

Housing for you

South Worcestershire Allocations Policy



Introduction

Housing For You, is the South Worcestershire Allocations scheme and is used to explain how allocations of social housing are made across three Council areas. The areas covered by this policy are:

- Malvern Hills District Council
- Worcester City Council
- Wychavon District Council

These three District Councils work in partnership with Housing Associations to make sure the limited supply of social housing is distributed fairly.

As properties are owned by Housing Associations and not by the District Councils, Housing Associations may also have their own internal policies around who they will let their properties too. This means that households awarded Band 1 may find it difficult to access properties if they do not meet the requirements of the Housing Association's own internal policies.

Below, are a list of Housing Associations we work with to allocate properties (organisational changes may result in changes to this listing):

- Advance
- Anchor Housing
- Bromford Housing Group
- Bromsgrove District Housing Trust
- Citizen Housing
- Community Housing Group
- Cottsway Housing
- Fry Housing
- Greensquare Housing Group
- Housing 21
- Midland Heart
- Muir Housing
- Orbit Housing
- Pershore Alms Houses
- Platform Housing Group
- Rooftop Housing Group
- Sanctuary Housing Group
- Severn Vale Housing
- Stonewater
- Viridian Housing
- Walsall Housing Group

South Worcestershire Partnership- Aims and Objectives

1. To provide a single access point for households in Worcester City, Wychavon and Malvern Hills to make an application for housing.
2. To ensure our application process is efficient and accessible using a range of communication methods which embrace technology (e-mail, texts, social media and through an online portal).
3. To enable households in the partnership area to have a choice of different affordable housing tenure types.
4. To ensure housing is allocated fairly and based on who needs it the most, in line with the South Worcestershire Allocations Policy.
5. To enable Housing Associations to allocate to their homes and create mobility for existing tenants who need to move.
6. To empower customers to work with us and share the responsibility of finding a new home which meets their needs.
7. To ensure the South Worcestershire Allocations Policy is fair, accessible and gives all households an element of choice.
8. To ensure effective use of all affordable housing stock.
9. To ensure that residents are supported to remain in their local area through prioritisation on the Housing Register.



What is an Allocations Policy?

The Housing Act (1996) as amended, requires Local Authorities to make all allocations and nominations in accordance with an Allocations Scheme. A summary of the Scheme must be published and made available free of charge to anyone who asks for a copy.

The South Worcestershire Allocations Policy sets out the qualifying and eligibility criteria for Housing For You and specifically, how households are prioritised according to their needs. It sets out in detail who can or cannot be accepted under the policy and how this assessment is made. It also sets out how applicants can apply for and access affordable housing.

The policy complies with the requirements of the Housing Act (1996) as amended, making sure that reasonable preference is given to households with specific housing needs. This policy also takes in to consideration the Localism Act (2011) and the Equalities Act (2010). The South Worcestershire partnership are committed to provide all households an element of choice in where they live.

A copy of the policy is published on each Council's website, alongside advice on how to apply for Housing For You.

Housing For You may also be used to advertise intermediate market rent, shared ownership and privately rented properties. Please see the eligibility criteria of the relevant landlord for more details regarding the allocation of these types of properties.

What Is an Allocation?

An allocation is the nomination of an applicant or existing tenant to be an Assured or an Assured Shorthold tenant of a Housing Association.

This may include a 'starter tenancy' where an Assured Shorthold Tenancy is offered by a Housing Association for a set probationary period, usually twelve months, which if the tenant successfully completes the given period, the landlord will grant a further fixed term tenancy or an assured tenancy.

Exempt Allocations

The following are not considered allocations under this Policy (covered by Section 160 Housing Act 1996):

10. Succession to a tenancy on a tenant's death pursuant to S89 Housing Act 1985 and S17 Housing Act 1988. This will be dealt with by the landlord under the relevant legislation and policies.
11. Assignment of a tenancy by way of a mutual exchange.
12. Transfer of the tenancy by a court order under family law provisions or under the Civic Partnership Act 2004.
13. An introductory tenancy (including assured shorthold) becoming an assured / secure tenancy.
14. Transfers initiated by the Housing Association e.g. decant to alternative accommodation to allow for major works.
15. Provision of non-secure temporary accommodation in discharge of a homelessness duty or power.
16. Supported accommodation such as a Foyer.
17. Where a property is required for a 'direct match'
18. Extra Care and Very Sheltered accommodation.
19. Changes to joint tenancies which may include the granting of a new tenancy through changes from a sole to joint tenancy and from a joint to a sole tenancy.
20. Households requiring a move through the Witness Protection Scheme, or similar, at the formal request of the appropriate authority.
21. Some adapted properties with significant adaptations that may be direct matched to an appropriate applicant.

Partnership Commitment

The Partnership commits:

22. To ensure that the South Worcestershire Allocations Policy is legally compliant and accessible.
23. To ensure households are equipped with the right information to enable them to apply for Housing For You.
24. To ensure Housing For You is user friendly, accessible and sensitive to the needs of customers.
25. To be responsive to applicants' needs and to set timescales for key activities/actions.
26. To provide consistent quality housing advice for applicants.

