



Public Document Pack STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Council Offices • Ebley Mill • Ebley Wharf • Stroud • GL5 4UB
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25 October 2021

HOUSING COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Housing Committee will be held on **TUESDAY, 2 NOVEMBER 2021** in the Council Chamber, Ebley Mill, Ebley Wharf, Stroud at **7.00 pm**

Kathy O'Leary
Chief Executive

Please Note: The meeting is being held in the Council Chamber at Stroud District Council and will be streamed live on the Council's [YouTube Channel](#). A recording of the meeting will be published onto the [Council's website](#). The whole of the meeting will be recorded except where there are confidential or exempt items, which may need to be considered in the absence of press and public.

Due to current Covid-19 regulations a maximum of 6 members of public will be permitted in the Council Chamber at any one time, if you would like to attend this meeting please contact democratic.services@stroud.gov.uk.

A G E N D A

1. **APOLOGIES**
To receive apologies of absence.
2. **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**
To receive declarations of interest.
3. **MINUTES (Pages 5 - 12)**
To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2021 as a correct record.
4. **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**
The Chair of the Committee will answer questions from members of the public submitted in accordance with the Council's procedures.

DEADLINE FOR RECEIPT OF QUESTIONS Noon on Thursday 28 October 2021

Questions must be submitted to the Chief Executive, Democratic Services, Ebley Mill, Ebley Wharf, Stroud and can be sent by email to democratic.services@stroud.gov.uk

5. **REVISED TENANCY & ESTATES MANAGEMENT POLICY (Pages 13 - 36)**
To effectively manage tenancies and the environment in our communities.
6. **REVISED HOMESSEEKERPLUS ALLOCATIONS POLICY (Pages 37 - 92)**
To seek the Committee's approval for the adoption of the revised HomeseekerPlus Allocations Policy following a consultation exercise.
7. **MOBILITY SCOOTERS POLICY IN COUNCIL PROPERTIES (Pages 93 - 108)**
To inform Housing Committee of a new Mobility Scooters Policy for all users in Stroud District Council Housing.
8. **CORRECTIVE ACTION TO STRENGTHEN THE COUNCIL'S OUT OF HOURS CALL OUT PROVISION (Pages 109 - 118)**
To inform Housing Committee of the corrective action being undertaken to strengthen operational procedures in the management of the Out of Hours Service provision.
9. **VOLUNTEERING POLICY (INDEPENDENT LIVING) (Pages 119 - 132)**
To inform Committee of a new Volunteering Policy for Independent Living to provide a structure for our Volunteers to work within.
10. **PET POLICY (Pages 133 - 146)**
To review the Pet Policy, to cover pets owned by Stroud District Council Tenants.
11. **GLOUCESTERSHIRE AND SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE WARM & WELL PARTNERSHIP RENEWAL (Pages 147 - 150)**
To update members on the Gloucestershire & South Gloucestershire Warm & Well Scheme and to recommend renewal of the partnership for up to a further 5 years.
12. **PROGRESS UPDATE ON KEY ACTION PLANS (CLEANER ESTATES & SERVICE STANDARDS) (Verbal Report)**
To provide a verbal update.
13. **MEMBER REPORTS**
 - (a) Tenant Representatives (Verbal Report)
 - (b) Housing Review Panel Update (Verbal Report)
 - (c) Retrofit/Carbon Reduction Task and Finish Group (Verbal Report)
 - (d) Tenant Engagement and Empowerment Task and Finish Group (Verbal Report)
 - (e) Housing Repairs and Voids Task and Finish Group (Verbal Report)
14. **WORK PROGRAMME (Pages 151 - 152)**
To consider the work programme.
15. **MEMBERS' QUESTIONS**
See Agenda Item 4 for deadlines for submission.

Members of Housing Committee

Councillor Mattie Ross (Chair)

Councillor Paula Baker
Councillor Laurie Davies
Councillor Katrina Davis
Councillor Colin Fryer
Councillor Lindsey Green

Councillor Christopher Jockel (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Nicholas Housden
Councillor Steve Hynd
Councillor Jenny Miles
Councillor Loraine Patrick
Councillor Lucas Schoemaker

Tenant Representatives

Becky Adams

Trish Betteley (Deputy)

Mike Ritcher

Carole Wise (Deputy)

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HOUSING COMMITTEE

14 September 2021

7.00 - 9.00 pm

Council Chamber - SDC

Minutes

Membership

Councillor Mattie Ross (Chair)

Councillor Paula Baker
Councillor Colin Fryer
Councillor Lindsey Green
Councillor Nicholas Housden
Councillor Laurie Davies

* = Absent

Councillor Christopher Jockel (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Steve Hynd
Councillor Jenny Miles
Councillor Loraine Patrick
Councillor Lucas Schoemaker
* Councillor Katrina Davis *

Officers in Attendance

Accountancy Manager
Principal Accountant
Senior Democratic Services &
Elections Officer
Corporate Policy and Governance
Manager

Strategic Director of Communities
Head of Contract Services
Democratic Services & Elections Officer
Head of Housing Services

Other Member(s) in Attendance

Councillors Cornell

Tenant Representatives

Becky Adams
Carole Wise (Deputy)

Mike Richter

HC.14

Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Davis and Davies

HC.15

Declaration of Interests

There were none.

HC.16 **Minutes**

With agreement from Committee it was confirmed that the following would be amended in the minutes:

- HC.005 - resolution should have said 'recommend to council' instead of 'resolved'.
- HC.007 – the last paragraph, second line down should have stated leads instead of needs 'which then leads to overflowing'.

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the meeting held on 8 June 2021 were approved subject to the amendments listed above.

HC.17 **Public Question Time**

There were none.

HC.18 **Members' Questions**

Members questions were submitted. They were answered by the Chair (Refer to the [Council's recording](#) and [Agenda Item 12](#)).

HC.19 **Budget Monitoring 2021/22 - Quarter 1 Report**

The Principal Accountant presented the report to the Committee and summarised the General Fund revenue budget and General Fund Capital Programme positions outlined in Section 3, Table 1 and Section 4, Table 2.

The Principal Accountant summarised the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget position. They stated that there was a projected net overspend of £352k and drew Committees attention to some of the larger variances which included:

- 5.3 showed a loss of income £260k this was due to the higher level of voids
- 5.4 – Supervision and Management £230k underspend due to vacant posts which will fluctuate through the year as positions are filled. The underspend £37k for IT software was also highlighted however the new housing IT system would be due for implementation later in the year.
- 5.5 Repairs and maintenance underspend of £185k.
- Void costs were expected to be higher due to the increase in Council tax.
- £85k overspend in property care mainly due to the use of subcontractors for specialist roles (roofing and drainage).
- Expenditure £52k overspend mostly due to fly-tipping and contaminated waste.
- Independent living and modernisation – £62k overspend this was due to delays caused by Covid-19.

The Principal Accountant also introduced the HRA Capital Programme 2021/22 drawing attention to table 5.

Councillor Miles questioned the increase in payment for voids and empty properties and whether this would be resolved by the last quarter. The Head of Contract services stated it was predicted to be the 1st quarter of the next year before they catch up from the delays caused by Covid. It was explained that the team were doing a lot more in terms of delivery in order to work through the backlog and that they were looking at other options to further increase productivity.

Councillor Schoemaker proposed and Councillor Fryer seconded.

On being put to the vote, the Motion was carried.

RESOLVED To note the outturn forecast for the General Fund and HRA Revenue budgets and Capital programmes for this Committee

HC.20 Options Appraisal - Decarbonisation and Energy Efficiency of Council Housing

The Head of Contract Services introduced the report and explained that retrofit work had already been carried out however the report proposed to increase the speed and level of delivery. A lot of data cleansing work had been completed prior to selecting option two for recommendation. He drew attention to items 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7 in the report which explained the efforts, reasoning and measures observed before concluding with the recommendation. The Head of Contract Services highlighted the importance the decision held in line with the 2030 strategy and informed the Committee that there was another wave of Government investment available, some of which he hoped could be secured for the Stroud District. He explained option two would be a good base to start with and would allow them to build on it further should further funding become available.

Councillor Baker asked for confirmation that option two was the most financially prudent option and that there would be regular reviews for additional funding, she also asked whether they could revert to another option if further funding or opportunities arose. The Head of Contract Services confirmed, that option two was achievable and sustainable and if they could do more they would.

In reply to members' questions over the behavioural and lifestyle changes required to ensure efficiency, the Head of Contract Services explained that the behaviour changes were mentioned in the appendices of the report. This detailed that there had been a post created for a 'tenant liaison carbon reduction officer' to support the tenants through the changes and assist with any behavioural and lifestyle queries they had. He further explained that whilst they would educate the tenants how their changes would make a difference; they could not force a behavioural change.

In response to further questions the Head of Contract Services confirmed that:

- The successful bid mentioned in item 4.2 of the report yielded just over £400,000 funding for the project.
- The decarbonisation project had started 4 years ago in 2017 and would be achievable by 2030.
- The houses with the lowest SAP rating would be completed first.
- An estimated 65 properties wouldn't be able to achieve a SAP C rating however, that didn't mean that they weren't completely thermally insufficient.

Councillor Fryer raised concerns about charging higher rent on new builds and relet. The Head of Contract services explained that the work needed to be done and paid for and that paragraph 2.6 contained a few of the options which could be considered. Grant options were a great way to receive funding however, these were unknown and could not be relied upon for steady income.

