 7 and 10.

The Allocations Policy is monitored to make sure that allocations made reflect current housing needs and meet legislation requirements. This policy will be reviewed and updated regularly, particularly when changes in legislation and/or operational processes are required, to ensure the Housing Register continues to meet local housing needs.

6.11. Cancelling Applications

An application will be cancelled from the Housing Register in the following circumstances:

- a) At the request of the applicant;
- b) If the applicant (including all household members) become ineligible under one of the eligibility and qualification rules;
- c) When the applicant has been housed;
- d) On failure to reply to a review letter or requests for further information within a given time period;
- e) Where it is discovered that the applicant has given false or misleading information;
- f) If the applicant fails to bid on any properties, which are suitable to the household size and within preferred locations within a 12 month period.
- g) If the applicant refuses two suitable and reasonable offers of a property, for which the applicant has placed a bid.

In circumstances b), e), f) and g), the applicant will be notified in writing including the reason why the application has been cancelled and detailing the right to request a review of the decision. It is the applicant's responsibility to inform the Council of any changes which may result in the application being cancelled.

6.12. Short Term Interim Rented Properties

On occasions, where a property is hard to let, some homes may be available for short term lets for people with exceptional circumstances or who are waiting on the Housing Register and are assessed by the Council to be homeless and in priority need. These types of properties including temporary or emergency night paid accommodation provided by a housing association, private landlord or alternative housing provider.

6.13. Deliberate Worsening of Circumstances

Where there is evidence that someone has deliberately made their housing situation worse in order to gain a higher priority on the Register, the assessment of their needs will be based on the circumstances before their situation changed through their deliberate worsening of their circumstances.

Examples of this may include, but not limited to:

- Allowing family members or others to move into a property who previously had suitable accommodation or the financial means to secure their own accommodation and this has resulted in the property being overcrowded;
- Moving from previously suitable or more suitable accommodation which it was reasonable for the applicant to continue to occupy, into a less suitable property;
- If the applicant was a Homeowner and has transferred their property to another family member within the last 5 years from the date of application to join the Housing Register.
- Giving up affordable and suitable private rented accommodation, which could have been kept 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.
- Where a customer fails to report or to cooperate with the landlord to get repairs done to the property which worsens the housing condition or where advice has been provided of appropriate actions the tenant needs to take to reduce or prevent a condition such as condensation but fails to do so which exacerbates a medical condition

These are examples only. There will be other circumstances considered to decide whether someone has deliberately worsened their circumstances. The Council reserves the right to review and make a decision based on the information provided by the applicant. Further information may be requested from other sources (including family members and/or landlords) before a decision is made.

6.14. Misrepresentation, False Statements and Withholding Information

Applicants must supply full information about their circumstances, and must provide supporting evidence where required to do so. It is an offence to provide false information, or to withhold information, in order to fraudulently obtain a tenancy (Section 171, Housing Act 1996).

Any person who knowingly withholds any information about their housing application or deliberately provides false information, will be guilty of committing a criminal offence, and could face a conviction.

If an applicant has knowingly given false information, the Council:

- Suspend or disqualify the applicant from the housing register and/ or;
- Withdraw any offer of a tenancy and/ or;
- Work with the landlord to take County Court action for misrepresentation and/or eviction from a tenancy.

7. The Allocation Process

7.1. How are applicants selected for allocation?

Applicants who meet the eligibility criteria and are validated for the Register will have their individual housing needs assessed and their application will then be placed in a band according to their circumstances and housing priority. Each year the total amount of vacant social housing stock varies. Applicants and nominations for homes are made in accordance with the rules in section 7 of this policy. Allocations of a home is made by the relevant housing association/landlord in line with their own Eligibility Policy.

Nominations to the landlord who make the offer are made in line with the banding system. The banding system gives preference to those most in need. Properties will be offered to the bidder in the highest band who has the earliest Banding Date; some exceptions may apply to this process due to exceptional circumstances.

Further validation of the application details may be undertaken by the landlord, in line with their own Eligibility Policy, before an offer of accommodation is made. This is to determine that the applicant is still eligible to receive the nomination for a property and circumstances are up to date.

As part of this Policy, vacant homes will be advertised for two Kent Homechoice bidding cycles. If after two bidding cycles an applicant is not allocated to a property because either

- a) no eligible bids have been received for the property
- or
- b) those who have been offered the property have refused it

other means of identifying a suitable application for the property will be considered to minimise the time the property is vacant. This may include a direct let from a Housing Provider's waiting list or advertising it using other methods.

7.2. The Banding system

The banding system will be used to decide when to make an offer of accommodation and to whom. On occasions, properties may be allocated outside of this system in exceptional circumstances and as agreed by the Council. These exceptions are outlined below. Once an application has been verified and all documents received, the Council will allocate an A to D banding criteria based the applicant's housing needs based on their identified reasonable preference groups¹²

There are 4 bands and properties will be allocated in the following order based upon housing need:

¹² as defined in Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996

Band A: Urgent need to move	These are applicants in need of the highest priority with an urgent need to move.
Band B: High Priority	These applicants in need of a high priority need to move.
Band C: Medium Priority	These applicants have a medium priority need to move.
Band D: Low Priority	These applicants have a low priority need to move.

Priority for an offer of housing is determined by the band and then the length of time the applicant has been placed in that Band. Medical priority, and any other exceptional circumstances including social and welfare needs, will be assessed by the Council with the option of referring the case to an independent medical advisor if considered appropriate. It is the responsibility of the applicant to provide any supporting evidence to support additional priority or medical needs. Examples of exceptional circumstances are outlined in Section 7.5. The process for assessing social and welfare priorities are detailed in Appendix 4.

See Appendix 2 for the full definitions for each priority group awarded a banding. Usually, an application is linked to several factors across different priority bands but the highest factor will determine the band.

Applicants for older people's extra care housing schemes in the District will be assessed by a Joint Allocations Panel who will consider the applicant's care, support, social and housing needs. The Panel will include representatives from Sevenoaks District Council, Kent County Council, the relevant housing association and care provider. On occasions, extra care properties may be advertised and allocated outside the Choice Based Lettings scheme.

The Banding criteria's are set out below, for full detailed descriptions for each criteria, please see Appendix 2 of this Policy:

Banding System A-D	Housing Need Priority Group or Circumstance
Band A Urgent Need to Move	Imminent risk of serious harm, violence or domestic abuse
	Demolition, Prohibition or Compulsory Purchase Order
	Management transfers including major works, non-successor (priority need) or other urgent management reasons
	Statutory overcrowding
	Emergency medical condition, welfare need or disability
	Young people in care
	Releasing adapted housing
	Agricultural workers (Rent Agriculture Act)
Band B High Priority to Move	Homeless households in TA for over 6 months
	Qualification under Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and with a priority need
	Serious Medical, Welfare or Disability needs
	Hardship - support or employment including Right to Move and Local Essential Workers

	Under-occupying in social housing
	Overcrowding in social housing and in priority need
	Serious hazards assessed in private sector housing
	Downsizing to move into housing specific for older people (for over 55's) and is a current resident in Sevenoaks District
	Members of the Armed Forces
	Parental eviction - at home for over 12 months
	Applicants in supported housing
Band C Medium Priority to Move	Homeless households in TA under 6 months
	Made and eligible for homeless application but not in priority need
	Rough Sleepers (verified)
	Parental eviction - unable to remain for 12 months
	No or shared access to facilities essential to health and wellbeing
	Overcrowding (as defined by the Bedroom Standard) with no priority need (as defined by Housing Act 1996)
	Non-successor tenant with no priority need
	Intentionally homeless
	Non critical or serious Medical, Welfare or Disability needs
	No access to a kitchen
Band D: Low Priority to Move	Need to share kitchen, bathroom, WC or living room
	Local connection qualification for making a considerable community contribution
	Rural Exception Site applicants with a Parish Connection
	Older people (over 55's) with low social and housing needs moving into housing specific for older people
	Not currently suitably/adequately housed
	Applicants banding reduced permanently or for a period of time

7.3. Banding Allocation Exceptions

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 to people in the highest band, and then by the time they have waited within that Band.