Customer Commitment

Households who are applying to Housing For You are required to do the following things:

27. Provide full details of their housing needs at the point of application.
28. Respond to requests for information or action within an agreed time.
29. Provide accurate information that is truthful to the best of their knowledge.
30. Advise of any changes in circumstances within an agreed time.
31. Apply for housing using the on-line facility***
32. Households who require support to use Housing For You online, should contact the relevant District Council who will advise on possible options for support.
33. Actively and responsibly bid for vacancies.
34. Discuss with the Local Authority or their agents any proposed decision to refuse an offer of suitable accommodation to enable the consequences to be clearly understood.
35. Engage with any tenancy ready scheme that is offered (if applicable)
36. Ensure information is not deliberately withheld, particularly information that may be relevant to the application.
37. Actively participate in the scheme as an application will be removed after 12 months if no bidding has taken place.

If you are an existing tenant of a Housing Association applicants who want to apply for a transfer will also need to commit to:

38. Make sure the transfer standard of your Landlord is upheld (please refer to your landlord's website).
39. Keeping your home in good condition, including your garden and any outbuildings.
40. Maintaining your rent account up to date including rent, repairs and any court costs.



Service Standards

In delivering Housing For You, the partners aim to:

41. Advise all applicants who are ineligible for the Housing Register, within 10 working days of receipt of their application.
42. Register all eligible applications within 10 working days of receipt where all the required information has been provided.
43. Send out further requests for additional information within 10 working days of registration.
44. Respond to telephone calls or voicemails within 3 working days.
45. Respond to applicant's letters or letters from professionals within 7 working days of receipt.
46. Respond to applicant emails or messages within 3 working days.
47. Produce a shortlist for properties within 10 working days of the end of an advertising cycle.
48. Advise applicants who are excluded by a landlord when shortlisting within 10 working days of the reason(s) for the exclusion and their rights of appeal.
49. Respond to requests for a banding or eligibility review within 28 working days.
50. Provide feedback to applicants via the customer portal on whether they have been successful or where a property has been withdrawn.

Requirements of applicants:

51. Speak to us in a polite and courteous manner.
52. Provide us with the information we need within the timescale set so that we can help you.
53. Contact us if you are unable to keep an appointment(s).
54. Tell us about any changes in your circumstances that may affect your banding or the service we provide to you, within 14 days of the change happening.
55. Actively bid for properties during each bidding cycle (where suitable properties are available).
56. If you are dissatisfied with the service you have received that you let us know.
57. If you are satisfied with the service you have received that you let us know.



Statement of Choice

Housing For You aims to provide the greatest choice possible for applicants but it is important that all eligible applicants are prioritised as the number of housing applications exceeds the number of homes that become available for letting. The provision of choice has to be balanced alongside local needs and housing provision.

Applicants will have the opportunity to view the adverts for all the properties that they are eligible for. Some landlords may also offer the opportunity to view the property before the applicant makes a decision on whether to accept an offer or not. If an applicant wishes to decline an offer of accommodation it is vital that they speak to their relevant Housing Options Team before doing so as it may affect their banding or timescales for an offer of alternative accommodation.

In the following situations, choice may be restricted for applicants:

58. Where the applicant is not eligible for a particular property.
59. Where a local lettings plan has been agreed and the applicant does not qualify.
60. Where a criminal conviction determines unsuitability for an area or neighbourhood as determined and set out in licence conditions.
61. Where there is a legal agreement restricting who can be offered the property e.g. preference to those with a local connection to a parish or other defined area – a Section 106 agreement.
62. Where there are particular additional needs for an applicant such as an adapted home or as a result of an emergency such as a fire or flood which has rendered their current home uninhabitable.

It is important that applicants understand how social housing is allocated in our area and for us to be able to demonstrate that the allocations scheme is fair. We will collect and publish accurate, up to date and anonymised information on waiting list applicants and the lettings outcomes.

Anonymised data from the allocations scheme may be used to identify where there is a need for more affordable housing within each Council area. This information will be used to support a development programme for additional affordable housing.

Eligibility and Qualifying Criteria

People from Abroad

To be considered eligible for Housing For You, applicants must have the right to live in the UK and be entitled to claim public funds.

This includes applicants who are British Citizens, EEA Nationals (generally those who are working) and those with indefinite leave to remain. British Citizens returning from abroad may have to pass a habitual residency test.

As part of the Housing For You application, applicants will be required to provide evidence of their identity and immigration status.

A person from abroad (or two or more persons jointly) is ineligible for an allocation of social housing if they are subject to immigration control within the meaning of the Asylum and Immigration Act (1996), or are excluded from entitlement to Housing Benefit by merit of S.115 of the Immigration and Asylum Act (1999) (c33) (exclusion from benefits) unless they are of a class prescribed by regulations made by the Secretary of State.

Persons who are subject to immigration control but are eligible for housing assistance are:

63. Applicants who have refugee status.
64. Applicants who have exceptional leave to remain.
65. Applicants who have indefinite leave to remain.
66. Applicants who have been awarded Settled Status.

This does not apply to a person who is already a secure or introductory tenant of a Council or Registered Provider.

Applicants who have been considered as ineligible due to their immigration status can re-apply at any time if their status changes.

If an applicant has any further questions regarding their status, they should speak to the Housing Options Team or seek independent legal advice.

When considering eligibility on the grounds of living in a District Council area the following will not be included:

67. Occupation of a mobile home or caravan or motor home where it is not an applicants main or principal home.
68. Occupation of a holiday letting for the purposes of a holiday.
69. A stay in prison, bail hostel or other such accommodation.
70. In-patient of a hospital/specialist centre where a connection exists elsewhere.