Agenda Item 3

2021/22

Councillor Housden asked for confirmation whether CN2030 referred to carbon neutral and if so, was this achievable by 2030. The Head of Contract Services stated that the strategy refers to making the district as carbon neutral as possible and that we needed to play our part in helping to achieve this.

Councillor Jockel enquired as to what the key external factors were which enabled Stroud District Council to achieve full carbon neutrality by 2030. The Head of Contract Services answered with the following:

- Stock and stock type
- Embodied energy to build and maintain new builds
- Income
- Investment.

In response to a question from Councillor Hynd the Head of Contract Services advised that he would collate and circulate the figures regarding carbon savings achieved since the start of the project.

Councillor Housden questioned whether the council had looked at options to set up own their own housing association. The Chair responded that this request had been spoken of on previous occasion and was not popular with the tenants. She stated that tenant engagement was crucial.

Councillor Baker proposed and Councillor Fryer Seconded.

Councillor Hynd expressed his support for the report and advised that it was clear that Members wanted to help decarbonise the housing stock but it needed to be done in a fiscally responsible way which the option put forward in the report allows. Councillor Schoemaker stated that this project needed to be a flagship project with publicity to help a behaviour change throughout the whole district.

On being put to the vote, the Motion was carried unanimously.

- RESOLVED a. Adopt Option 2, that by 2030 the average energy efficiency rating across all Council housing stock will be SAP C and;**
- b. Request the Housing Committee Retrofit Task and Finish Group consider the necessary programme delivery requirements, including tenant consultation and resource scheduling, and report back to committee in December 2021**

HC.21 **Response to the Social Housing White Paper**

The Head of Housing Services introduced the report explaining the paper outlined Stroud District Council's response to the charter for social housing residents shown in Appendix B and that part of the works for the installation of fire alarms and carbon monoxide detectors had already begun. As part of the renewal of the existing smoke detectors, they were being replaced by new combined smoke, heat and carbon monoxide detectors. The Head of Housing Services drew attention to the tenant feedback which ranged from mixed to generally positive. He explained the new task and finish groups covering

2021/22

resident involvement, voids and repairs and energy retrofit had now been set up. He also informed the committee of the newly appointed Change Agent.

The Head of Housing Services spoke of the newly proposed Tenant Representatives and Deputy Tenant Representatives which was a huge step to improve tenant engagement. He further explained there was no timetable for delivery of the Social Housing White Paper and some of the proposals within the report required more engagement, consultation and legislation.

In a response to a question from Councillor Miles the Head of Housing Services advised that they would be looking at the wider district to find what global issues were affecting tenants and that resident engagement would be required.

Questions were taken from Councillor Fryer on the resources and capabilities to provide a services to tenants and deal with any communication issues between tenants and the Council. The Head of Housing Services acknowledged they needed to find a balance between sending officers out on site and having the resources available to answer the phones. He informed the committee that the fit for the future programme was working alongside services to improve call handling. The Head of Housing Services also explained that this was something the new task and finish groups were looking into and they would report back to the Committee with their findings.

In response to Councillor Green, the Head of Housing Services explained the reason the actions in the report hadn't been completed already was due to a large reduction in posts particularly in resident engagement at the council approximately 4 years ago. A lot of extra work was given to the Neighbourhood Management Officers (NMOs) which needed to be re-addressed in order to get them back to being dedicated officers for tenants, which is what the fit for the future programme was doing.

The Head of Housing Services responded to Councillors Patricks' concerns over the Out of Hours service (OOH), he acknowledged the issues that took place last year and advised that the Head of Contract Services had been working hard to ensure the issues had been addressed. The Chair advised that a full enquiry into the OOH service last year had been carried out actions would be taken to rectify the problems.

In response to Councillor Baker, the Head of Housing Services confirmed there were approximately 1000 properties per NMO, each NMO had a fixed patch and that tenants should know who their NMO is so that they contact them with any issues however further work could be done in this area.

Councillor Fryer proposed and Councillor Hynd seconded.

On being put to the vote, the Motion was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED To agree that the Head of Housing Services work with the cross party Resident Involvement Task and Finish group to:

- a) **Draft Stroud District's Tenants Charter**
- b) **Draft Stroud District's Tenant Empowerment and Engagement strategy**
- c) **Coordinate consultation on the proposed Tenant satisfaction measures, and bring recommendations back to this Committee**

HC.22 **Draft Council Plan**

The Chair introduced the report and explained that it was a critical document for the Council as it set out the priorities and objectives for the following 5 years. She explained that the plan was built on three tiers:

- 3 principle priorities which were Environment and Climate Change, Community Resilience and Wellbeing and Economy, Recovery and Regeneration
- Between 5 - 6 Strategic objectives under each of the priorities
- Delivery plan which included the activity the Council would undertake to achieve the objectives.

The Chair informed the committee that the plan had been developed in consultation with all services, the Strategic Leadership Team, lead officers and alliance Members. Each policy committee would also have the opportunity to review it before it was recommended to be ratified at Full Council in October.

In reply to members questions the Accountancy Manager confirmed the difference between Social and Affordable housing and stated that the report was referring to 'affordable' homes which covers all types of affordable homes including Affordable Rent, Social Rent and Shared Ownership.

Councillor Hynd proposed and Councillor Schoemaker seconded.

Councillor Hynd stated the plan was clearly laid out with clear lines of governance. Councillor Shchoemaker advised that it was an excellent basis for dialogue between Officers and Members and to see how the Council was progress and work round obstacles.

Upon being put to the vote, the Motion was carried.

RESOLVED To RECOMMEND to Strategy & Resources Committee that the draft Council Plan is agreed and recommended to Council.

HC.23 **Progress Update on Key Action Plans (Cleaner Estates and Service Standards)**

The Head of Housing Services provided the Committee with a verbal update on the progress of the key action plans, he explained the cleaner estates action plan had already held 2 successful events and there were a further 6 events planned. He drew attention to the regeneration work that was taking place at Nouncells cross.

2021/22

With regards the service standards action plan progress had been made which included the appointment of the tenant representatives and the deputy tenant representatives. They were in the process of creating the induction and training for the tenant representatives who were receiving mentoring from the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS). A focus group for Independent Living had been booked for 27 September 2021 which would be chaired by TPAS, 14 tenants had shown interest in this meeting. Involved tenants evening booked for 12 October where the Operations Manager would attend to talk about repairs. Volunteers would be needed for a variety of areas including:

- Scrutiny
- Green Champions
- Photographer
- Repairs and Voids inspectors
- Walkabouts
- Digital
- Consultation
- Annual Report

In response to a question from Councillor Hynd, the Head of Housing Services confirmed they were awaiting the KPI's from the action plans which information would need to come back from consultation before they could assign them to the action plans, this would come back to another meeting.

HC.24 **Member Reports**

a) Housing Review Panel Update

The Chair spoke about the first meeting where they discussed the retrofit and explained the recording was available for members to view online. She also informed the committee that the next meeting was booked and representatives had been received from all political parties.

b) Tenant Representatives

The proposed tenant representatives introduced themselves to the Committee.

HC.25 **Performance Monitoring**

The report was circulated prior to the meeting.

HC.26 **Work Programme**

An extraordinary meeting was added in November due to the large number of items in December and the items had been spread out across the new date.

Agenda Item 3

2021/22

Councillor Hynd questioned where the EC3.3 private sector decarbonisation fitted in with the current work programme the Strategic Director of Communities agreed that this could be looked at after the meeting.

RESOLVED To note the work programme.

The meeting closed at 9.00 pm

Chair

STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

HOUSING COMMITTEE

2 NOVEMBER 2021

Report Title	REVISED TENANCY & ESTATES MANAGEMENT POLICY			
Purpose of Report	To effectively manage tenancies and the environment in our communities.			
Decision(s)	The Committee RESOLVES to: a) Adopt the revised Tenancy & Estates Management policy. b) Give delegated authority to the Head of Housing Services, in consultation with the Chair & Vice Chair of Housing Committee to make minor amendments as necessary.			
Consultation and Feedback	Consultation has taken place with Involved Tenants, Officers and Councillors			
Report Author	Michelle Elliott – Housing Manager michelle.elliott@stroud.gov.uk			
Options	N/A			
Background Papers	None			
Appendices	Appendix A – Tenancy & Estate Management Policy (proposed) Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment			
Implications (further details at the end of the report)	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Council has a duty to ensure its tenancies and estates are managed in line with the relevant housing legislation and effectively manages its assets and maintains good relationships with tenants and stakeholders
- 1.2 Stroud currently has 5051 housing properties, which are defined as:
- 1516 Flats
 - 1279 Bungalows
 - 14 Maisonettes
 - 2242 Houses.
- 1.3 We strive to remain a responsible landlord and be transparent, ensuring our tenants and staff are fully aware of their obligations and that they are adhered to.
- 1.4 The revision of the policy ensures the Estate Management Policy is in keeping with the current services it supplies to both its tenancies and on its estates.

Agenda Item 5

1.5 Estate Management covers a diverse range of services including:

- Inspection & Maintenance of communal areas
- Ensuring tenants comply with tenancy conditions
- Monitoring empty properties
- Providing advice and referrals to tenants & residents on services which enhance the local community
- Supporting initiatives to reduce crime
- Environmental improvements
- Partnership working with other agencies.