In some exceptional circumstances, an offer will be made to someone 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, or where the vacancy is for a Rural Exceptions Site home.

For example, if there are additional preferences due to an exceptionally urgent need for housing, an applicant may be placed at the front of the priority band and made an offer of housing as soon as possible. A decision whether a need to be housed is exceptionally urgent would be made by the Council. Examples of the circumstances, but are not limited to:

- A need to move due to a fire or flood or severe storm damage to a home;
- An imminent risk of violence and/or are to be housed through a witness protection programme;

- An applicant needs to house urgently as part of a multi-agency protocol such as a Public Protection arrangement (MAPPA), Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) etc.;
- Where an applicant is homeless and in temporary accommodation that would not be suitable for more than a short period of time or where there is a need to move 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 if an applicant has an established need for this property type, regardless of the date they were registered or banding.

In some circumstances, qualification criteria for a property will be restricted to households that meet specific criteria. Restrictions may apply to:

- properties subject to a local lettings policy;
- properties situated on rural exception sites;
- properties subject to an agreement under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990

Further details of exceptions to the banding criteria and local connection rules can be found in this Policy. The Council has the authority to allocate properties in exceptional circumstances outside the current banding system.

7.4. Type of property allocated to an Applicant

The Council wants to make the best use of affordable housing properties that become available in the District. When deciding the size and type of property for which applicants are eligible, the Government's National Bedroom Standard¹³ will apply. A summary of how a property size is calculated can be found below.

When bidding for properties, there are a number of very important considerations that an applicant should take into account. These include property size, location and affordability. Any additional exceptional circumstances will be taken into account, it is the responsibility of the applicant to provide relevant supporting evidence.

Applicants should note that not all types of accommodation are available in all of the towns and villages in the Sevenoaks District. Therefore, to maximise opportunities of being offered a property, it is important that an applicant bids for all types of properties that meet their housing needs in their preferred locations. **Applicants who do not bid on any suitable properties within a 12 month period and/or decline two reasonable offers on properties, including where an applicant has placed a bid AND the property meets their bedroom size within their preferred areas, this will result in the applicant being removed from the Housing Register, see section 10 for full details.** Alternatively, if the applicant has been awarded an urgent (Band A) or high priority (Band B) and fails to bid or accept suitable properties, this priority banding may be removed at the discretion of the Council.

¹³ In accordance with s.169 of the Housing Act 1996

National Bedroom Standard Summary

The National Local Housing Allowance (LHA) Bedroom Calculator¹⁴ will be used when calculating the number of bedrooms that an applicant is entitled to. This will calculate the size of the property based on the gender, ages and number of occupants for each household. The following rules will apply:

The LHA Bedroom Standard, as used to calculate Housing Benefit and Universal Credit, allocates a separate bedroom to each:

- married or cohabiting couple;
- single adult (16 or over);
- Two children under 10 (regardless of sex);
- Two children under 16 of the same sex.

National exceptions will apply when calculating bedrooms, sharing arrangements and spare bedroom subsidy. Such as approved foster carers, children or couples with a disability or medical condition etc, see <https://www.gov.uk/housing-benefit/what-youll-get> for full details.

7.5. What are other considerations and exceptional circumstances

Other considerations and exceptional circumstances may be taken into account when assessing the bedroom and household size requirements of an application for a property. These include, but are not limited to:

- Where an applicant has been identified as requiring a live-in carer (by Kent County Council Social Care Service), a need for a spare bedroom would be taken into account, subject to affordability checks;
- Prospective foster carers or adopters who would require an extra bedroom to accommodate a foster or adoptive child;
- Where a property has been substantially adapted for the needs of a disabled person, the property will only be allocated to applicants if their household would benefit from those adaptations;
- Where an additional room may be required for medical or welfare reasons, applications may be assessed by the Social and Welfare Panel;
- Housing designated for older people will only be available if the applicant is over the age of 55. However, the age criteria may vary for exceptional circumstances, including high support and care needs, and may differ for individual Housing Providers.

7.6. Making an offer of a Property

Once an applicant has bid on a property and the advert closes, the details of the applicants who have bid on the property are passed to the relevant housing provider (who owns the property). Prior to an offer being made, the housing provider will contact the successful applicant to carry out further verification on eligibility and priority based on the housing provider's own Eligibility Policy.

¹⁴ LHA Bedroom Calculator can be found at <http://lha-direct.voia.gov.uk/bedroomcalculator.aspx>, as part Schedule 4 of the Universal Credit Regulations 2013, details available at www.gov.uk

Once verification is completed, the successful applicant will receive an offer of a tenancy in writing from the Housing Provider (the landlord) which will include details of the weekly rent and any service charges. Once the applicant has been offered a property, they will be unable to place any further bids on other properties.

In certain situations, the offer will not be made, or, if made, may be withdrawn if:

- Since joining the scheme, the applicant has become ineligible;
- On verification of their details, the priority band has been incorrectly awarded due to the information received by the applicant, or due to mistakes in the assessment of the application itself;
- The circumstances of the applicant have changed since the priority band was awarded or they are no longer entitled to the same level of priority;
- The landlord has a good housing management reason not to offer a property;
- The applicant does not meet the landlord's affordability criteria.

If the applicant does not reply to an offer within 2 working days of receiving an offer, then the offer will be deemed to have been refused and the property will be offered to the next applicant on the shortlist who qualifies for that offer.

All offers will be formally made in writing. Notification in writing may be made by letter, e-mail or, in an urgent situation, by text.

7.7. Refusals of Offers

Unless the applicant is being housed under the homelessness legislation (see section 8), the applicant may refuse a maximum of two suitable and reasonable offers of accommodation¹⁵. If both offers are considered suitable and reasonable and are refused, the applicant will be removed from the register or may lose their priority banding. If removed, the applicant will not be able to re-apply for 12 months.

Before any applicant is removed, checks will be made to determine if both the offers were reasonable in relation to the applicant's housing needs, taking into account any additional disability, physical or medical needs or exceptional circumstances. The Applicant will have the right to request a review of the decision to be removed from the Register. See section 9.1 on the review process.

It is within the discretion of the Council to waive this removal.

Full details regarding 'Refusals of Offer' and 'Removal from the Register' can be found in Section 10.