Unacceptable Behaviour

If an applicant or member of their household has engaged or participated in anti-social or unacceptable behaviour that would have been considered serious enough for the applicant to be evicted from a Housing Association tenancy, they will be ineligible for Housing For You.

Unacceptable behaviour is defined as 'behaviour, which would, if an applicant or member of their household was a secure tenant, entitle a landlord to outright possession under any of the Grounds 1 to 7, Schedule 2 of the Housing Act (1985).

Examples of unacceptable behaviour may include:

71. Conviction for using the property for an illegal or immoral purpose.
72. Abusive, threatening or violent behaviour that has caused intimidation or harm to staff, neighbours, visitors or other household members.
73. Causing deliberate damage to the property that has resulted in financial loss or the Landlord or responsible Agent.

This list is not exclusive.

Where households do not qualify for Housing For You due to unacceptable behaviour, they have a right to review of this decision and should contact the relevant Housing Options Team to progress this.

All households who do not qualify due to unacceptable behaviour, will be able to re-apply 6 months after their initial application and will qualify if they are able to evidence a behavioural change during this period.

A household may be rendered ineligible at any time during the application process should the relevant authority be made aware of unacceptable behaviour. A full written explanation for the decision will be issued to the household and will provide information about their right to review.

Income

Households who have a gross household income including benefits of more than £38,000 (per annum) will not be eligible to join the register.

Households who have assets, equity, savings or capital of over £60,000 and are assessed as able to compete in the private market will also not be eligible.

However, if a household is in receipt of a pension or fixed income where they are unable to obtain a mortgage, they would be allowed equity, savings or capital of up to £95,000. The savings etc. of all adult members of the household should be taken into account.

If financial circumstances change or worsen, households will be able to re-apply for the Housing Register at any time.

The financial resources of an Armed Forces applicant will be disregarded where it is a lump sum that was received as compensation for an injury or disability sustained on active service.

Please be advised that Registered Provider Landlords may also set their own thresholds for income and capital which you will need to have regard to. Further information can be obtained from the landlords direct.

Age

Any person aged 16 years or over can apply to join Housing for You. Housing Associations may decide to request a guarantor for both rent and repairs for customers under the age of 18 where they will be the lead tenant.

The landlord will only be able to offer an equitable tenancy to an applicant under the age of 18, as they are unable to legally hold a full tenancy. Please seek further advice on this from your Housing Options Team.



Local Connection

Households who cannot demonstrate a local connection to the partnership area (Wychavon, Malvern Hills or Worcester City) will not qualify for Housing For You.

Whilst a local connection to the partnership area (Wychavon, Malvern Hills or Worcester City) will enable applicants to join Housing For You, offers of accommodation will only be made when there is a local connection to the specific district area. This ensures applicants who have a local connection to their specific district are prioritised for offers of accommodation.

The local connection criteria for South Worcestershire are set out below:

- The applicant or joint applicant must have lived in the partnership area for 6 months out of the last 12 months. The residency must have been of choice and settled; time spent in prison or accommodation that was casual in nature does not qualify as a local connection.

- The applicant or joint applicant must have lived in the partnership area for 3 out of the last 5 years. The residency must have been of choice and settled; time spent in prison or accommodation that was casual in nature does not qualify as a local connection.
- The applicant or joint applicant must have permanent paid employment in the partnership area and this must be over 16 hours per week.
- The applicant or joint applicant must have an immediate family living in the partnership area for a minimum period of 5 years immediately prior to the application being made (immediate family is defined as parent/step parent, foster carer, sibling, adult child).

There are some exceptions to this, please see list below for clarification:

- Applicants who are considered statutorily homeless under the Housing Act (1996), as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017)
- Applicants with a reasonable preference under the Housing Act (1985)
- Applicants who need to move to the partnership area (Wychavon, Malvern Hills or Worcester City) to give or receive care from an immediate family member
- Applicants who are being accommodated as part of a reciprocal arrangement with another Local Authority
- Applicants where relocation into the partnership area (Wychavon, Malvern Hills or Worcester City) is accepted by the local authority as being essential due to public protection.
- Victims of Domestic Abuse who cannot safely reside in the area in which they have an established local connection
- Members of the UK regular or reservist Armed Forces stationed abroad will be considered as living in the United Kingdom for the purposes of applying for social housing.
- Persons who are serving in the regular or reservist Armed Forces or have done so in the last five years preceding their application for an allocation of housing
- Bereaved spouses or civil partners of those serving in the regular or reservist forces where their spouse or partner's death attributable (wholly or partly) to their service and the bereaved spouse or partner's entitlement to reside in Ministry of Defence accommodation then ceases. This includes divorced or separated spouses of the above who need to leave Ministry of Defence accommodation following a relationship breakdown



- Seriously injured, ill or disabled regular or reservists armed forces or previous members of the reservist or regular armed forces, whose injury, illness or disability is attributable (wholly or partly) to their service
- Applicants who need to move to the area for a special or exceptional reason. This must be agreed by the relevant Senior Officer within the relevant District
- Care Leavers will have a local connection with the area of the local authority that owes them a leaving care duty. Care Leavers owed a duty by Worcestershire County Council, will have a local connection to all three districts in the partnership area

(A care leaver aged under 21 who normally lives in a different local authority area, for example: receives care from Worcestershire County Council, but lives outside of their area, and has done for at least 2 years including sometime before they turned 16 will have a connection to that area as well).