2.0 Management Responsibilities, Legislation & Guidance

2.1 It is critically important that the District Council's Tenancy Management Service ensures that legislative changes and acknowledged good practice are reflected in its tenancy and estates management policies. Landlord and tenants' responsibilities must be defined and clear service standards remain up to date and in line with best practice. This policy will be periodically reviewed to make sure it keeps up to date with legislation, regulation and local requirements

2.2 Housing Services will enforce procedures for ensuring that tenancy obligations are fulfilled and tenancy management breaches are identified.

2.3 There is a range of legislation relating to the management of our housing stock,

- The Housing Act 1985
- The Housing Act 1988
- Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014
- Localism Act 2011
- The charter for social housing residents: Social Housing White Paper 2020.

2.4 The Social Housing White Paper 2020 sets out a new Charter for Social Housing Residents. While much of the responsibility for delivering the expectations set out in the White Paper rests with social landlords, its implementation will be underpinned by a strengthened consumer regulation regime. It seeks to:

- Provide clarity on the standards that every social tenant in England is entitled to expect from their landlords
- Raise the standard of social housing and meet the housing aspirations of residents now and in the future
- Engender quality, safe environments free from crime & anti-social behaviour
- Ensure tenants feel protected and empowered by a regulatory regime and a culture of transparency, accountability, decency and service befitting the intentions and traditions of social housing
- Provide routes to self-ownership.

2.5 The White Paper's charter addresses the relationship between landlord and tenant, and how landlords can work with their tenants more effectively. It confirms that the Regulator of Social Housing will focus on the following areas:

- Changes needed to the consumer standards that all social landlords will be required to meet
- The proactive consumer regulation activity (including, for example, a programme of inspections as outlined in the White Paper) through which we will monitor and assess whether those standards are being met; and
- Agreeing a set of tenant satisfaction measures that will both inform our regulation and help tenants hold their landlords to account.

3.0 Stroud Districts response to the housing paper

- 3.1 Responding to the White Paper, the District Council, recognising its landlord responsibilities has established an officer and member working group to oversee a series of action to strengthen tenancy involvement and ensure a strong and effective tenant landlord relationship.
- 3.2 The Tenant Service Standards action plan and the Cleaner Estates action plan identify areas where greater tenant involvement is being prioritised, including scrutiny, complaints and repairs. Task and finish groups are also in place covering resident involvement, voids and repairs and energy/retrofit.
- 3.3 In unison with these, there is commissioned work around resident involvement, Strategic Housing and landlord services. Complaints reports for the whole service have been shared with Housing Committee performance scrutiny members and Tenant Representatives.

4.0 Key changes to the Policy include:

4.1 Community Involvement

- 4.2 The policy in line with the service standards action plan promotes focus groups, estate walkabouts and tenant events ensuring that there is a comprehensive tenant engagement plan in process. This will ensure that tenants have the opportunity of being involved and to influence decision making.
- 4.3 To further ensure tenants views are represented the council housing committee has co-opted two volunteer tenants, called 'Tenants' Voice Representatives', who help shape housing services by representing the views of tenants and influencing decisions at Housing Committee meetings.
- 4.4 Linking in with the cleaner estates policy we are also promoting the role of a green champion to encourage engagement and ownership from communities.
- 4.5 The draft paper was sent out to all involved tenants and the following comments were received.
- Add in how often estate walkabouts take place
 - Happy with Report
 - 2x involved tenants Concerns that enforcement never takes place
 - Concerns about dog fouling being addressed
 - Comments were specific to an independent living scheme, so are being addressed by Service Delivery Manager
 - Concerns about untidy gardens and enforcement/ possibility of online training for Neighbourhood Ambassadors/ scrutiny of services by tenants

Agenda Item 5

5.0 Home Contents Insurance

- 5.1 The Council does not provide home contents insurance, however, it does expect tenants to take out appropriate home contents insurance to protect their belongings in the event of a fire, theft, accidental damage or natural disaster.

5.2 Rechargeable Repairs

- 5.3 Repairs that are caused by mistreatment will be categorized as a recharge and remain the responsibility of the tenant.

5.4 Independent Living Schemes

- 5.5 Independent Living HUBS are operating across the district for social inclusion and the wellbeing of tenants and residents.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial Implications

It is important to have and enforce a Tenancy and Estate Management Policy. The Housing Revenue Account has seen an increase in fly tipping and spend on clearing properties when vacated by tenants. This reduces funding available for rest of the housing service, including retrofit works.

Jon Coldridge, Principal Accountant

Tel: 01453 754030 Email: jon.coldridge403@stroud.gov.uk

6.2 Legal Implications

In addition to the specific obligations referred to in the report, the Council has a duty under the Consumer Rights Act 2015 to ensure that the terms of its tenancy agreements are not unfair, and a general duty as a local authority to act reasonably.

Adopting a general policy in respect of tenancy and estates management helps to ensure that tenancy obligations (on both landlord and tenant) are consistent and fairly applied across the Council's residential properties.

One Legal

Tel: 01684 272691 Email: legalservices@onelegal.org.uk

6.3 Equality Implications

An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken and can be found in Appendix B.

6.4 Environmental Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.



Tenancy and Estates Management Policy

October 2021

Housing Services

Last updated: October 2021

Next document review by: October 2023

Reviewed by: Michelle Elliott, Housing Manager

Approved by: Housing committee

Agenda Item 5

Appendix A

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Agenda Item 5

Appendix A

1.0 TENANCY AND ESTATES MANAGEMENT POLICY

- 1.1 This policy details how Stroud District Council manages the types of tenancies it provides under current legislation and its statutory obligations as a landlord. Tenant Services is committed to providing estate management services to specific land and property owned by Stroud District Council (The Council). This policy is concerned with maintaining the physical condition, cleanliness and safety of the internal and external housing environment.

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE TENANCY AND ESTATES MANAGEMENT POLICY

- 1.3 The Council aims to manage tenancies efficiently and effectively to enable tenants to exercise their Legal rights.
- 1.4 This policy details the arrangements for the creation, ending and assignment of tenancies; the right to buy; and the right to sub-let.
- 1.5 Tenant Services is required to ensure our estates are attractive, well maintained, safe and secure for all our tenants.
- 1.6 Where communal services exist, the Council will always make the appropriate annual service charge to Tenants and leaseholders for the services received.
- 1.7 The key principles of the Estate Management Policy are to:
- Maintain, in conjunction with tenants, clean, tidy and well cared for communal areas on our estates. These include hard surfaces and landscaped areas, as well as the internal communal areas of our properties.
 - Carry out site inspections of all of our estates and communal areas on a 4 – 12 week cycle based on demand, to highlight and subsequently address any area falling below our acceptable standards.
 - Work in partnership with Tenants and Resident Groups, Directorate colleagues, other stakeholders within the Council and other partnership agencies, such as the Police, support functions and adult social care to make stronger, safer and sustainable communities.
 - Ensuring the landlord's statutory obligations are being delivered in a fair and proportionate manner.

1.8 WHAT IS TENANCY AND ESTATE MANAGEMENT?

- Ensuring all our tenants are aware of their rights and responsibilities
 - Enforcing tenancy conditions when appropriate and where support has been offered
 - Offering subsidized gardening scheme where appropriate
 - Working with partners to reduce and resolve Anti-Social Behaviour
 - Giving advice, assistance and support on tenancy matters
 - Keeping all housing communal areas clean and well maintained
- 1.9 The Council will need to ensure that the procedures for managing the Council's housing estates are implemented in such a way as to ensure quality, efficiency, cost effectiveness including value for money.

2.0 MANAGING TENANCIES

- 2.1 We ensure that our tenants are aware of their rights and obligations when they sign-up for their tenancies; the terms of which are set out in their Tenancy Agreement, which is the formal contract between the Council and the tenant(s).

- 2.2 The Council has a series of policies and documents which outline how tenancy matters are managed, such as sub-letting, abandonment and ending a tenancy.

2.3 INTRODUCTORY TENANCIES

- 2.4 For tenants in social housing, an introductory tenancy is a probationary tenancy for twelve months. After this period, an introductory tenant will become a secure tenant if they meet the conditions of their tenancy agreement. If tenants do not meet the conditions to become a secure tenant, they will be advised before the 10-month stage and will be referred to Housing Advice for support in looking for alternative accommodation. Reasons for not being offered a secure tenancy can include consistent antisocial behaviour or rent arrears

3.0 SECURE TENANCIES

- 3.1 Are classified as lifetime tenancies with a few exceptions. Under the 1985 Housing Act Secure tenants have the right to:

- Exercise the Right to Buy
- Take in lodgers and sub-let part of their home (with written consent from the landlord)
- Carry out improvements (with written consent from the landlord)
- Exercise a Mutual Exchange
- Be consulted on related housing matters
- Be able to assign their tenancy with permission with consideration being given to the Localism Act 2011 (See assignment of tenancies below)

- 3.2 The Courts have the power to grant possession, however, the Council would have to present compelling evidence that an eviction is warranted.

3.3 NON SECURE TENANCIES

- 3.4 Are only given to people transitioning through the homeless process. A non-secure tenant has very limited rights to remain in the property and possession is readily obtained through the legal process.

3.5 ASSIGNMENT OF TENANCY

- 3.6 If a tenancy commenced prior to 1 April 2012, a tenancy can be passed to a person who would qualify to have the tenancy assigned to them as referred to in the Housing Act 1985-part IV.

- 3.7 If a tenancy commenced on or after 1 April 2012 an assignment of tenancy may be made to a partner, who has used the property as their main home for the 12 months preceding a request for an assignment.

- 3.8 The Council must give written permission to assign a tenancy to another person for it to be actioned.