7.8. Local Lettings Plan

The Housing Register may sometimes use Local Lettings Plans (LLP) to nominate a property. A Local Lettings Plan is an agreement between a housing provider/developer and the Council about how properties will be allocated. It is used to facilitate sustainable communities:

¹⁵ 'suitable offers' is defined by the Homelessness (suitability of accommodation) (England) Order 2012)

- Where there have been particular management problems identified in an area;
- When nominating a new or refurbished development to ensure the creation of a balanced and sustainable community. This could include, for example, consideration of child density levels. In these circumstances an updated Nominations Agreement may be required between the housing provider and the Council during the development phase;
- To fulfil requirements under Planning Agreements (also known as section 106 conditions);
- To assist with wider strategic objectives of the Council, e.g. to remedy under-occupation of existing social rented homes, prioritise Local Essential Workers, provide a better mix of tenures and provide further options for affordable housing such as Intermediate Rents and Help to Buy.

The introduction of a Local Lettings Plan is subject to the Housing Provider or Housing Association obtaining the agreement of the Council's Chief Officer responsible for housing allocations. The advert for the vacant property will show if a LLP applies. The Council will monitor to ensure that allocations reflect the Local Lettings Plan and do not discriminate on equality grounds. Details of LLP's in place are available from the Council.

7.9. Sensitive Letting (property)

An individual property may be a 'sensitive let'. This could be where there is a confirmed history of anti-social behaviour or criminal activity at that property involving the previous tenant or members of their household. A property will only be named a sensitive let with the approval of a senior manager of the Council.

Properties let sensitively will be allocated as part of Local Lettings Plan in place between the relevant housing providers and the Council. Sometimes, preference may be given to those with a local parish connection and this will be clearly stated in the advert for the vacant property. The introduction of a Local Lettings Plan is subject to the Housing Provider/Housing Association obtaining the agreement of the Council's Chief Officer responsible for housing allocations. More information on these policies are detailed in section 7.8. above

7.10. Social and Welfare Priority

The Social and Welfare Panel is able to consider and make decisions on applications relating to Register eligibility, exemptions and banding, when a senior housing officer from the Council is unable to reach a decision. A Panel may also be held when information on the application does not clearly fit within the assessment criteria, and additional social and/or welfare priorities may be taken into account. The Panel is made up of representatives from the Sevenoaks District Council and the relevant Housing Provider. The Panel meets as required to consider the supporting evidence and documentation provided by a relevant support worker or professional (this may include Housing Officer, Social Worker, Education Welfare Officer etc.) to consider urgent social and welfare priorities.

For further details on the Social and Welfare Panel can be found in Appendix 4.

7.11. Special Circumstances (applicant)

Under some special circumstances, it may be necessary to consider other priorities when assessing a person's need for housing. This will be decided at the time of application and/or when the Council or Housing Provider/Housing Association receives relevant information, usually having considered the advice of relevant professionals and in agreement with the applicant. This would generally be when the applicant would be at risk of harm if housed in a particular location, or may pose a risk to others.

Examples could be where there has been a breakdown in a violent relationship, or where someone is at serious risk of harm because they have acted as a witness in court, or where we have information from the Police or Probation Service that they may be a risk to the community¹⁶.

Applicants are entitled to details of any criteria attached to their housing application, although provision will be made to ensure that confidentiality is not breached that would put others at risk. If a bid made under Choice Based Lettings (CBL) results in an applicant being at risk, the Council will discuss the suitability of the offer with the applicant. This may result in the offer of accommodation not being made. If a bid under the CBL scheme is made that may place an applicant at risk, the suitability of the offer will be discussed and a decision may then be made not to make such an offer of accommodation.

Reciprocal Rehousing Arrangements

Under special circumstances, it may on occasion be necessary to move or accept an existing social housing tenant through a reciprocal arrangement with another housing associations or local housing authority. This would be at the mutual agreement of both parties. Senior managers at the Council have the authority to consider and approve reciprocal rehousing requests made to/from other councils or housing associations. If a rehousing is required as part of this process, the following criteria will be applied:

- The nominated person would be at risk in their present property, and who need to move due to exceptional circumstances;
- The referring organisation is unable to intervene to mitigate the risk or to
- house the nominated people themselves;

Once accepted for re-housing, the assistance through the Housing Register will be on the following basis:

- The Housing Register Team will have nomination rights to the resulting vacancy or another property of similar type or size.
- The application will placed in a high priority band as an exceptional case under special circumstances;
- The accommodation will be of a similar size and type to that occupied at present.
- The offer of accommodation will be at a safe distance to the present accommodation.

7.12. Specially adapted Properties

¹⁶ This includes data received as of the Serious and Organised Crime and Policing Act 2005 (SOCAPA 2005, Chapter 4) which states that a public authority "must take reasonable steps to provide the assistance requested".

Some homes have been specially adapted to meet people's needs or have the potential to be adapted to meet people's needs. This includes homes for the disabled and for older people. To ensure we match people to appropriate homes and make the best use of the accommodation, properties currently adapted or suitable for adaptation will be advertised for those with a recognised need. The Council, in partnership with the housing provider, reserve the right to allocate such a property outside of the Choice Based Lettings scheme, band and date order system in order to best match that property to an applicant who requires an adapted property. This includes where a vacant property has been identified as suitable for an applicant's disability, physical or medical needs because home adaptations could be put in place to make the property accessible, through the Council's Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG). The property will be assessed in advance of an offer for suitability and required alterations and/or adaptations by the relevant housing provider and the Council.

7.13. Providing Applicants with Choice

As far as possible, the Council wishes to give choice to anyone who is looking to obtain an offer of social housing. This is why the Council operates a Choice Based Lettings scheme to give applicants the best possible choice over where they may wish to live. However, this must be set against the need to resolve a situation where there is an urgent need to provide settled or alternative housing. For example, where there are homeless households to whom there is a statutory duty to provide housing. Therefore, in certain circumstances, choice may be limited.

In very exceptional circumstances, the Council may make a direct offer of suitable accommodation at any time in order to resolve a threat of homelessness, homelessness itself, or to reduce the financial burden on the Council of the cost of temporary accommodation:

- a. If an applicant is accepted by the Council as statutorily homeless and owed a duty to house¹⁷;
- b. If an applicant is granted homeless status¹⁸; or
- c. If an applicant has been awarded Homeless Prevention banding under this policy.

Please note that if an applicant falls into the categories listed above and refuse a suitable offer of accommodation, they will lose the allocated A or B priority banding.

An offer of suitable accommodation made will also bring to an end any statutory homeless duty owed¹¹. **The applicant will be warned of this consequence at the point the property is formally offered.** It is unlikely that the applicant would then receive a second offer within 12 months given lower banding. However, if they do receive such an offer and refuse that second offer, this applicant will be removed from the Register for a minimum period of 12 months.

¹⁷ Housing Act 1996, sections 193(2) or 195(2)

¹⁸ Under section 166A (3) (a) (people who are homeless within the meaning of Part VII of the Housing Act 1996)

8. Homelessness and Housing Advice

It is important to be aware that not all housing problems can be dealt with through the Housing Register, or at least not in a short term or immediate timescale. For example if someone is homeless, at risk of becoming homeless, issues with a current landlord or disrepair of a property.

If someone is homeless or at risk of homelessness within 56 days, the Council's Housing Advice Service can assess a person's needs, as part of their duties under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended). As part of this service, a Housing Advice Officer will work with the individual to assess their housing situation and complete a Personalised Housing Plan to help prevent them from becoming homeless. This may include supporting the individual into alternative suitable housing, liaising with the current landlord or family member, assessing affordability to maximise income or placing the individual in emergency or temporary accommodation if they are homeless and assessed as having a priority need.