Section 106 Sites

Where an applicant meets the eligibility, criteria established in the section 106 agreement they should already have met the local connection eligibility criteria for the district and be registered for Housing For You.

Bedroom Need

If you qualify to join Housing For You, your household make up will determine the size of accommodation you may be considered for. Households who are under occupying or overcrowded must meet the specific guidelines.

To ensure Housing Options Teams calculate the bedroom need appropriately, the following guidance will be utilised:

- 2 children of the same sex are able to share a room until the eldest reaches the age of 16, at which point an additional bedroom will be required
- 2 children of different sex are able to share a room until the eldest reaches the age of 10, at which point an additional bedroom will be required

Household Make-Up	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed
Single Person	X		
Childless Couple	X		
Parent(s) & 1 Child		X	
25+ weeks pregnant woman with or without partner and no other children		X	
Parent(s) and 2 children of same sex aged between 0 and 16		X	
Parent(s) and 2 children of same sex over the age of 16			X
Parent(s) and 2 children of different sexes under the age of 10		X	
Parent(s) and 2 children of different sexes when the oldest reaches 10			X
Parent(s) and 3 children – 2 of the same sex aged between 0 and 16, plus one other child			X
Parent(s) and 3 children – 2 of different sex under the age of 10, plus one other child			X



Non-Resident Children

Anyone with access to children will need to demonstrate their involvement and the care and supervision of the child.

A Senior Officer within the Local Authority will give consideration to factors including regularity of contact, who claims the relevant benefits for the child and any residency orders as well as legislation, codes of guidance and case law in determining which parent has primary responsibility for the children.

Therefore, unless there is an exceptional circumstance, we would unlikely to provide family accommodation where they are not the primary carer for the child, even if they have 50% access rights to their child.

Exceptional Circumstances

There will be exceptional situations where a Senior Officer may exercise discretion in deviating from the bedroom standard.

Where a child is entitled to the care component of DLA/ PIP at the highest or middle rate and by reason of their disability means they are unable to share a bedroom with another child they may be treated as an exception to the bedroom requirements. Similarly, where there is a carer within the household, they cannot share a bedroom.

Households that include other adults rather than children may find it difficult to obtain social housing where they require larger properties. Normally houses are allocated only to families with children, as priority is given to those with dependent children.



Property Type

Housing For You advertises a wide variety of accommodation types. Houses will be prioritised for applicants who are residing with dependent children as part of their household.

Bungalow accommodation may also have specific priorities attached; for example, most bungalows will require at least one member of the household to be 60 years of age or over. However, Housing Associations may accept customers who have one member of their household in receipt of Personal Independence Payment or high rate Disability Living Allowance.

Reasonable Preference Criteria

Housing For You is required by law to assess the relative priority for housing applicants. Legislation requires Local Authorities to give 'reasonable preference' to specific groups of people, as set out in the Housing Act (1996). These groups include:

- 74. Households who are considered homeless or threatened with homelessness in line with the Housing Act (1996) as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017).
- 75. People occupying unsanitary, overcrowded or otherwise unsatisfactory housing conditions.
- 76. People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds (including grounds relating to disability).
- 77. People who need to move to a locality to avoid hardship to themselves or others.

This Allocations Policy sets out the basis on which priority will be awarded based on the above preferred preference criteria, and other factors. Housing For You determines priority between applicants in each band taking into account the length of time the applicant has been waiting within their current band.



Application and Assessment

You can apply to join the scheme online at <https://worchester-wychavon-malvern.housingjigsaw.co.uk>

All applications will be administered online through the customer portal. If customers are experiencing difficulties making an online application, the Housing Options Team can be contacted and will advise on the support available. This may include a telephone or face to face appointment with the Housing Options team, or a referral to advocacy services for support.

If an applicant does not meet the eligibility or qualifying criteria to join Housing For You, they will be notified in writing, giving clear reasons and advising on the applicant's right to request a review of the decision.

Applications will be assessed by the appropriate Housing Options team, in line with supporting evidence provided by the customer. When the registration process has been completed an applicant will be notified of their registration number and banding. If an applicant disputes the band they have been awarded they will be advised of their right of review.

Banding Structure

Housing For You provides a needs based banding system with the highest band indicating the greatest need for housing. The bands within the policy are based on the reasonable preference criteria as set out above.

Banding	Description
<p>Band 1 Priority</p> <p>This banding will be under continual review.</p> <p>Applicants within this band must actively make bids and make sure bids are being placed on suitable properties which become available.</p> <p>Failure to apply bids will result in bids being placed by the Housing Options Team on behalf of the applicant and may lead to a reduction of priority on the housing register.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applicants who have been placed in Temporary Accommodation or are owed the s.188 interim accommodation duty and are owed the Relief Duty. The household must be actively engaging with the Local Authority to relieve their homelessness and be working to achieve the agreed actions within their personal housing plan. Applicants who are threatened with homelessness within 56 days and a member of the household has specific needs. The household must be actively engaging with the Local Authority to prevent their homelessness and be working to achieve the agreed actions within their personal housing plan. <p>Specific needs may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pregnancy/dependent children Diagnosed with significant physical health needs Diagnosed with significant mental health needs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applicants who statutorily homeless with a duty to re-house under section 193 of the Housing Act 1996 (eligible, homeless, priority need, not intentional and with a local connection). The household must be actively engaging with the Local Authority to resolve their homelessness Applicants who have an exceptional need for accommodation where their housing needs are not reflected in the banding policy. This banding would be awarded for a maximum of 3 months. <p>An exceptional need for accommodation may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Urgent medical or welfare need <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applicants who are under occupying properties who wish to downsize to smaller accommodation or if a significantly adapted property is no longer required by the household. This relates to properties where the Landlord is a Registered Provider. This banding will be for a maximum of 3 months before being reassessed. Young people leaving care who are identified as 'tenancy ready'. Registered Provider Landlords will also assess the young person and be satisfied they are 'tenancy ready' and that an ongoing support package is being offered where required. Serving members and former members of the regular and reservist Armed Forces who urgently need to move because they have been diagnosed with a serious mental or physical health condition which is attributable (wholly or partly) to their military service <p>To ensure consistent decision making, we propose that this would be management decision within the relevant Local Authority.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bereaved, divorced or separated spouses or civil partners of members of the regular and reservist Armed Forces who have left or will be leaving services accommodation provided by the Ministry of Defence following the death of their spouse or civil partner and whose death was attributable (wholly or partly) to their military service.