3.9 SUCCESSION RIGHTS

- 3.10 The right for someone to inherit a tenancy when the existing tenant dies is called succession. The policy of granting succession rights is in line with the current HomeseekerPlus rulings as defined by the Regulator of Social Housing. A surviving family member may be offered a tenancy in the same property or a different property - subject to bedroom need.

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3.11 ALLOWING THE COUNCIL ACCESS TO OUR PROPERTIES

- 3.12 The Council will carry out regular inspections to our properties to ensure they are being used by the legal tenant and are being maintained to a good standard. Tenants must allow Council staff or Contractors access to the property to conduct these inspections.

3.13 PROPERTY REPAIRS

- 3.14 Our Lettable Standard document contains details on the standard to which all council homes are required to meet prior to them being let. At the viewing, a Neighbourhood Management Officer will discuss this standard and use a checklist to make sure it has been met. To minimise any delays in the property becoming available, some minor repairs may be completed after a move. Housing Services will ensure that the property:

- Is safe to move in to
- Is secure and water tight
- Has received a gas safety check (where appropriate)
- Has received an electrical safety check

- 3.15 A copy of the Lettable Standard can be found in our 'How to guides, videos and useful downloads' section.

<https://www.stroud.gov.uk/housing/council-tenants-and-leaseholders/council-housing-repairs/how-to-guides-videos-and-useful-downloads>

3.16 Repairs we are responsible for as part of the Tenancy Agreement.

There are certain repairs that SDC will carry out. These include:

- The structure and exterior of the property
- The roof, chimney stack and chimney pots
- Walls, ceilings, floors and foundations
- Gutters, soffits and fascias, pipes and drains
- Door and window frame furniture
- Paths and steps giving access to the property
- Sanitary installations such as baths, washbasins, sinks, WCs and soil pipes
- Service installations such as water pipes and taps (including stop taps), gas piping from the meter, electric supply from the consumer unit including sockets and switches
- Water heaters, fireplaces, fitted fires and central heating, boundary fencing gates and walls connected to public land only (fencing between gardens is the tenant's responsibility)
- If there has been willful damage to the property these repairs may be rechargeable

3.17 EMERGENCY ACCESS

- 3.18 In case of an emergency, it may not be possible to provide reasonable notice in order to access the property to prevent damage or harm to people and property. Every effort will be made to contact the tenant, if this is not possible, entry will be gained causing minimum damage to the property. A crisis assessment will also take place.

3.19 BREACHING YOUR TENANCY AGREEMENT

- 3.20 Where a tenant chooses to breach their Tenancy Agreement, the appropriate informal or formal action will be taken to rectify the matter in line with the anti-social behaviour policy, income management and recovery policy, and pet policy.

4.0 DECANT

- 4.1 In some circumstances, tenants may need to move from a property whilst alterations or major repairs or regeneration work are carried out. In such cases the Council will find suitable temporary or permanent accommodation whilst the work is being carried out. When this situation arises each case will be assessed on its individual merit.

4.2 DOOR FOBBS

- 4.3 If a door fob to a communal entrance has been misplaced or lost any additional fobs requested will be charged for and must be paid for in advance before being supplied.

4.4 ENDING A TENANCY

- 4.5 A tenant may end their tenancy with the Council by providing four weeks written notice, starting on a Monday and ending on a Sunday. This applies to any tenant who chooses to leave their home to relocate either to another Social Landlord, Housing Association, Private Landlord or if they are buying a property on the open market.
- 4.6 Joint tenants can end their tenancy jointly or solely, once a notice for ending a joint tenancy has been accepted, the tenancy ends for both tenants.
- 4.7 If a tenant has vacated their property for more than 28 days without giving the required notification, the Council may issue a Notice to Quit and commence legal proceedings for possession of the property.
- 4.8 If a tenant dies, contact will either be made with the Next of Kin or the Executor/Administrator of the Estate to clarify the payment of any rent or outstanding housing debt. Whilst the Estate is being resolved, rent will be charged until the keys have been returned to Tenant Services.

4.9 HOARDING

- 4.10 The Council recognises that hoarding takes place in a minority of its properties. Once the Council becomes aware of this, it will make every effort to work with the tenant; however, this cannot take precedence over the Council's Health and Safety responsibilities. If tenants, choose not to engage with the Council on this matter then legal action will be sought to bring the matter to its rightful conclusion.

4.11 HOME CONTENTS INSURANCE

- 4.12 The Council does not provide home contents insurance, however, it does expect tenants to take out appropriate home contents insurance to protect their belongings in the event of a fire, theft, accidental damage or natural disaster.
- 4.13 Details of the Council's insurance provider is detailed on the website and given to tenants at sign up:

4.14 IMPROVEMENT WORKS

- 4.15 The Council will carry out improvement works to our properties and this will be done on a scheduled basis.
- 4.16 When improvement works are going to be undertaken at our properties, the Council will give the tenant advance notice by writing to them explaining what works are to be carried out, how they will be carried out, and when they are due to start and end.

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4.17 MUTUAL EXCHANGES

- 4.18 In order for tenants to exchange their home with another tenant they must get the Council's written permission first and any other tenant must get permission from their landlord respectively. This only applies to Secure tenancies. Introductory and Non-Secure tenants cannot mutually exchange. Mutual Exchanges are completed through the homeswapper portal.

5.0 PROPERTY ALTERATIONS

- 5.1 Tenants must have written permission from the Council prior to undertaking any alterations or additions to their home. This includes (but is not limited to) satellite dishes, aerials and external decorations. This only applies to Secure tenancies. Introductory and Non-Secure tenants cannot carry out property alterations.

5.2 RECHARGEABLE REPAIRS

- 5.3 Repairs that are caused by mistreatment will be categorised as a recharge and remain the responsibly of the tenant. The tenant can opt for Tenant Services to carry out the repair, however, payment for this must be made before the works commence or a payment plan agreed to. Tenant Services Officers will carry out a financial assessment with tenants to ensure the payment is affordable

- 5.4 Alternatively, the repair can be carried out by a qualified tradesman of the tenant's choosing and payment should be made in advance; in which case a post inspection of all work will be undertaken by Council.

5.5 RIGHT TO BUY

- 5.6 Most tenants, with the exception of independent living, Introductory and Non-Secure, have the Right to Buy providing they meet the qualifying criteria.

5.7 SUB-LETTING

- 5.8 Tenants are able to sub-let part of their home with written permission from their Neighbourhood Management Officer. This only applies to Secure tenancies. Introductory and Non-Secure tenants cannot sub-let part of their home.

5.9 TENANCY CHANGES

- 5.10 For changes to a tenancy from joint to sole or sole to joint, all requests must be made in writing giving the reason(s) for the assignment.

- 5.11 Before the Council grants permission an assessment of the existing tenancy will be reviewed taking into consideration the tenant's behaviour, tenancy fraud, and any breaches or notices served. This only applies to Secure tenancies. Introductory and Non-Secure tenants cannot assign their tenancy.

5.12 TENANCY FRAUD

- 5.13 The Council recognises the significant impact of tenancy fraud not only reducing the availability of social housing to those who need it most, the public purse and criminality. The Council will take the appropriate action against any tenant found to be committing a tenancy fraud and will always consider taking legal action against this activity.

5.14 UNAUTHORISED OCCUPATION

- 5.15 Where the Council becomes aware that any property it owns and manages has been occupied by a person, and/or persons, who do not have the Council's authorisation to occupy the property, it will take action to remove the unauthorised occupiers from the property.

6.0 ABANDONED POSSESSIONS

- 6.1 The Council will act in accordance with legislation and within the General Data Protection Regulations in relation to the handling and disposal of possessions and information which is sensitive and/or personal data remaining in a property at the end of a tenancy.
- 6.2 If a tenant has vacated the property for more than 28 days, without giving the required notification, we may issue a Notice to Quit and commence legal proceedings for possession of the property. Any work undertaken to gain entry and subsequently secure the property as a result of a warrant of eviction will be recharged against the tenant(s).
- 6.3 The ownership of abandoned vehicles found on housing estates will be properly investigated. If the registered owner refuses to remove the vehicle, the Council will do so and the owner will be recharged for any costs incurred.

6.4 ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR ACTIVITIES

- 6.5 All acts of vandalism will be reported to the Police.
- 6.6 If the perpetrator is a tenant or member of the tenant's family or friend or visitor, any associated costs to rectify this matter will be recharged to the tenant(s).
- 6.7 Where incidents of vandalism are recurrent, the Council will work closely with the Police to consider all appropriate action to cease the vandalism.
- 6.8 Where graffiti are of an unsavoury nature and can cause an offence, the graffiti will be removed within 24 hours.
- 6.9 Where hazards exist, such as hypodermic syringes, faeces, blood, or other such fluids, the Council will deal with these within 24 hours to minimise health and safety risks to our tenants.
- 6.10 The Council accepts that from time to time neighbour disputes may arise due to differing lifestyles and values. In such cases, tenants will in the first instance be encouraged to resolve difficulties with their neighbours on an amicable basis in line with our ASB Policy 2021.

6.11 CCTV

- 6.12 A number of areas have CCTV present. CCTV is passively monitored and footage will only be viewed when required. If CCTV is to be installed, a proper legal process in line with RIPA will be followed. If alterations are to take place with the CCTV, consultation will take place with the affected tenants.