The Council is able provide housing advice and assist with other housing options. This may include help to access a private rented property, for a minimum of six month, with a tenancy or lease arrangement with a private landlord or alternative housing provider. The Council's Private Sector Letting Scheme (PSL) may be able to assist a customer with their upfront financial costs such as a deposit bond or required rent in advance, subject to eligibility and ongoing affordability. Further details about PSL are available at www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/housing.

Accessing the Housing Register

If an applicant is owed a main homelessness duty, the refusal of **one suitable and reasonable offer** of a property on the Housing Register may end the homelessness duty owed by the Council. Where the Council have accepted a homelessness duty to the applicant, a homelessness priority Band B may be allocated to the applicant on the Housing Register. If the one offer, which is considered suitable and reasonable by the Council and in line with the housing legislation¹⁹, is refused, the applicant will be removed from the Register or may lose their priority banding. If removed, the applicant will not be able to re-apply for 12 months. This is also likely to result in the Council discharging their statutory homelessness duty to the applicant. This includes bids made by Council Housing Officers, on behalf of the applicant, where there is an urgent or immediate need to provide suitable and affordable housing to an applicant at risk of homelessness.

If the homelessness duty has enabled the applicant to access temporary or emergency accommodation, when this duty is discharged, the applicant will be required to leave this accommodation with a reasonable notice period, in line with the legislation. No further offers of temporary accommodation would be made as the Council will no longer have a homelessness duty to the applicant. This forms part of the Council's main housing duty²⁰.

¹⁹ 'suitable offers' is defined by the Homelessness (suitability of accommodation) (England) Order 2012)

²⁰ Housing Act 1996, sections 193(2) or 195(2)

From time-to-time the Council may contact Register applicants to offer them further affordable housing opportunities including access affordable and private rental properties and shared ownership, which is often a quick route to finding the right home.

Someone requiring housing advice about housing problems, housing options or wish to make an application as homeless, should contact the Housing Advice Service at Sevenoaks District Council, Council Offices, Argyle Road, Sevenoaks TN13 1HG, tel: 01732 227000.

9. Requesting a Review and Making a Complaint

9.1. The Review Process

Any applicants have the right to appeal a decision made in relation to a housing application to join the Register and any subsequent decisions. The applicant has a right to ask for a formal review of the decision within 21 days of receiving the notification letter.

An applicant has a legal right to a review of a decision in the following circumstances if they:

- a) Do not agree with the allocated Band, or with a banding change;
- b) Consider that a decision has been reached based on incorrect information;
- c) Disagree with a decision made on the basis of immigration status;
- d) Disagree with a decision made based on serious unacceptable behaviour;
- e) Disagree a decision regarding being removed from the Register - as set out in Section 10.

If an applicant wishes to request a review of a decision, the process is set out below:

- i. The applicant will be notified in writing of any decisions made in respect of the application stating their right of review;
- ii. If an applicant wishes to seek a review, they must request a review of a decision within 21 days of being notified in writing, unless there are exceptional circumstances outside this timescale. The applicant must give reasons why they wish to have the decision reviewed, including where they believe an incorrect decision has been made, based on the facts.
- iii. The review request must be in writing (email is acceptable) stating the reasons for the review. The request for a review should be addressed to:

Housing Register Team
Sevenoaks District Council
Argyle Road
Sevenoaks
Kent TN13 1HG
Email: housing.register@sevenoaks.gov.uk

- iv. A manager of the Council, who has not been involved in making the original decision, will carry out the review. The review process should be completed within 56 days of the request for a review. Any extension to include timescale will be agreed with the applicant.
- v. The review will be considered on the basis of the allocation scheme, any legal requirements and all relevant information. This will include information

provided by the applicant on any relevant developments and submitted evidence since the original decision was made.

- vi. Aim to complete the process and inform them in writing of the decision within 21 working days of receipt of the request and supporting information, after taking into account any additional information that is provided. Alternatively, if additional time is required for the review, this will be agreed with the applicant within the 56 days. It is the responsibility of the applicant requesting the review to provide additional documented evidence to be considered as part of the review process.
- vii. If the applicant do not agree with the review decision, they may appeal to the County Court on a point of law, within 21 days of the review decision.
- viii. The applicant may also raise their dissatisfaction through the District Council's Complaints Policy, which is detailed on its website at www.sevenoaks.gov.uk. If the applicant wants to make a complaint as part of this work, it is the applicant's right to direct complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman, the Housing Ombudsman or other appropriate bodies. This will not prejudice any Review appeal or onward decision. See section 9.2 below for full details.

9.2. Making a Complaint

To make a complaint about this Policy, complaints should first be made using the Stage 1 and 2 of the Council's complaints procedure. A copy of the current procedure is available on the Council's website at www.sevenoaks.gov.uk.

If the applicant is still not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint, a further complaint can be made direct to the Local Government Ombudsman service. The Local Government Ombudsman is an independent service run by central government to make sure that Local Authorities provide the required standard of service to customers.

The Ombudsman will deal with a complaint if a customer feels they have been treated unfairly as a result of maladministration.

All complaints to the Ombudsman must be in writing. Applicants can request assistance from their local Councillor or get someone else to write on their behalf. The contact details for the Local Government Ombudsman are:

Local Government Ombudsman
PO Box 4771
Coventry CV4 0EH

10. Removal from the Register

10.1. Refusal of Suitable Offers

The bidding process forms part of a choice based lettings process and therefore all bids placed by applicants or officers are within the preferred locations selected by the applicant, as part of the Register application process (as detailed in Sections 6 and 7.13).

Where an applicant has placed a bid on a property and then refuses two offers of a property and the properties are considered to be suitable and/or reasonable²¹ in a 12 month period, they may be removed from the Housing Register and will not be able to reapply for a period of 12 months or lose their priority banding. Please note: These offers include properties that match their specified housing need and will include all types of properties in their preferred locations such as flats, houses, bungalows and maisonettes.

All applicants will be contacted by the Council before removal to discuss this matter and if required offer further housing advice and support. Any exceptional circumstances including allocated property size, any additional housing and/or medical needs of the applicant will be considered.

Exceptional Circumstances

Additional number of refusals may be allowed if a property does not meet the applicant's disability, physical or medical needs or in other exceptional circumstances. This will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. If a property requires additional adaptations to support the applicant's disability, physical or medical needs, the housing association may assess the property's suitability for appropriate new home adaptations through the Council's Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG).

The following exception will apply in relation to the refusal of two suitable and reasonable offers of a property, as part of the Housing Allocations process:

Homelessness Duty Exception

If an applicant is owed a main homelessness duty²², the two offer policy does not apply and the refusal of **one** suitable and reasonable offer may end the homelessness duty owed by the Council. Where the Council have accepted this duty, applicants may be given a priority Band B on the Housing Register. If **one offer** which is considered suitable and reasonable is refused, the applicant will be removed from the Register or may lose their priority banding. If removed, the applicant will not be able to re-apply for 12 months.

This is also likely to result in the Council discharging their statutory homelessness duty to the applicant, as the offer has been refused. This includes bids made by Council Housing Officers, on behalf of the applicant, where there is an urgent or immediate need to provide suitable and affordable housing to an applicant at risk of homelessness. If the homelessness duty has enabled the applicant to access temporary or emergency accommodation, when this duty is discharged, the applicant will be required to leave this accommodation with a reasonable notice period, in line with the legislation. No further offers of temporary accommodation would be made as the Council will no longer have a homelessness duty to the applicant. This forms part of the Council's main housing duty²³.