<p>Band 2</p> <p>This band will be awarded for a period of 6 months and will then be subject to review.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applicants who are threatened with homelessness within 56 days and are not included in band 1. Applicant must be actively engaging with the Local Authority through a personal housing plan to resolve their homelessness. Applicants who are owed the Relief Duty but are not owed a duty under s188 and not included in Band 1. Applicant must be actively engaging with the Council through their personal housing plan to resolve their homelessness. Applicants who have been assessed as ready to move on from supported accommodation. Applicants who are homeless where there is no statutory duty to re-house (exclude intentionally homelessness). <p>That the applicant is ready to move to independent settled accommodation and is 'tenancy ready'. Evidence must be provided of the programmes undertaken in readiness for independent living and the outcomes achieved. That an ongoing support package has been assessed and is in place.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applicants who are living in a property that has become unsuitable due to medical need or illness including where a home cannot be adapted to meet the needs of the customer. Applicants who have expressed that they have medical need, will be directed to complete a Medical Assessment form and provide supporting evidence from a medical professional. Applicants who are experiencing severe overcrowding (2 or more bedrooms short). Applicants who are overcrowded (1 bedroom short) and whose household includes children under 10 years old living in a flat with no access to a private garden.
<p>Band 3</p> <p>This band will be awarded for 12 months and then will be subject to review.</p> <p>Households who meet 2 or more criterion in Band 3 will be awarded Band 2.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applicants who are moving to receive or provide care, either as an occupation or to relieve hardship. Applicants who are living in disrepair or unsuitable accommodation. <p>The property will be inspected and assessed by the Property Standards Officers. The applicants must have tried to resolve the issue with the Landlord. Properties that are assessed as having category 1 or category 2 hazards will be placed in band 3.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applicants who have been determined by the Local Authority to be Intentionally Homeless under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996. Applicants who are experiencing overcrowding (1 bedroom short).



<p>Band 4</p> <p>This band will be awarded for 6 months and will then be subject to review</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicants who were in Band, 2 or 3 but failed to bid on any suitable properties within the last 6 months or successfully bid but then refused a property on more than one occasion which would have been suitable to meet their needs. • Applicants who own their own home and financial resources available to them to meet their housing need. • Applicants who are within the income threshold to be eligible to join the register but have sufficient financial resources and/or own their own property. • Applicants in band 1 or 2 who are not working with the Local Authority to achieve the actions in the Personal Housing Plan. • Applicants who have deliberately worsened their circumstances to qualify for a higher band or deliberately moved into a property that was unsuitable and as a result qualify for a higher band. <p>This would include circumstances where an applicant surrendered their tenancy when it was reasonable to continue to occupy and / or against the advice of the Housing Options Team or where they moved to a property that was smaller than their requirements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicants with housing related debts <p>This applies where debts have arisen from a deliberate act or omission and exceeds £500.</p> <p>Applicants will be encouraged to make an affordable arrangement for repayment.</p>
<p>Band 5</p> <p>This band is for any other eligible applicants.</p>	<p>Examples of where this will apply include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Households who do not meet any of the above banding criteria.



Waiting Time

Households will be prioritised based on the band they have been awarded and the date the award was made. Households who are re-registering for Housing For You, having previously made an application to Home Choice Plus, will keep their band start date as long as they make their application within the first 6 weeks of the re-registration process. The banding structure (above) differs from the current policy so households who apply to Housing For You are not guaranteed to be awarded the corresponding band.

Applications will be shortlisted in line with the band structure and based on the amount of the time the applicant has been awarded the band for. Any changes to the band award will initiate a new band start date and will impact the waiting time.

There may be circumstances where key groups will be awarded additional preference, including additional waiting time being applied to their band start date. This applies to members and former members of the regular or reservist armed forces, if there is no evidence of dishonourable discharge.



Banding Reviews

All bands are awarded on a time limited basis and at the end of the time limit (other than homelessness, Band 1), if an applicant has not been successfully housed, the Local Authority will reassess the application. This may require applicants to complete a new on-line application form and provide additional evidence. The review should take no more than 28 working days and may result in a change of banding. If an applicant is asked to provide a new form or evidence and fails to do so, their application may be closed.

Following a review of applications in the reduced priority band then where conditions have been met an applicant maybe promoted to a higher band dependent on their circumstances and the band start date will be back dated to the date they were originally placed in the reduced priority band.