6.13 CLEANING OF COMMUNAL AREAS

- 6.14 The Council will ensure that communal areas are regularly cleaned.
- 6.15 The Council will maintain all shared hallways and gardens where a service charge is paid making sure these areas are clean and tidy. Currently, we have several blocks of flats, where a historical decision was made for tenants to clean the block themselves. This is to be reviewed. The Council will ensure all shared hallways are kept clear of any items or debris in

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line with regular fire risk assessments (FRA's). Regular visits will be made to inspect these areas to ensure they have been cleaned and no articles remain a hindrance to these areas, in case of a fire escape

6.16 COMMUNAL BIN STORES

- 6.17 Communal bin stores are for the sole use of our tenants and must be used in accordance with the guidelines prescribed by the Council. Where tenants are abusing these areas and extra services are required to be provided, the costs for recouping these will be through service charges and or recharging.
- 6.18 Where non tenants are causing the problem through fly-tipping, the Council will thoroughly investigate, working in partnership with civil enforcement to identify and prosecute the perpetrator(s); making sure the full cost of this service is recovered.

7.0 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

- 7.1 The Council aims to foster good relationships with its tenants in providing a high quality service, which maintains and improves the external environment of its estates. To do this, the Council will seek appropriate consultation mechanisms to support community activities and promote service specific projects.
- 7.2 There are lots of ways tenants and leaseholders can get involved and have real influence on the types of services we provide and the role we play in the community. Tenants views matter to us and there are a number of ways in which tenants and leaseholders can have their say or get involved.
- 7.3 The Councils Housing Committee has co-opted two volunteer tenants, called 'Tenants' Voice Representatives', who help shape housing services by representing the views of tenants and influencing decisions at Housing Committee meetings.

7.4 TENANTS REPAIRS INSPECTORS

- 7.5 As a landlord, we own and manage around 5,000 properties.
- 7.6 This 'hands on' involvement would see volunteer tenants trained up and working with our Property Care team, carrying out independent inspections on properties, check that the standard of workmanship is acceptable, that contractors are polite, turn up on time and show I.D. Tenant Repairs Inspectors would report on how well the Property Care team are doing and make suggestions on service improvements.
- 7.7 Neighbourhood Ambassadors/ champions is one way in which tenants can make a positive difference in their communities, by acting as an essential link between their neighbours and the Council. They advise on housing services, give regular feedback about what's working well and what isn't and help us make sure messages are clear. They also accompany Neighborhood Management Officers on Estate Walkabouts, which are open to everyone to join in. Training is provided and we encourage and welcome tenants in every area of the district to volunteer to make a positive difference in their communities. For the future online training will be considered.
- 7.8 A Community Association is a group made up of tenants, leaseholders and residents a street, neighbourhood or estate. The aim of each group is to work together to improve the area, and create a community spirit. As a group, Community Associations can act as a 'hub' for a wide range of activities to benefit the health and wellbeing of local tenants and residents.

- 7.9 Throughout the year Task & Finish Groups or focus groups will be set up to scrutinize an aspect of the housing service. Each of these groups will be a short term activity and can be based on feedback from councilors, tenants or officers.
- 7.10 Estate walkabouts are an excellent opportunity for tenants or leaseholders to highlight issues affecting the local neighbourhood. If you would like to join in, please advise us so that we can include as many tenants as possible in our consultations on the design and delivery of our services to you.
- 7.11 There is a new volunteer role, Green Champions, which has been created as part of the Housing Service's Cleaner Estates Strategy. This is another opportunity for tenants and leaseholders who wish to make a difference on estates. The role involves checking standards of cleaning in internal communal areas and the tidiness of estate landscapes (to help manage fly-tipping and waste management).
- 7.12 Tenant consultation events are held where refurbishment work is planned or any other changes that may affect tenant and leaseholders. There will be a satisfaction of tenants and residents (STAR) survey taken of a random sample of tenants every two years and there will be surveys about other aspects of the housing service some of which may be related to focus group work (see above). We are keen for as many tenants as possible to be involved consultations which help to improve the design and delivery of our services to tenants and leaseholders.
- 7.13 ANNUAL REPORT**
- 7.14 Each year Tenant Services produce an annual report, which can be found on our website, detailing the Councils key performance outcomes.
- 7.15 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY**
- 7.16 Introduction**
- 7.17 The Council is committed to providing services which embrace diversity and promote quality of opportunity. The Council's goal is to ensure these commitments are reinforced by the Council's values and statutory and legislative requirements, ensuring these are embedded in our day to day working practices.
- 7.18 The Council is committed to equality of opportunity for all people regardless of race, disability, sex, age, sexual orientation, religious belief (including non-religious beliefs), gender (including gender reassignment), marital status, and pregnancy and maternity. We recognise and value the diversity of the local community and believe equality is central to the provision of modern quality services. We are committed to being inclusive with our approach and determined to make sure our approach to managing income and allocating resources supports this.
- 7.19 Actions Taken**
- 7.20 The Council's staff and contractors will operate in such a way to ensure their procedures and practices are sensitive to the needs of individual residents and to ensure they do not discriminate on the grounds of any strand of the Equality Act 2010.
- 7.21 Income collection and recovery action will be tailored to meet the needs of individuals as appropriate. All cases will be considered on an individual basis and the Council will work with Support Workers, Social Workers, and advocates of the tenant where necessary.

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7.22 The Council will, in all reasonable circumstances, make information available in a variety of information formats, including (but not exclusively):

- Large print
- Audio CD
- Community languages

7.23 ESTATE IMPROVEMENT

7.24 The Council will work positively with tenant representatives and the community to deliver well-kept estates where anyone would be proud to live.

7.25 The Council will work jointly with tenant representative and the local neighbourhood to consider financing specific activities for the benefit the whole community, with the aim of making our estates the most attractive places to live and thrive.

7.26 ESTATE INSPECTIONS

7.27 The Council will undertake a regular programme of inspections of our housing estates, to monitor the quality of the environment.

7.28 The Council will prioritise the regularity of estate inspections required.

7.29 The estate inspections will take into account all assets owned by the Council, including pavements, roads, fencing, trees, hedges and play areas. (this is not an exhaustive list)

7.30 Tenants who have gardens, hedges, trees, shrubs, bushes and fences, which form part of their property, must keep these areas clean and tidy. These areas must not be used to store furniture, vehicle parts or any other items unless permission has been given by the Council. The Council will work with and refer tenants for support who struggle to maintain their gardens and refer for a subsidized service if appropriate.

7.31 Where a tree preservation order exists work must not commence unless written permission is given by the Council.

7.32 GARAGES

7.33 The Council will manage garages on housing land in such a manner as to maximise income whilst ensuring an efficient and effective service for garage tenants. Garage tenancies are not being currently offered as they form part of an ongoing development opportunity project.

7.34 Regular inspections will take place to ensure these areas are maintained to a sufficient standard, preventing a hazard to health.

7.35 GROUNDS MAINTENANCE

7.36 The Council will ensure that work is undertaken on a routine basis to ensure that communal grounds on housing estates are maintained to a good standard. Currently 10 cuts a year take place.

7.37 Grounds maintenance will take place between March and October (weather permitting) with the inclusion of strimming, shrub pruning, weed control, litter picking and footpath clearance.

8.0 PARKING

8.1 All vehicles parking within the Council's car parks must have a current valid road tax, display licence plates and be roadworthy. If vehicles are not roadworthy they may be removed within 28 days.

8.2 At times contractors will have to use these areas to park, in order to carry out repair work to the Council's properties, or the emergency services.

8.3 PETS

8.4 The Council accepts that keeping pets offers significant benefits to their owners and, therefore, encourages it. Tenants may keep animals in their accommodation with written permission from the Council. As specified by the Council's Pet Policy.

8.5 Pets must be kept under proper control at all times, in a safe and hygienic manner and must not cause a nuisance, annoyance or harm to anyone in the community.

8.6 Pets should not cause damage to any parts of the property owned by the Council.

8.7 Fouling or mess created by a pet(s) must be cleared up immediately and in a hygienic manner.

8.8 PLAY AREAS

8.9 Play areas owned by the Council will be maintained and regularly inspected to ensure they are safe to use.

8.10 Periodically assessments will take place to establish the validity of the play areas; if the result of any assessment identifies a redundant play area, the Council will consult with the affected tenants and take the appropriate action.

8.11 PROPERTY INSPECTIONS AND THE DETERIORATION OF PREMISES

8.12 The Council will inspect the homes of tenants to ensure that they are complying with their conditions of tenancy. Where tenant's actions result in the deterioration of our property we will take action to tackle this problem. If tenants wish to transfer to another SDC property, then a property inspection will need to take place. If the property shows sign of deterioration through willful neglect or damage, then a transfer will be refused.

8.13 Guidance and advice will always be given when managing a deteriorated premises and signposting to support will be given if necessary. It is the responsibility of the tenant to maintain their property to a good standard. Where there are repeat offenders or tenants who are unwilling to engage with this process, consideration may be given to legal action.

8.14 RELEVANT LEGISLATION AND REGULATORY COMPLIANCE

8.15 The Council will ensure that it manages its estates in accordance with relevant policy and legislation.

8.16 REMOVAL OF LITTER

8.17 The Council will act to remove fly tipping from communal land on housing estates, to ensure that our estates provide a high quality living environment. In the case of fly tipping the Council will endeavor to find and prosecute the perpetrator(s) and in doing so will utilise the best methods to achieve this.