Band A Exception

The two refusal rule will not apply if an applicant has been awarded an 'urgent need to move' priority banding A on the Housing Register, as the housing need

²¹ 'suitable offers' is defined by the Homelessness (suitability of accommodation) (England) Order 2012)

²² 'main homelessness duty' as defined in section 193 (2) of the Housing Act 1996

²³ Housing Act 1996, sections 193(2) or 195(2)

is classed as an urgent and immediate. In this instance, the applicant may be removed from the Register if they refuse one suitable and reasonable offer. Alternatively, on assessment of the refusal, the applicant's priority banding may be removed and a lower priority banding awarded, if the applicant no longer has an urgent need to move.

This exception will apply if the property is deemed by the Council to be suitable and reasonable and therefore meets the urgent housing needs. This includes where the bid has been placed by the Council on behalf of the applicant. As above, exceptional circumstances will be taken into account.

Please note: The bids are placed by Officers or applicants within the preferred locations pre-selected by the applicant, as part of their application through the Choice Based Letting System (detailed in Section 7.13).

Any decision to waive the removal from the Register rule for refusing two offers due to exceptional circumstances, for any of the above, will be made by the Council in consultation with the applicant. It is the responsible of the applicant to provide any additional supporting evidence to justify this waive.

The applicant will be informed in writing with 14 days of refusal with the opportunity to appeal this decision.

10.2. Failure to bid

If an applicant does not bid on any property within a period of 12 months, the applicant will be removed from the Housing Register and will not be able to reapply for a period of 12 months, unless they can demonstrate exceptional circumstances. All applicants will be contacted by the Council before removal to discuss this matter and if required offer further housing advice and support.

It is the responsibility of the applicant to provide supporting evidence as part of exceptional circumstances. The Council has the authority to waive this removal.

Note: If the applicant is granted a priority or urgent band (A or B), the applicant may lose this priority banding if they are not bidding within a reasonable period of time, which could be as little of 3 months. In this instance, the housing application would be re-assessed to allocate the new lower banding based on the housing needs.

Exceptional Circumstances

Additional number of bids could be allowed if a property does not meet the applicant's disability, physical or medical needs or in other exceptional circumstances. This will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Other exemptions will apply as set out in Section 10.1 above.

The failure to bid will not apply if the applicant has joined the Housing Register for access only to Rural Exceptions Site properties. It is recognised that the applicant will only bid on these types of property when they become available, based on the applicant meeting the specified criteria and local connection to the relevant parish. See Section 3.6 for full details.

10.3. Giving False Information

It is a criminal offence if an applicant knowingly gives false statements, withholds information and fails to disclose change of circumstances relevant to an application. This is in connection with the Council exercises its allocating social housing functions²⁴. An offence is also committed if an applicant allows a third party to provide false information on their behalf. This includes:

- (a) It is an offence to knowingly or recklessly to make a statement which is false in a material particular, or
- (b) Knowingly to withhold information, which the Council has reasonably required the applicant to give, in connection with the exercise of these functions.

If an applicant is found to have withheld or given false information and are removed from the Register, they will not be able to reapply for a minimum period of 12 months. Decisions to remove anyone from the register will be made based on the seriousness of the false information given and an assessment of why the information was withheld.

Where a criminal offence has been committed relating to false or fraudulent information, the Council will work with the Police to take action to prosecute the applicant. This offence may result in a conviction or fine. The Council will also consider possession proceedings in partnership with the relevant housing provider, under Ground 5 in Schedule 2 of the Housing Act 1985 (as amended by the Housing Act 1996, s 146), where an applicant has given false information and obtained a tenancy.

11. Applicant Information and Rights

11.1. Confidentiality

Information received in relation to an application will be treated in confidence in accordance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2016/679 and the Data Protection Act 2018. Confidential Information held about customers will not be disclosed to third parties apart from:

- Where the individual has consented to the disclosure;
- Where it is necessary to process their application;
- [sub-processors]
- Where the Council is required by law to make such a disclosure;
- Where disclosure is made in accordance with a recognised Information Sharing Protocol;
- for reasons of public protection; or
- otherwise in accordance with our Privacy Notice at www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/privacy.

11.2. Data Protection and Information Sharing

²⁴ As outlined in the Housing Act 1996, Part 6 Section 171

The Council will ensure that all information provided by an applicant, and by third parties in relation to an application, is treated in strictest confidence. In doing so, this will comply fully with legal requirements²⁵.

All personal data will be dealt with in accordance with the Privacy Notice on the application form, the Council's general Privacy Notice (which can be found at www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/privacy) and this Policy. Together they set out what personal data we will collect from applicants, how it will be used, and how it will be shared.

The processing is necessary under the Public Task purpose and is necessary for the Council to perform a task in the public interest or for its official functions, and that task or function has a clear basis in law. All applicants will be asked to sign a declaration as part of their Register application form to give consent to share personal information about them or any member of the household, in relation to the processing of their application.

Where an applicant does not consent to their information being shared, this may result in an application not being complete and consequently, unless there is an exceptional reason for not consenting, the applicant will not be admitted onto the Housing Register.

The applicant's information may be shared irrespective of whether consent has been obtained in exceptional circumstances. These circumstances will include:

- a) In accordance with the provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act²⁶
- b) For the purposes of the prevention or detection of crime and fraud.
- c) Where there is a serious threat to the applicant or a third party, including staff or contractors.
- d) Where information is relevant to the management or support duties of the proposed landlord or any nominated support organisation, to ensure the health and safety of the applicant, a member of the household or a member of staff.

11.3. Equal Opportunities and Monitoring

Sevenoaks District Council is committed to ensuring that its policy and procedures in the letting of property are non-discriminatory and that all customers are able to access the service especially taking account of any vulnerability or other specific needs, and also the needs of different groups protected by Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010.

To identify the needs of our customers, the application form will have specific questions relating to vulnerability, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, disabilities and other relevant criteria. This information will be used to monitor the impact of the policy on minority and specific needs groups and to make such amendments as may be required, to ensure no group is disadvantaged by the policy.

²⁵ Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR, in relation to the way the Council stores and processes the information we hold on applicants, and with s.166(4) of the Housing Act 1996.

²⁶ Crime and Disorder Act 1998, Section 115

Under the Equality Act²⁷, this Council is 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. To comply with our duties in the Equality Act, 'reasonable preference' categories are given priority for housing and the overall customer satisfaction with the scheme is monitored.

11.4. Treating all applications fairly

Decisions about housing applications and the allocation of housing are usually carried out by Council Officers rather than elected Councillors. However, this does not prevent Councillors from seeking or providing information on behalf of their residents, with written consent from the applicant to act on their behalf.

In order to ensure that we treat all applicants fairly, applicants must disclose whether the application for housing is from a Councillor or employees of the Council or a partner Housing Association. Canvassing is not allowed. These applications will be assessed in the normal way, but an offer of housing must be approved by a manager at Sevenoaks District Council with responsibility for housing.

11.5. Right to information

Applicants are entitled to request copies of personal information that the Council holds about them. Further details about people's rights can be found in our general Privacy Notice at www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/privacy. Applicants may make this request by writing to the Data Protection Officer at the Council Offices or by emailing data.protection@sevenoaks.gov.uk.