Where applicants are awarded a specific band, they are entitled to a review of the original decision. Reviews are carried out by Senior Housing Options Officers within 28 days of receipt of the requests. Requests should be submitted, clearly explaining the reasons why the decision is being disputed and what the desired outcome might be.

Change in Circumstances

All applicants are required to notify the Local Authority of any change to their circumstances that may affect their priority for housing. Applicants will need to notify the Local Authority within 14 working days of the change and to provide any relevant evidence to support this. Bandings will be re-assessed from the date the Local Authority becomes aware of the change, and this will determine the band start date.

Applying for a property and lettings

1. Once applicants have registered online, applicants will be provided with their own login details. They will be able to access Housing For You independently to look for available properties to bid on.
2. Housing Associations will advertise their properties on Housing For You; adverts will include the location of the property, property type, property size, rental obligations and any specific eligibility criteria attached to the property.
3. Applicants will make bids online, directly through the Housing For You system. If assistance is required to make appropriate bids, applicants should contact the relevant Local Authority for support.
4. Properties will be available to bid for one week from the point of advertisement; the time the bid is placed during the week doesn't make a difference to the shortlist position. There is no restriction or limitation on the number of bids a customer can place each week if they are placed on suitable properties and match the advertisement criteria.
5. Applicants who appear on the top of more than one shortlist will be contacted to discuss the most suitable offer. This will consider customer preference, as well timescales in which the property will be available to let.
6. Applicants who are not offered the property will be given a reason directly by the Housing Association. This will not affect the customer's band award or ability to bid.
7. Staff, Board Members and Co-optees will be treated and assessed in the same way as any other applicant.





Refusing Offers of Accommodation

1. Households are expected to take reasonable care when bidding for a property to ensure it meets their needs. Households who choose properties to bid on will be expected to accept the offer if it is suitable.
2. Applicants who wish to refuse an offer of accommodation must contact the relevant Council straight away. The Council will then advise whether they would consider refusing the offer reasonable and any potential impact on the band award.
3. Applicants who refuse an offer of accommodation that is deemed by the Council to be suitable, will in normal circumstances face a reduction in their band award.
4. Applicants who refuse an offer of accommodation and the Council deems the refusal to be reasonable, will keep their original band award and will be awarded a further offer of accommodation.

Exempt Allocations

The following exempt allocations are covered by s160, Housing Act 1996; The following are not allocations under this Policy:

- Succession to a tenancy on a tenant's death pursuant to s89 Housing Act 1985 and s17 Housing Act 1988 (this will be dealt with by the landlord under the relevant legislation and policies)
- Assignment of a tenancy by way of mutual exchange
- Transfer of the tenancy by a court order under family law provisions or under the Civil Partnership Act 2004
- An introductory tenancy (including assured shorthold) becoming an assured / secure tenancy
- Transfers initiated by Council / Housing Associations (e.g. decant to alternative accommodation to allow for major works)
- Rehousing due to being displaced from previous accommodation by a Council or being rehoused by a Council pursuant to the Land Compensation Act 1973

The following allocations are deemed to be exempt as, although they may consider this allocation policy to some extent, they also require different decision-making processes and criteria in making assessments and rehousing the applicant:

- A person being granted a family intervention tenancy.
- Provision of non-secure temporary accommodation in discharge of any homelessness duty or power.
- Supported accommodation.
- Where a Housing Association needs to directly match a property (more details regarding this are included later in this policy).
- Some Extra Care and Very Sheltered accommodation.
- Changes to joint tenancies which will include the granting of a new tenancy through changes from a sole to a joint tenancy and from a joint to a sole tenancy. The individual Housing Association will decide whether to allow a Joint Tenancy depending on the circumstances of the case.
- Households requiring a move through the Witness Protection Scheme or similar, at the formal request of the appropriate authority.
- Some adapted properties may be held on a separate register specifically for people with disabilities.

Local Lettings Plans

Housing for You will work closely with Housing Associations to ensure they meet the demands of the partnership area. This may, at times include applying additional criteria to properties when they are advertised, some examples of this are below:

1. Local connection criteria to a specific parish or ward.
2. Specific age ranges.
3. Receiving a specific type of benefit or income.
4. Specific cohorts of people- for example, applicants who are working.

This list is not exclusive

The Council and Housing Associations put these plans in place to promote sustainable and balanced communities which are tailored to the needs of the area. These plans may be put in place to protect existing residents or the wider community.

All Local Lettings Plans will be published for transparency. Local Lettings Plans will be agreed by Senior Officer(s) at the relevant Council, in conjunction with Senior Officer(s) at the relevant Housing Association. This will be agreed in accordance with the Equalities Act (2010).

Direct Lets

Housing For You is a Choice Based Lettings system and where possible the partnership will promote choice and control.. There must be special or exceptional circumstances for any direct match, which will be agreed jointly by Senior Officer(s) in the relevant Council and Housing Association. Below are some examples of when direct matching may be considered:

1. Customers who are fleeing abuse or harassment and need to move immediately.
2. Customers who have an urgent medical need and are unable to move due to lack of advertised properties who meet their needs.
3. Customers who may need to be decanted from their current property due to extreme works or refurbishment.

This list is not exclusive.