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9.0 SATELLITE DISHES AND TV AERIALS

- 9.1 The Council recognises that our tenants enjoy the total use of their property and in doing so may want additions to compliment the property.
- 9.2 Tenants must have written permission prior to undertaking any works in relation to satellite dishes and aerials. Where permission is granted, the tenant will be responsible for any damage caused to the property and/or the property of others through the dish or aerial being installed, dismantled or becoming dislodged.
- 9.3 Communal aerials are maintained by the Council.

9.4 STREET LIGHTING

- 9.5 Where the Council is aware of a defective street light, in adopted areas, these will be reported to Gloucestershire County Council, for an inspection or a repair to be carried out.
- 9.6 The exception to this is where the Council owns street lamps on its estates the Council will carry out the repair work.

9.7 TREE MANAGEMENT

- 9.8 Trees which are located within the Council's communal areas will be maintained in line with the Council's tree policy.
- 9.9 Trees situated in a tenant's garden will remain the responsibility of the tenant. Guidance will be given to tenants who struggle to maintain trees in their gardens.

9.10 TRESPASSING ON HOUSING LAND

- 9.11 The Council will act promptly to address encroachment on communal land in our ownership; this will include the management of abandoned vehicles/possessions.

9.12 VERMIN AND PEST CONTROL

- 9.13 The Council will take action to address vermin/pest infestations on communal land/areas and will work with tenants to address vermin and pest infestations in individual properties.
- 9.14 Vermin/pests infestations which occur in individual homes remain the responsibility of the tenant; guidance and advice will be given to tenants from the Environmental Health team.

10.0 INDEPENDENT LIVING (SPECIFIC):

10.1 COMMUNAL SPACES

- 10.2 Communal spaces can be used by external organisations with the relevant written permission from the Independent Living team. All communal spaces are managed by the Independent Living team for tenants to enjoy.

10.3 INDEPENDENT LIVING HUBS

- 10.4 Independent Living HUBS are operating across the district for social inclusion and wellbeing of tenants and residents.

10.5 FIRE RISK ASSESSMENTS

10.6 These assessments are carried out weekly within all Independent living communal areas to ensure they are clear of fire risks. A zero tolerance policy is adhered to in all communal walkways and corridors.

10.7 All fire risk assessments are managed in line with Health and Safety regulations.

10.8 HEALTH & SAFETY

10.9 Health and Safety checks are carried out by Site Officers each time they are on site to ensure living space and the environment is fit for purpose.

10.10 PAT TESTING

10.11 Site Officers will PAT test all communal electrical equipment; portable equipment every 6 months and static equipment every 12 months.

10.12 LEGIONELLA WATER TESTING

10.13 All communal showers and low use outlets will be tested on a weekly basis by Site Officers to achieve the relevant water temperatures.

10.14 MOBILITY SCOOTERS

10.15 Must not be stored or charged in the communal area or your home (unless your mobility scooter uses a lithium battery). Where storage or charging facilities are made available, these must be used. When using an external charging point, a suitable waterproof transformer must be used. Mobility scooters using the communal charging points will be PAT tested annually by the Site Officer.

11.0 TRANSLATION STATEMENT

11.1 If you have any difficulties reading this information or need further assistance understanding our processes, please contact us on 01453 766321 or visit our website on www.stroud.gov.uk.

11.2 We can produce document in a variety of formats. All you need to do is let us know what you need and we will try to assist you.

11.3 POLICY REVIEW

11.4 This policy will be reviewed as the need arises through changes to legislation or regulation or no later than 3 years from its implementation date.

11.5 Where there has been a change in legislation which has an impact on the policy, the policy will be reviewed within 3 months of the legislation or regulation coming into effect.

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Equality Analysis Form

By completing this form you will provide evidence of how your service is helping to meet Stroud District Council's General Equality duty:

The Equality Act 2010 states that:

*A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have **due regard** to the need to –*

(a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010;

(b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;

(c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The protected characteristics are listed in Question 9

Stroud District Equality data can be found at: <https://inform.gloucestershire.gov.uk/equality-and-diversity/>

Please see Appendix 1 for a good example of a completed EIA.

[Guidance available on the HUB](#)

1. Persons responsible for this assessment:

Name(s): Michelle Elliott	Telephone:
	E-Mail: michelle.elliott@stroud.gov.uk
Service: Housing Services	Date of Assessment: 18 October 2021

2. Name of the policy, service, strategy, procedure or function:

Tenancy & Estate Management Policy

Is this new or an existing one? **Existing**

3. Briefly describe its aims and objectives

To enable council tenants to enjoy their home free from nuisance, annoyance and disturbance and to understand their responsibilities
--

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4. Are there external considerations? (Legislation / government directive, etc)

The Housing Act 1985
The Housing Act 1988
Anti Social Behaviour, Crime & Policing Act 2014
Localism Act 2011
The charter for social housing residents. Social Housing white paper 2020

5. Who is intended to benefit from it and in what way?

Tenants and residents will benefit by having a pleasant environment in and around their homes

6. What outcomes are expected?

For the service to be measurable and cost effective and delivering an increase in tenant satisfaction results.

Provide safe homes and estates

Protect and enhance the reputation of SDC

7. What evidence has been used for this assessment? (eg Research, previous consultations, Inform (MAIDEN); Google assessments carried out by other Authorities)

Research and understanding of legislation

8. Has any consultation been carried out?

Yes

Details of consultation

Consultation carried out with involved tenant groups :

Tenants Voice Representatives

Neighbourhood Ambassadors

If NO please outline any planned activities

9. Could a particular group be affected differently in either a negative or positive way?

(Negative – it could disadvantage and therefore potentially not meet the General Equality duty;

Positive – it could benefit and help meet the General Equality duty;

Neutral – neither positive nor negative impact / Not sure)

Protected Group	Type of impact, reason and any evidence (from Q7 & 8)
Age	Positive, the policy is all-inclusive and all tenants have the opportunity to take ownership and responsibility along with their landlord to ensure estates are well managed.
Disability	Positive, the policy is all inclusive and all tenants have the opportunity to take ownership and responsibility along with their landlord to ensure estates are well managed. Provision will be made for tenants who require information in different formats There is opportunity for hard copy documentation to be in larger print or other languages for those who may not be digitally enabled, or on an audible solution for visually impaired. For those with learning disabilities alternative easy read versions will be available.
Gender Re-assignment	Neutral – We are not aware of any tenants that sit in this group but any requirements would be acted upon if reasonable and proportionate
Pregnancy & Maternity	Positive, the policy is all-inclusive and all tenants have the opportunity to take ownership and responsibility along with their landlord to ensure estates are well managed
Race	Positive, the policy is all-inclusive and all tenants have the opportunity to take ownership and responsibility along with their landlord to ensure estates are well managed. There is also opportunity for hard copy documentation to be in other languages for those who may not use English as their primary language
Religion – Belief	Positive, the policy is all-inclusive and all tenants have the opportunity to take ownership and responsibility along with their landlord to ensure estates are well managed. There is also opportunity for hard copy documentation to be in other languages for those who may not use English as their primary language
Sex	Neutral, the policy is all-inclusive and all tenants have the opportunity to take ownership and responsibility along with their landlord to ensure estates are well managed.
Sexual Orientation	Neutral, the policy is all-inclusive and all tenants have the opportunity to take ownership and responsibility along with their landlord to ensure estates are well managed.
Marriage & Civil Partnerships (part (a) of duty only)	Neutral, the policy is all-inclusive and all tenants have the opportunity to take ownership and responsibility along with their landlord to ensure estates are well managed.
Rural considerations: ie Access to services; transport; education;	Positive, the policy is all inclusive and may have increased benefit for those tenants in rural locations where community engagement may not be as prevalent but the policy outlines expectations and routes to take when things don't go well. There is opportunity for hard copy documentation to be in larger print or other languages for those who may not be digitally enabled

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employment; broadband;	
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10. If you have identified a negative impact in question 9, what actions have you undertaken or do you plan to undertake to lessen or negate this impact?

Please transfer any actions to your Service Action plan on Excelsis.

Action(s):	Lead officer	Resource	Timescale

Declaration

I/We are satisfied that an Impact Assessment has been carried out on this policy, service, strategy, procedure or function * (delete those which do not apply) and where a negative impact has been identified, actions have been developed to lessen or negate this impact.

We understand that the Equality Impact Assessment is required by the District Council and that we take responsibility for the completion and quality of this assessment

Completed by: Michelle Elliott	Date: 20/10/21
Role: Housing Manager	
Countersigned by Head of Service: Kevin Topping	Date: 21/10/21

STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

HOUSING COMMITTEE

2 NOVEMBER 2021

Report Title	REVISED HOMESSEEKERPLUS ALLOCATIONS POLICY			
Purpose of Report	To seek the Committee's approval for the adoption of the revised HomeseekerPlus Allocations Policy following a consultation exercise			
Decision(s)	The Committee RESOLVES to: a) Agree the changes made to the HomeseekerPlus Allocations Policy and approve the revised policy for adoption. b) Give delegated authority to the Head of Strategic Housing in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of Housing Committee to make minor textual and formatting changes before publication.			
Consultation and Feedback	There has been formal consultation between 1 st February and 29 th March 2021. Consultees included housing applicants, District Councillors, all Parish and Town Councils, key internal and external stakeholders.			
Report Author	Laura Stephen, Senior Housing Strategy & Enabling Officer Email: laura.stephen@stroud.gov.uk			
Options	Committee could choose not to adopt the revised policy. However, this would mean that the previous policy, which is now outdated, would remain in place.			
Background Papers	Not applicable			
Appendices	Appendix A – Summary of changes to the HomeseekerPlus Policy Appendix B – Revised HomeseekerPlus Allocations Policy			
Implications (further details at the end of the report)	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	No	Yes	No	No

1. INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

- 1.1 HomeseekerPlus is a choice based lettings (CBL) scheme run by the HomeseekerPlus Partnership, which consists of the six local authorities within Gloucestershire together with West Oxfordshire District Council, who work in partnership with social housing landlords to provide affordable homes for people to rent.
- 1.2 The seven local authorities within the HomeseekerPlus Partnership are Cheltenham Borough Council, Cotswold District Council, Forest of Dean District Council, Gloucester

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City Council, Stroud District Council, Tewkesbury Borough Council and West Oxfordshire District Council.