In line with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, we make certain information about our services publicly available through our Publication Scheme. If the information is not already available then please submit a written request to the Council. Further details about making a request can be found on our website.

12. Glossary

AA	-	Attendance Allowance
AFIP	-	Armed Forces war pension
CBL	-	Choice Based Lettings Scheme
DBS	-	Disclosure and Barring Service
DCLG	-	Department of Communities and Local Government
DFG	-	Disabled Facilities Grant
DLA	-	Disability Living Allowance
HERO	-	Housing, Energy, Retraining and Options
KCC	-	Kent County Council
LCHO	-	Low Cost Home Ownership (Help to Buy)
LLP	-	Local Lettings Plan

²⁷ Equality Act 2010, section 149

MAPPA	-	Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangement
MARAC	-	Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference
MHCLG	-	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
PIP	-	Personal Independence Payment
PSL	-	Private Sector Lettings Scheme
SDC	-	Sevenoaks District Council
SDHR	-	Sevenoaks District Housing Register
SLA	-	Service Level Agreement
TA	-	Temporary accommodation
WKHA	-	West Kent Housing Association

13. Appendix 1 - Definitions

Accommodation	A shared dwelling or property are behind a door that only that household can use and there is at least one other such household space at the same address with which it can be combined to form the shared dwelling.
Adult	An adult is a person aged 18 or over who has legal control over their person, actions and decisions and is therefore regarded as independent, self-sufficient and responsible.
Affordable Housing	Accommodation provided by 'Housing Providers' registered as a social landlord or other housing providers approved by Sevenoaks District Council.
Allocation	A housing authority allocates accommodation (under Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996) when it: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • selects a person to be a secure or introductory tenant of accommodation held by that authority; • nominates a person to be a secure or introductory tenant of accommodation held by another housing authority; • nominates a person to be an assured tenant of accommodation held by a Private or Registered Provider or other providers approved by Sevenoaks District Council.
Assured tenant	A person with an assured shorthold tenancy, including of an Affordable/Social Rent property.
Child	A dependent child is defined as being under 16 years of age, or under 18 and in, or about to begin, full-time education or training. A 16 or 17 year old may not be seen as dependent if they are living independently, have been excluded by parents or are leaving care etc.
Common Travel Area	Includes the UK, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man and the Republic of Ireland.
Council	Sevenoaks District Council
District	The whole locality area for the Council of the Sevenoaks District.
Employment	Paid employment in the District.
Rural Exceptions Site	A site outside the normal development boundary of a village or market town that has been granted planning permission to provide accommodation for local people in perpetuity. Allocation arrangements are specified in a Section 106 Agreement.
Guarantor	Person who holds the responsibility to ensure rent is paid as well as any losses, expenses or damages where the young person fails to carry out their obligations under the agreement.
Homeless	An individual who lacks housing including a person whose primary residence during the night is a supervised public or private facility (Shelter) that provides temporary living.
Household	One person or a group of people who have the

	accommodation together as their only or main residence to make up a household.
Housing Register	A list of applicants who are eligible to apply for housing in the District.
Intentionally homeless	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a person deliberately does or fails to do anything in consequence ceases to occupy accommodation (or the likely result of being forced to leave accommodation) and; • the accommodation is available for the person's occupation; and • it would have been reasonable for the person to continue to occupy the accommodation.
Local Essential Worker	<p>A 'Local Essential Worker' is someone employed in the District and in one of the following occupations, as defined in the Sevenoaks District Local Plan as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public sector employees providing frontline services in areas including health, education and community safety and can include NHS staff, teachers and school support staff, police, firefighters, military personnel, social care and childcare workers (as per NPPF definition); • Council employees who provide frontline services (including County, District or Town/Parish); • Private sector employees and the self-employed providing frontline services in care and includes teachers and school support staff, health care, social care and childcare workers; • Private sector employees and the self-employed who provide frontline services in amenities and includes cleaners, kitchen/catering staff, shop workers, hairdressers, local transport and agriculture; and • Any other frontline occupational group experiencing recruitment or retention issues - such issues being first evidenced to the satisfaction of the District Council and inclusion as a local essential worker is at the sole discretion of the District Council.
Housing Provider	A housing organisation including a social landlord or private housing company who have signed a Local Lettings Plan and/or a Nominations Agreement with Sevenoaks District Council to enable them to advertise affordable housing properties on the Sevenoaks District Housing Register
Secure tenant	A person with a flexible tenancy granted under s.107A of the Housing Act 1985
Statutory homelessness	Statutory duties on local housing authorities to ensure that advice and assistance to households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness is available free of charge
We/our	This is intended to mean Sevenoaks District Council

14. Appendix 2 - Banding Criteria

Banding A-D	Criteria	Housing Need - Full Description
Band A Urgent Need to Move	Imminent risk of serious harm, violence or domestic abuse	<p>Applicants with an exceptional need to move. This includes those owed a homelessness duty, or who would be owed a homelessness duty if assessed, as a result of being a victim of serious violence, harassment, intimidation or where threats of violence are likely to be carried out.</p> <p>It also includes domestic violence, witnesses to crime or victims of crime, racial or homophobic harassment. Applicants who qualify under this category are not required to have a local connection.</p> <p>The Council may bid on properties, on behalf of applicants in this category as part of the Council's main Homelessness Duty²⁸. The refusal of one suitable and reasonable offer will apply; see Section 10.1 for full details.</p>
	Statutory overcrowding	Applicants who are statutorily overcrowded as defined by the Housing Act 1985 .
	Demolition, Prohibition or Compulsory Purchase Order	Demolition, Prohibition or Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO). Where the applicant's property is subject to demolition or subject to a Compulsory Purchase Order for redevelopment or served an Order for being unfit for habitation.
	Emergency medical condition, welfare need or disability	<p>Applicants with an emergency associated with their medical condition(s), welfare needs, or disability that is critically affected by their housing circumstances.</p> <p>This must be supported by Police, MAPPA Process, (Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements produced by the National Offender Management Service) Social Services or medical professional. This category includes Service Personnel who need to move into suitable adapted accommodation because they have sustained serious injury, a medical condition or a disability during their service.</p> <p>Note: A case may be referred to an independent medical advisor for advice if appropriate. Emergency medical, Welfare or disability priority may need to be assessed and verified by the Social and Welfare Panel (See Appendix 4 for full details).</p>
	Young people in care	Young people in care and considered ready to move out of care by Kent Social Services. See Section 2.2 for full details.
	Releasing adapted housing	A tenant of one of the Housing Register partner Housing Providers/Housing Associations who would release an adapted social housing property by moving. See Section 7.12.
	Management	A tenant of one of the SDHR Partner Housing

²⁸ 'main homelessness duty' as defined in section 193 (2) of the Housing Act 1996