Selection Process

1. Applicants should note that Housing Associations can exercise discretion regarding who allocate properties to. It is expected that Housing Associations hold internal Allocations Policies in order to protect their stock.
2. Applicants should note that reaching the top shortlist position does not guarantee a property offer if the applicant does not meet the criteria set out in the Housing Association's Allocations Policy.
3. Applicants who have been 'matched' to a property, will be prevented from bidding on any other properties until they have made the decision to accept or refuse the offer of accommodation.
4. Applicants can access each Housing Association's individual policies around Allocations on their individual website. Housing Associations can also be contacted over the telephone and will provide information on their internal processes.

Advert Restrictions

Landlords may apply restrictions to identify suitable applicants and these will always be specified in the advert. Where a property is advertised with certain restrictions, the letting will be made to the bidder who meets the criteria with the earliest band start date in the highest band as with usual lettings. Please see examples below:

1. Under agreements pursuant to Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act (1990)- (as amended) imposing conditions on who can bid – normally a restriction to households with a local connection.
2. Housing Associations may adopt specific lettings criteria in relation to developments or areas in order to address identified problems and to create sustainable and balanced communities.
3. Partner Registered Providers will also be entitled to advertise properties with preference given to their existing tenants to facilitate transfers.

Closing Applications

Applications may be closed for a number of reasons:

1. Applicants may request their application to be closed at any time.
2. Applicants do not complete their application.
3. Applicants do not provide outstanding documents, which are required to active their application.
4. Applicants do not bid within 1 year of making their application, where there have been appropriate properties for them to bid on.
5. Applicants have a change of circumstances which means they no longer meet the qualifying criteria.
6. Applicants who do not respond to a review of their application within an agreed period.

Applicants who may have had a previous application, will be free to join the Housing Register as long as they meet the qualifying criteria.

Equality and Diversity

Our aim is to implement and maintain services which comply with the Equalities Act (2010) and ensure that no potential or current applicant is treated less favourably on the grounds of:

1. Gender
2. Marital Status
3. Race
4. Nationality
5. Ethnic or National Origin
6. Disability
7. Age
8. Sexual Orientation
9. Religion

This list is not exclusive

We aim to ensure that no applicant or potential applicant is disadvantaged by the application of a rule, condition, or requirement, which has a discriminatory effect which cannot be justified by law.

This policy will be subject to periodic equality impact assessments- see Appendix 1



Data Protection

The partnership will ensure compliance with the Data Protection Act (1998) and the General Data Protection Regulation (2016). This means that all information held or requested for the purpose of the Housing For You scheme will be treated in accordance with the above legislation and any subsequent legislation which proceeds this.

We will follow the general principles of this legislation and ensure that customers consent is sought before any information is sought or shared with other agencies.

We will also commit to ensuring that any personal information disclosed is kept confidential and will not be disclosed to any other member of the public. The partnership will be clear and transparent regarding how any information is used and stored and will provide applicants with a copy of any information pertaining to their application, upon request.

Information may be shared about applicants and their history irrespective of whether their consent has been obtained in exceptional circumstances which will include:

- In accordance with the provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (Section 115).
- Where there is a serious threat to the other party's staff or contractors.
- Where information is relevant to the duties of the proposed landlord or support organisation to ensure the health and safety of the applicant, a member of his or her household, or a member of staff.

False Statements or Withholding Information

It is a criminal offence for applicants and/or anyone providing information to this Scheme to make false statements knowingly or recklessly or knowingly withhold reasonably requested information relevant to their application (s171 Housing Act 1996).

This includes but is not limited to information requested on the housing registration form, in response to correspondence at the renewal of the application or relating to any other reassessment of the application. An offence is also committed if a third party provides false information whether at the instigation of the applicant. This would apply at any stage of the application process.

Where there is suspicion or an allegation that a person has either provided false information or has withheld information, the application will be placed under pending status during the investigation and will be excluded from this Allocation Scheme until an outcome is reached.

If the outcome of any investigation is that they did not provide false information or there was no withholding of information or such was not found to be withheld knowingly, then the application will be reinstated from the date of registration meaning the relevant applicant should not suffer prejudice.

However, where the investigation shows that false information was provided on the application form the application will be re-assessed. The applicant may also be liable to prosecution.

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

If it is determined that an applicant directly, or through a person acting on his or her behalf, has given false information or withheld required information it will result in an applicant being removed from the Scheme and deemed Ineligible.

Monitoring and Compliance

The Housing For You Partnership (lead officers) will meet on a quarterly basis to monitor outcomes and discuss any issues arising within the scheme. The Partnership will be represented by a steering group where lead officers with appropriate technical knowledge will monitor the overall compliance of the scheme.

Right to Review

An applicant to the Housing For You scheme has a right to request a review from the relevant Council, if unhappy with any decision (finding of fact) including the following:

- Decisions to exclude from registration
- The level of priority awarded
- The way an application has been processed

This list is not exclusive

Applicants should direct their review request to the appropriate authority within 21 days of the decision being made and communicated to them.

Applicants also have specific rights to information once a review has been requested, including the following:

- The right to be informed of any decision about the facts of their case which has been, or is likely to be taken in account when considering whether an allocation is made to them.
- The right to review any decision which renders an applicant ineligible to join the scheme.

- The right to be informed of any decision in writing once a review has been requested and the specific reasons why the decision has been made
- We will aim to determine the review within 21 working days of the request, or such longer period as may be agreed with the applicant. No further review will be undertaken on the same matter
- Applicants can also seek a judicial review, can make a formal complaint through the Local Authority complaints procedure or can raise the issue with the Local Government Ombudsman
- Reviews will be carried out by a senior member of staff within the relevant Local Authority. An officer who was involved in the original decision will not be involved in any review of the decision.