- 1.3 The purpose of the HomeseekerPlus Policy is to explain who is eligible to apply for affordable housing and how their housing needs will be assessed. This assessment must be in line with relevant legislation and the statutory code of guidance on the allocation of accommodation, as these set out how applications will be assessed in a fair and transparent way based on housing need.
- 1.4 Other than a major change to the HomeseekerPlus policy in 2016 to include West Oxfordshire District Council into the partnership and a name change to “HomeseekerPlus” there have previously only been minor alterations to the policy.
- 1.5 Following the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act (when minor changes were made in line with the new legislation) it was considered timely to conduct a full review of the current HomeseekerPlus Policy.
- 1.6 It had also become apparent that the HomeseekerPlus policy was open to interpretation and could be implemented differently across the partnership. It was felt necessary to provide greater clarification within the policy to ensure consistency throughout the partnership.

2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1 The revised HomeseekerPlus Policy has been developed in collaboration with key stakeholders including Stroud District Council officers and the other local authorities and housing providers who make up the membership of the HomeseekerPlus Operational Group and the HomeseekerPlus Management Board.
- 2.2 The proposed changes are detailed in Appendix A.
- 2.3 Public consultation on the proposed changes ran from 1st February until 29th March 2021 with Forest of Dean District Council coordinating the consultation on behalf of the partnership. The consultation was publicised to all 19,000 applicants who are registered on HomeseekerPlus, as well as housing providers and councils. It was also publicised via social media platforms and on the HomeseekerPlus website.
- 2.4 At a District level an information Sheet on the review of the HomeseekerPlus Policy was disseminated to all Stroud District Council Members on 8th February 2021. A link to the consultation was sent to all Members, Town and Parish Councils, internal and external stakeholders on 8th February 2021. The consultation was also publicised on the Stroud District Council website.
- 2.5 In total there were 232 responses to the consultation. Overall responses were positive to the suggested changes with respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing.
- 2.6 Following the consultation exercise two additional minor changes were made to the policy as follows:

The word 'urgent' at Point 22.15 has been added in for the distinction between those with minor non housing related physical barriers to those with urgent housing related physical barriers.

Point 22.15 – *'For example, a member of the household seeking accommodation is disabled and re-housing will enable that person to overcome **urgent** physical barriers created by current accommodation and it has been established that the home cannot be adapted to meet needs e.g. steps and stairs.'*

The paragraph below has been removed as this is no longer relevant due to the mechanisms of the current I.T. system.

"If there is an occasion where two or more applicants have the same band start date and application date, the Social Housing Landlord will make a decision which applicant best meets the aims and objectives of HomeseekerPlus."

- 2.7 There are a number of other minor changes to the policy which are to address spelling, punctuation and grammar or are in relation to presentation. These changes have not changed the overall document, meanings, or how applicants are assessed or allocated housing.
- 2.8 The revised policy wording with the proposed changes can be found in Appendix B. Some formatting updates are still required.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1 Changes made to the HomeseekerPlus policy have been made in order to update the policy in response to national legislative and policy changes, and to refine wording where this has been found to be necessary; there have been no changes which radically alter the way in which households access affordable homes within the district. As a result, officers support these changes in operational and strategic terms.

4. IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications directly arising from this report.

Jon Coldridge, Principal Accountant

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4.2 Legal Implications

As a Local Housing Authority the Authority has a statutory duty in respect of the allocation of housing to applicants. These duties are contained in Part VI and VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

In addition to these duties the Authority has a duty to ensure that it operates in accordance with its duties under the Equalities Act 2010. When considering changes to the policy the Authority must undertake a fair, reasonable and transparent consultation and consider any

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responses to that consultation before determining whether or not to make changes to the policy.

One Legal

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4.3 **Equality Implications**

There are not any specific changes to service delivery proposed within this decision.

4.4 **Environmental Implications**

There are no significant implications within this category.

Appendix A - Summary of changes to HomeseekerPlus Policy

Reason for policy change

In 2009 the Gloucestershire Homeseeker Partnership was formed. Since then there have been tweaks to the policy and in 2016 the partnership and policy had a major change to include West Oxfordshire and changed names to HomeseekerPlus. Other than minor tweaks to include new legalisation such as the Homelessness Reduction Act there has been no major rewrite and clarification of the policy undertaken.

This has led to the common allocation policy being interpreted differently across the partnership, therefore this new policy aims to remove ambiguity and add clarification.

Old wording

I Introduction.

- I.1. HomeseekerPlus is a choice based lettings (CBL) scheme run by the seven local authorities in partnership with the majority of Social Housing Landlords operating within Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire.
- I.2. It must be recognised that the demand for affordable social housing within the HomeseekerPlus area is very high and cannot be met from the available resources. Only those in the highest housing need, with a local connection to the area are likely to obtain housing through the scheme. Each district's Housing Advice Service will be able to discuss a range of housing options.
- I.3 The policy takes into account the Localism Act 2012, Welfare Reform Act 2012 and the Statutory Code of Guidance on the Allocation of Accommodation 2012. It also has regard to the Councils' Homelessness, Tenancy Strategies and Housing Policy.

New wording

- I.1 HomeseekerPlus is a choice based lettings (CBL) scheme run by the seven local authorities in partnership with affordable housing landlords, and any other housing providers that are required to deliver affordable homes through section 106 affordable housing obligations within Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire.
- I.2 The seven local authorities are Tewkesbury Borough Council, Gloucester City Council, Cheltenham Borough Council, Stroud District Council, Forest of Dean District Council, Cotswold District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council.
- I.3 Demand for affordable housing within the HomeseekerPlus area is very high and cannot be met from the available affordable housing resources. Only those in the highest housing need, with a local connection to the area are likely to obtain housing through the HomeseekerPlus scheme. Each district's Housing Advice Service will be able to give advice on a range of housing options including the private rented sector.
- I.4 This policy explains who is eligible and qualifies to apply on HomeseekerPlus and sets out how applications will be assessed based on housing need.

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Appendix A

1.5 HomeseekerPlus aims to allocate affordable housing in the partner council areas in a fair and transparent way while complying with all legal requirements.

Overview of how the partnership functions

2.1 HomeseekerPlus enables affordable housing landlords and other housing providers that are required to deliver affordable homes through section 106 affordable housing obligations to advertise their homes. Applicants are able to express an interest in properties advertised. This is known as placing a “bid” for a property. Once a bid is placed the system generates a shortlist sorting applicants in order of band, band start date and whether they meet the criteria of the advert. Priority for properties goes to those who have a local connection with the local authority in which the property is located, then to those who have a local connection with any of the other HomeseekerPlus districts and finally to anyone else.

Legal section

Currently the Policy makes passing reference to Legislation and Statutory Guidance which needs to be complied with and this section needs to be made more explicit and be brought up to date.

Due to this we have provided a separate section, adding in references to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Old wording

No current section

New wording

5.1 HomeseekerPlus complies with the local authority’s statutory duties under Part VI and VII of the Housing Act 1996 as amended and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, in addition to any other relevant legal duties and has regard to the following:

- Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England 2020
- Equalities Act 2010
- Public Sector Equality Act 2010
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Localism Act 2011
- Immigration Act 2014
- Local Letting Plans
- S.106 agreements
- Armed Forces Act 2011

Data retention

- 6.1 As part of the application process, personal data is required to support any housing application. We will comply with all data protection legislation. This includes:
- For active applications, data is stored for as long as your application is active.
 - For housed applications, data is stored for 3 years
 - If HomeseekerPlus is not accessed for a period of 1 year, then your case will be set to 'removed' and removed after 6 months.
 - Homeless applications are stored for 3 years.

Definition of affordable housing providers for HomeseekerPlus

- 7.1 For the purposes of this policy affordable housing is defined as being social rented and affordable rented housing provided to eligible households who otherwise would be unable to secure alternative provision and who have been assessed under this policy. Housing providers who operate within the HomeseekerPlus boundaries are defined as being registered providers, arm's length management organisations or stock owning Councils. Eligibility and qualifying criteria for providers is set by this policy.
- 7.2 All partners have a common goal to provide homes for local people in housing need with eligibility determined within this policy framework.

Types of tenancies

- 8.1 Depending on the landlord and applicants' circumstances, an applicant may be offered either an introductory; secure; starter; assured; fixed term; assured shorthold or flexible tenancy.

Who does not qualify?

This section was greatly expanded to provide clarity to existing homeowners facing hardship and where someone does not qualify due to being evicted for anti-social behaviour, they can be provided with defined actions/timescales for them to take before consideration would be made.

Old wording

An applicant will not be accepted for social housing if we are satisfied that: -

- a) They have sufficient financial resources to resolve their own housing need.
- b) Where they have unreasonably disposed of financial resources that could have enabled them to purchase/obtain their own accommodation.
- c) They own or part own a property which is suitable for their needs, or where those needs can be resolved through adaptation, sale or where, if they sold it, they could afford to buy another property. We may make exceptions to this rule in the case of proven social or medical needs.