Banding A-D	Criteria	Housing Need - Full Description
	transfers including major works, non-successor (priority need) or other urgent management reasons	Providers/Housing Associations where the social landlord requires the tenant to move due to major works or other urgent management reasons. Reasons such as those who are occupying a social housing property as a non-successor with a priority need and a decision is taken to rehouse them, or reciprocal arrangements with another housing provider or local authority. Reciprocal arrangements are where the social landlord requires the tenant to move, or the tenant needs to move, due to likelihood of violence, harassment, intimidation or threats of violence.
	Agricultural workers	Farm workers who need <u>immediate</u> housing under the Rent (Agriculture) Act as recommended by the Agricultural Dwelling Housing Advisory Committee.
Band B High Priority to Move	Homeless households in Temporary Accommodation (TA) over 6 months	<p>Homeless households owed a full homeless duty by Sevenoaks Council under sections 193 (2) and have been accommodated in temporary accommodation for a period of 6 months- <i>note these applicants might be made a direct offer in any area that is suitable.</i></p> <p>Households in this category will be made one suitable offer only, in line with Section 10 of this Policy.</p> <p>The Council may bid on properties, on behalf of applicants, in this category as part of the Council's main Homelessness Duty²⁹. The refusal of one suitable and reasonable offer will apply, see Section 10.1 for full details.</p>
	Parental eviction - at home for over 12 months	A priority need household as defined by the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) who was at threat of homelessness, but has been able to remain in the parental home for over 12 months since the initial threat of homelessness, rather than going into emergency accommodation.
	Qualification under Homelessness Reduction Act 2017	Applicants where it has been decided that they qualify as part of this Council's duty under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the Council is satisfied they will be homeless, or threatened with homelessness, within 56 days and have a priority need. Therefore the Council has accepted a 56 day Prevention Duty, this timescale may be extended by the Council.
	Serious Medical, Welfare or Disability needs	<p>Applicants with a serious medical condition, welfare need, or disability that is seriously affected by their housing circumstances</p> <p>Note: An award of Band B medical or Welfare or disability priority can be assessed and verified by the assessing officer but some cases may to be assessed by the Social and Welfare Panel (See Appendix 4 for full details).</p> <p>A case may need to be referred to an independent medical advisor for advice if appropriate.</p>
	Overcrowding in	A social housing tenant in the District who is overcrowded

²⁹ 'main homelessness duty' as defined in section 193 (2) of the Housing Act 1996

Banding A-D	Criteria	Housing Need - Full Description
	social housing <u>and</u> in priority need	<p>(unless caused deliberately) in their two bedroom home according to the Bedroom Standard, as set out under section 4.8 of the Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England</p> <p>In addition, there is a reason to believe that the household would be considered to be in priority need according to the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) and a move would free up a social home.</p>
	Under-occupying in social housing	<p>A tenant of one of the Housing Register partner Housing Providers/Housing Associations who are under-occupying their home and need to move to a smaller property.</p> <p>Note: This is not applicable to households who are making another member of the household homeless in order to downsize.</p>
	Applicants in supported housing	<p>Applicants in Supported housing who have been assessed by the Council as being ready to move on from that accommodation and where the Council agrees that their circumstances are such that social housing will only offer an appropriate housing move on solution.</p>
	Serious hazards assessed in private sector housing	<p>Where an authorised officer from the Council has determined that a private rented property contains one or more serious Category 1 hazards as defined by the Housing Health & Safety Rating System and there is no prospect of the issues being remedied in a period of time that the Council considers reasonable.</p> <p>Households living in private rented housing where their conditions give rise to an imminent risk of serious harm, and where the Local Authority has served a Prohibition Order or Emergency Prohibition Order under Part 1 of the Housing Act 2004, and the view of the local authority is that the conditions or circumstances that gave rise to that order cannot be resolved.</p> <p><i>Note: It is for the Council's housing application assessing officer to decide with advice the seriousness of the hazard.</i></p>
	Downsizing to move into housing specific for older people	<p>A resident over the age of 55 who is already living within Sevenoaks District, who needs to downsize and move into older person's specific accommodation within the District for medical, health or wellbeing reasons. See Section 4.2 for details.</p>
	Members of the Armed Forces	<p>Members of the Armed Forces persons who are serving in the regular forces who will be discharged within three months and have served for five years preceding their application for an allocation of housing accommodation. In line with Section 4.1 of this Policy.</p>
	Hardship and Employment	<p>Hardship on support grounds: Applicants that have demonstrable evidence that they provide or receive substantial and on-going support to or from relatives or</p>

Banding A-D	Criteria	Housing Need - Full Description
		<p>friends and need to move in order to deliver that support as detailed in Section 3.1 This will only be considered where there are significant medical or welfare issues including grounds relating to disability.</p> <p>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 and need to move in order to take up this employment, as detailed in Section 3.2. They will only be considered where they do not live within a reasonable commuting distance. In line with Section 3.5 (Right to Move) of this Policy and includes Local Key/Essential Workers (as defined in the District's Local Plan).</p>
Band C Medium Priority to Move	Made and eligible for homeless application but not in priority need	<p>An applicant where a decision on their Homeless Application to Sevenoaks Council is that they are eligible, homeless but not in priority need.</p> <p><i>Note: For this award to continue the applicant must still be homeless whilst on the register and still be homeless at the point of any offer.</i></p>
	No or shared access to facilities essential to health and wellbeing	<p>Applicants without access to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A bathroom/shower room within the building in which they live. • A WC within the building in which they live. • Hot or cold water supplies, electricity, gas or heating. <p>(Note: Applicants who have access to shared facilities in shared accommodation will not qualify under these criteria).</p>
	Non-successor tenant with no priority need	<p>A tenant of one of the SDHR Partners including Housing Providers/Housing Associations, where the social landlord requires the person to move due to irregular occupation of a social property as a non-successor who is not considered to be in priority need as defined by the Housing Act 1996 (as amended).</p>
	Homeless households in Temporary Accommodation (TA) under 6 months	<p>Homeless households owed a full homeless duty by Sevenoaks Council under section 193 (2) of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) and have been accommodated in temporary accommodation for a period of less than six months- <i>note these applicants might be made a direct offer in any area that is suitable.</i></p> <p>The Council may bid on properties, on behalf of applicants in this category as part of the Council's main Homelessness Duty. The refusal of one suitable and reasonable offer will apply, see Section 10.1 for full details.</p>
	Parental eviction - unable to remain at home for 12	<p>A priority need household as defined by the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) who has been asked to leave the parental home and is unable to remain for a further</p>

Banding A-D	Criteria	Housing Need - Full Description
	months	minimum of 12 months.
	Rough sleepers (verified)	Applicants where it has been verified by the Council that they are rough sleeping in the Sevenoaks District and meet the local connection rules.
	Overcrowding with no priority need	Households who are overcrowded as defined by the Bedroom Standard under section 4.8 of the Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England with no priority need (as defined by the Housing Act 1996 (as amended)). This can include applicants in social housing or a private rental property, both with no priority need.
	Intentionally homeless	<p>An applicant where a decision on their Homeless Application to Sevenoaks Council is that they are eligible, homeless, in priority need but are intentionally homeless.</p> <p><i>Note: This award will only be for the period that the Council is under an intentional homeless duty. This is normally for 1 month, being the period that under this duty a household that is intentionally homeless is owed an advice and temporary accommodation duty.</i></p>
	Non critical or serious Medical, Welfare or Disability needs	<p>Applicants with a medical condition, welfare need, or disability that is affected significantly by their housing circumstances but not at a critical or serious impact level</p> <p>OR The applicant needs to move to give or receive essential care and/or support to a close family member for the foreseeable future. As defined, in section 3.1 Local Connection criteria.</p> <p><i>Note: An award of Band C medical or Welfare or disability priority can be assessed and verified by the assessing officer and will not normally need to be assessed by the Social and Welfare Panel (See Appendix 4 for full details).</i></p> <p>Note: A case may be referred to an independent medical advisor for advice if appropriate.</p>
	No access to a kitchen	<p>Applicants without access to a kitchen.</p> <p>Note: Applicants who have access to shared kitchen facilities in shared accommodation will not qualify under this criterion.</p>
Band D: Low Priority to Move	Over 55 years old who want housing specific for older people	Applicants aged 55 years and over who want to move into sheltered housing, or other housing specifically designated for this age group, and have an identified housing and/or social need to move. This includes older people needing to move to be closer to family and/or social networks and therefore this qualifies the applicant for a local connection.
	Making a considerable community contribution	Applicants who have a qualifying local connection of 'making a considerable community contribution' and who meet the financial limits, but who do not have a housing need recognised in the other priority bands.
	Need to share	Applicants who need to share a kitchen, bathroom, WC or