Complaints

An applicant who is not satisfied with the service that they have received, can register a complaint with their Housing For You partner, by telephone, email, in writing or in person.

All complaints will be acknowledged and investigated. Please refer to the individual partners complaints procedure for details on how to complain and the length of time to consider the complaint. You can ask someone else or an organisation such as Citizens Advice to complain on your behalf.

Feedback on let properties

Housing For You will publish details of the number of bids for each property on the website giving details of the successful applicant's band and their band start date. This feedback will help applicants determine their prospects of success in obtaining housing.

Lettings are monitored by property type and household to demonstrate how the Housing for You partnership meet their various aims and objectives. The Housing for You Partnership will share this information with the Full Partnership on an annual basis and will ensure it is published on the Housing for You website.

Appendix 1 – Housing For You advice and contact points

Malvern Hills

Malvern Hills District Council, Council House, Avenue Road, Malvern, WR14 3AF

Telephone: 01386 565020

Email: housing.needs@wychavon.gov.uk

Website: <https://www.malvern hills.gov.uk/housing/>

Worcester City

Worcester City Council, The Guildhall, High Street, Worcester, WR1 2EY

Telephone: 01905 722233

Email: housing@worcester.gov.uk

Website: www.worcester.gov.uk

Wychavon

Wychavon District Council, Civic Centre, Queen Elizabeth Drive, Pershore, WR10 1PT

Telephone: 01386 565020

Email: housing.needs@wychavon.gov.uk

Website: <https://www.malvern hills.gov.uk/housing/>

Appendix 2 – Housing For You partners contact details

Registered Provider	Address	Phone Number	Email	Website
Advance Housing Trust	2 Witan Way Witney Oxon OX28 6FH	01993 772885	info@advanceuk.org	www.advanceuk.org
Anchor Trust	Milestone Place, 100 Bolton Rd, Bradford, BD1 4DH.	0845 140 2020		www.anchor.org.uk
Bromford Housing Group	1 Venture Court, Broadlands, Wolverhampton, WV10 6TB.	0330 1234 031	customerservices@bromford.co.uk	www.bromfordgroup.co.uk
Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (bdht)	Buntsford Court, Buntsford Gate, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, B60 3DJ	0800 0850 160	info@bdht.co.uk	www.bdht.co.uk
Citizen Housing	Apex 2, Apex Park, Wainwright Road, Worcester WR4 9FN	0300 790 6555		www.citizenhousing.org.uk/
Community Housing	The Community Housing Group, Community House, Stourport Road, Kidderminster, DY11 7QE	0800 169 5454		www.communityhg.com
Cottsway Housing	Cottsway House Avenue Two Witney OX28 4XG	01993 890000	contact@cottsway.co.uk	www.cottsway.co.uk
Fry Housing	43 Rowley Village, Rowley Regis, West Midlands, B65 9AS	0121 559 6406	admin@fryha.org.uk	www.fryha.uk

Registered Provider	Address	Phone Number	Email	Website
Gloucester City Homes	Railway House, Bruton Way, Gloucester, GL1 1DG	01452 424 344	Tenancy.services@gch.co.uk	www.gch.co.uk
GreenSquare Housing Group	GreenSquare, Methuen Park, Chippenham, Wiltshire SN14 0GU	01249 465465	info@greensquaregroup.com	www.greensquaregroup.com
Haig Housing	Alban Dobson House, Green Ln, Morden SM4 5NS	020 8685 5777	enquiries@haighousing.org.uk	https://www.haighousing.org.uk/
Hanover	2 Godwin Street, Bradford, West Yorkshire, BD1 2ST	0800 280 2575	lettings.enquiries@hanover.org.uk	www.hanover.org.uk
Housing 21	The Triangle, Baring Road, Beaconsfield, HP9 2NA.	0370 192 4000	enquiries@housing21.co.uk	www.housing21.co.uk
Legal and General				
Miur Housing	80 Lightfoot Street Hoole, Chester, CH2 3AL	0300 123 1222	info@muir.org.uk	www.muir.org.uk
Optivo Housing Group	Building 1060, Cornforth Drive, Kent Science Park, Sittingbourne, ME9 8PX.	0800 121 60 60		www.optivo.org.uk
Orbit Housing	10 Greenhill Street, Stratford upon Avon, WARCS CV37 6LG	0345 8 500 500	info@orbit.org.uk	www.orbitheartofengland.org.uk
Platform Housing Group	Progress House, Midland Road, Worcester, WR5 1DU	0333 200 7304		www.platformhgwest.com
Rooftop Housing Group	70 High Street, Evesham, Worcestershire, WR11 4YD	0800 0421 800	info@rooftopgroup.org	www.rooftopgroup.org
Sanctuary Housing Group	Sanctuary Midlands, 164 Birmingham Road, West Bromwich, Birmingham, B70 6QG	0800 131 3329	midlands@sanctuary-housing.co.uk	www.sanctuary-group.co.uk
Stonewater Housing Group	Jephson House 1 Stoneleigh Road Blackdown Leamington Spa CV32 6RE	0800 011 6420	blackdown@stonewater.org	www.stonewater.org
Walsall Housing Group	100 Hatherton St, Walsall WS1 1AB	0300 555 6666	enquiries@whgrp.co.uk	