Banding A-D	Criteria	Housing Need - Full Description
	kitchen, bathroom, WC or living room	<p>living room with people who are not part of their household.</p> <p>This could, for example, be a young couple or adult “children” who wish to set up their own home but circumstances require them to continue living in their family home or live in a house in multiple occupation with all or some shared facilities re the bathroom, kitchen and toilet.</p>
	Not currently suitably/adequately housed	Applicants who are not currently suitably/adequately housed. For example, a couple who wish to establish their first independent home together but have low priority need to move.
	Banding reduced for a period of time	The Council has the right to reduce an applicant’s priority under its allocation scheme. Example reasons for this may include, but are not limited to a change in circumstances, failure to bid or not accepting the agreed amount of reasonable offers or fails to provide documentary evidence to support a higher priority banding.
	Rural Exception Site Housing with a Parish connection	Applicants who have been accepted onto the Housing Register as they meet the criteria and definition of local parish connection for Rural Exceptions Site properties. This includes where applicants do not meet the Allocation Policy local connection criteria. See Section 3.6 for full details.

Please Note: Applicants who can demonstrate more than one type of housing need will be placed in the highest Band that applies.

15. Appendix 3 - Documents required for Housing Register application

Proof of an applicant's identity, current address, household details and finances are required before the application can be accepted onto the Housing Register to verify the information provided.

Applicants have 28 days from the date of the original application to provide all the documents. If we do not receive them within this time period, the application will be incomplete and will be removed. Once all information has been supplied, please allow a further four weeks for the Council to process the application. Once the assessment has been completed, the Council will contact the applicant with the outcome or to require further information/documents.

This list include, but not limited to, the following documents requirements:

Required documents	Examples
Proof of identity At least one proof of identity must include a photograph	Birth certificate Valid Passport
Current proof of residence One of the following for each person aged over 16 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rent card/book • Recent bill or credit payment book for gas, electricity, water supply or telephone • Confirmation from Employer or DSS • Tenancy Agreement • Full UK driving licence • Council tax bill • Notice to quit, Section 21 or Property repossession order if applicable
If the applicant is a Council or Housing Association tenant	Copy of the tenancy agreement
Proof of Income All of these are relevant for each member of the household over 16 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Last three months' wage slips (or 13 weeks if paid weekly) or latest tax return if self employed • Proof of all benefits received i.e. income support, DLA, etc. • Disbursement details (if there has/will be a house sale in last 3 years)
Proof of Financial details	<p>The most recent three months' full bank statements for every account held by each person aged over 16 years. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bank, building society, savings and post office accounts. <p>Each statement <u>must</u> show all transactions with account and applicant details clearly visible. Therefore summary statements, screen shots or balance sheets may not be accepted. Further evidence may be</p>

	required.
Proof of any other assets held	<p>Copies of other assets including stocks, shares and bonds - including any assets owned outside the UK.</p> <p>A current valuation of any property owed including outside the UK.</p>
Proof of income from child benefits or equivalent	<p>Children living with the applicant - Proof of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child benefit • Child Tax and Working Tax Credits • Custody or Residence Order • A letter from a Solicitors confirming that they acted for the applicant in relation to a dispute regarding custody/ residence of children & how it was resolved • Confirmation from DSS or Social Services
Maternity Certificate	<p>If pregnant, a copy of the Maternity Certificate (MAT B1) which a doctor/midwife will provide at the 26 weeks pregnant stage.</p>

Appendix 4 - Social and Welfare Priority Assessment Panel

The purpose and frequency of the Panel

Social and Welfare Panel is able to consider and make decisions on applications, exemptions and banding when information on the application does not clearly fit within the assessment criteria, and additional social and/or welfare priorities may be taken into account.

The Panel meets as required to consider the supporting evidence and documentation provided by a relevant support worker or professional (this may include Housing Officer, Social Worker, Education Welfare Officer etc.) to consider urgent social and welfare priorities. Any evidence will be sent to Panel representatives in advance for consideration.

Panel Representatives

The Panel will consist of the following representatives:

- Sevenoaks District Council - Senior representative with responsibility for Housing;
- Housing provider/landlord - A housing representative dealing with the case;
- Additional members co-opted as and when required.

Panel Process

A written assessment and supporting evidence is considered by the Panel to establish whether a social and welfare priority should be awarded, as the evidence indicates an exceptional reason for a change in priority banding or housing. **All options for resolving the applicant's difficulties will be considered before any additional priority may be awarded.**

Some examples of social and welfare priority that may be considered by the Panel include:

- Urgent welfare needs in order to deal with child protection issues arising under the Children Act;
- To provide further protection and reduce the risk level to vulnerable adults or children, as the current home could contribute to deteriorate to the household member at risk;
- Where an applicant requires a type of special housing provision such as where additional care or support is required for a long term medical condition or disability;
- Families with a child with medical or behavioural difficulties, which may require an additional bedroom or a particular type of accommodation;
- Requiring additional space to accommodate a carer or to foster/adopt (confirmation in writing will be requested from the relevant County Council or adoption agency);
- The need for rehousing due to irreconcilable neighbour disputes when all other options have been exhausted including mediation etc. This may include acts (or attempted acts) of violence, threats, witnesses of crime, harm, intimidation and harassment.

- Applicant requests for exceptions to this Policy, such as increase affordability due to a change of circumstances (ill health, loss of work etc.) or to alleviate hardship;
- Requests for a transfer or rehousing where there has been a bereavement or personal tragedy in the property or area;
- Applicants that may be excluded from this Policy but where exceptional circumstances need to be considered to establish qualification.

Monitoring and Outcomes

All decisions and reasons for that decision will be recorded and the applicant informed of the decision. Additional evidence or information may be required before the Panel can make a final decision. In exceptional cases, an applicant may be asked to attend the Panel to provide clarification on their case.

A review date will be set (at least annually) to ensure that the priority award remains valid; the applicant at review may be required to re-apply for a Panel assessment. If the applicant has been awarded an ‘urgent need to move’ priority banding is A, they will be removed from the Register if they refuse 1 suitable and reasonable offer which meets the urgent housing needs and is within their preferred locations. Applicants who have been awarded as an urgent priority banding of A will be reviewed on a six monthly basis to see if any help or support is required with bidding and to ensure this urgent priority awarded is still valid and appropriate.

It is the applicant’s responsibility to notify the Council of any changes in their housing and/or social and welfare circumstances to enable priority to be re-assessed. Failure to notification may result in the loss of any priority banding.

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