- d) The applicant, or a member of their household, has been responsible for unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable to be a tenant of the Authority or a Social Housing Landlord at the time of application. Each case would be considered upon its own merits and subject to the spirit of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 according to individual circumstances.

New wording

11.3 The following are persons who do not qualify for HomeseekerPlus:

- An applicant may not hold two tenancies at one time, applicants must be able to end their current tenancy within a reasonable period from being made an offer.
- An applicant will not qualify for affordable housing if the local authority has undertaken an affordability check which has shown that they have sufficient financial resources to adequately resolve their own particular housing need through outright purchase, lease or mortgage. This check will consider the type of accommodation needed to meet these needs to resolve their own housing need within their district.
- Homeowners who own or part own a property which is suitable for the household's needs or where those needs can be resolved through adaptation, and where it is safe to remain.

Financial

12.8 Applicants who have unreasonably disposed of financial resources that could have enabled them to purchase/obtain their own accommodation will be suspended.

Financial Assessments of armed forces applicants will have due regard of statutory guidance to affordable housing for members of the armed forces.

Unreasonable behaviour/rent arrears

12.9 The applicant, or a member of their household, has been responsible for unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable to be a tenant of the local authority or a affordable housing landlord at the time of application.

12.10 Behaviour that may be regarded as unacceptable is as follows: -

- Criminal activity in the vicinity of the property
- History of anti-social behaviour or disruptive nuisance to neighbours
- Racial harassment
- Illegal drug use or dealing
- Any other breach of the tenancy agreement such that the landlord would be likely to apply for and obtain a possession order.

12.11 As part of the assessment, consideration will be given to the household's personal circumstances, the severity of the situation and any other factors that may be relevant.

12.12 Such applicants will be informed of the actions required from them to demonstrate that there has been a change in their behaviour such that they will become qualifying e.g. obtaining a satisfactory landlord reference for a period of six months or where regular repayments are made without fail against an agreed repayment plan for a period of six months.

Suspending and demoting

Rewritten and expanded, some parts were moved from other areas of the Policy, this now means all the reasons for suspending or demoting are all in one place. This will make it easier for Customers and Staff to refer back to the Policy.

Old wording

9.1 If we become aware that a household has rent arrears or other housing debt accrued after an application has been registered the applicant will be given the opportunity to clear the debt before an offer proceeds. If the applicant is unable to do this, they may be suspended for a period as required to clear the debt before they can bid for other properties but each case will be considered upon its own merits. If a partner landlord becomes aware of such a debt they will advise the relevant local authority who may suspend or cancel the application as non-qualifying depending on the circumstances.

9.2 Applicants who have been awarded time limited bands are expected to bid on all suitable property types in a reasonably wide range of areas. Failure to do so may result in suspension or demotion for a period.

9.3 Whilst HomeseekerPlus aims to give applicants choice for good reason it also needs to help social landlords let their available homes in an efficient way. If an applicant refuses 3 properties that the local authority considers were suitable, the application may be demoted or suspended for a period.

9.4 An immediate review of an application will be undertaken if an applicant is found to have acted (or failed to act) in a way which deliberately worsened their housing situation. This could lead to the applicant being suspended, or being demoted to a lower band, for a minimum of 6 months.

9.5 Applicants will be advised as to what action/s will be necessary to lift the suspension or demotion.

New wording

Tenancy Debts

12.2 If an applicant has rent arrears or other housing debt with an affordable housing landlord which accrued less than 6 years ago, the applicant will be given the opportunity to clear the debt before a decision to suspend the application is made. If the applicant is unable to do this, they may be suspended for a period sufficient to reduce the debt to below the equivalent of eight weeks arrears, as well as having a repayment plan in place and payment being made before they can bid for properties.

12.3 Each case will be considered on its own merit, For example, an application would not be suspended if rent arrears arose as a result of domestic abuse.

12.4 Existing affordable housing tenants who are suspended because of rent arrears will be considered as an exception on an individual basis if proved that they cannot afford to stay in their current tenancy as a result of Welfare Reform Act changes.

12.5 If a partner landlord becomes aware of such a debt they will inform the relevant local authority when arrears are reduced. The local authority may unsuspend the application or advise the applicant to submit a change of circumstances for their application to be reassessed.

Time Limited Bands

12.6 Applicants who have been awarded time limited bands are expected to bid on all suitable property types available within their local connection area. Failure to do so may result in suspension or demotion for a period the local authority deems appropriate.

Repeated Refusal of Properties

12.7 Whilst Homeseekerplus aims to give applicants choice, it also needs to help affordable housing landlords let their available homes in an efficient way. If an applicant refuses three properties that the local authority considers suitable, the application will be demoted or suspended for a period of 6 months from the time of their last offer. This provision does not apply to final offers of accommodation made in order to discharge homeless duties under part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) or Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

Financial

12.8 Applicants who have unreasonably disposed of financial resources that could have enabled them to purchase/obtain their own accommodation will be suspended.

Financial Assessments of armed forces applicants will have due regard of statutory guidance to affordable housing for members of the armed forces.

Deliberately worsening their circumstances

12.13 An immediate review of an application will be undertaken if an applicant is found to have acted (or failed to act) in a way which deliberately worsened their housing situation. This could lead to the applicant being suspended, or being demoted to a lower band, for a minimum of 6 months.

Exceptions

12.14 Exceptions to these qualifying criteria include:

- Those people fleeing harassment or violence where the Police, Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVA) or Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) support a move
- Proven social or medical/welfare needs

12.15 In exceptional circumstances where the applicant has an urgent need to move, the local authority may waive this qualification and suspension criteria.

Requesting a review of a suspension / demotion

12.16 Applicants will be advised as to what action/s will be necessary to lift the suspension or demotion.

12.17 Applicants who are suspended will need to contact their relevant local authority to ask for a review of this suspension if they feel their circumstances have changed. If agreed, their application will be reactivated and reassessed.

Local connection

This is one of the key sections of the Policy, it was felt the Old wording was unnecessarily wordy which had the potential for confusion. A section has been added giving more detail as to how this will be considered. It also provides specific advice covering Care Leavers, those in or have left the Armed Forces and people who have recently travelled from Abroad (including refugees and asylum seekers).

Old wording

Local Connection is defined in Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 as:

- Those who are normally resident in the local authority area, and that residence is or was of their own choice. (Local Authority Agreement guidelines suggest this as having resided in the area for six of the last twelve months, or three of the last five years, where residence has been out of choice);
- Those who are employed in the local authority area. (Local Authority Agreement guidelines suggest this as employment other than of a casual nature);
- Those that have family connections in the local authority area. (Local Authority Agreement guidelines suggest this as immediate family members who have themselves lived in the area for five years).
- Members of the armed forces have a local connection to the district of their choice (Those currently serving, served within the immediate preceding 5 years; bereaved spouse or civil partner who has recently or will cease to be entitled to Ministry of Defence accommodation following the death of their service spouse and the death was wholly or partly attributable to their service; existing or former members of the reserve forces who are suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is wholly or partly attributable to their service).
- Other special circumstances.

New wording

Local Connection

14.1 Due to the exceptional demand for housing across the HomeseekerPlus area and the difficulty in solving local housing need, preference will normally be given to applicants with a local connection to the appropriate district.

14.2 HomeseekerPlus local connection is defined by any of the following:

- Those who are, or were in the past, normally resident in the local authority area, and that residence was of their own choice during six out of the past twelve months or during three out of the past five years.
- Those who are employed in the local authority area
- Those who have immediate family connections in the local authority area for five years
- Members of the armed forces
- Other special circumstances

14.3 Local connection will be awarded by the lead authority only.

Local connection clarification

15.1 Normal residence

‘Normal residence’ is to be understood as meaning ‘the place where, at the relevant time, the person in fact resides.’ Residence in temporary accommodation provided by a housing authority can constitute normal residence of choice and contribute towards a local connection. In the case of a person who is street homeless or insecurely accommodated (‘sofa surfing’) within their district, the housing authority will need to satisfy themselves that the applicant has no settled accommodation elsewhere, and if from inquiries the authority is satisfied that the applicant does in fact reside in the district, then the applicant will be considered as normally resident.

15.2 Where the applicant raises family associations, this may extend beyond partners, parents, adult children or siblings. They may include associations with other family members provided there are sufficiently close links in the form of frequent contact, commitment or dependency. Family associations should be determined with regard to the fact-specific circumstances of the individual case.

15.3 Employment

For the purposes of employment, a member of the application should work in the district they are applying too: it would not be sufficient if the employer’s head office is located in the relevant district, but their place of work is not. In the case of self-employment, local connection will be defined by the address at which their business

is registered. For agency, casual or other types of employment, proof must be provided that the employment contract is not short-term, casual or ancillary.

15.4 Special Circumstances

Special circumstances include but are not limited to the need to be near special medical or support services which are available only in a particular district and where transport links are not sufficient to meet those needs. Special circumstances will be assessed on their own individual merits.

15.5 Care leavers

Care leavers who are owed a 'Leaving Care' duty, will have a local connection to all districts within the area of the Children's Services Authority. Care leavers who have been placed in accommodation in a different district to that of the Children's Services Authority, and they have lived in the other district for at least 2 years, including some time before they turned 16, they will also have the same local connection until they are 21.

Any local care leavers protocol applies.

15.6 Armed Forces

Members of the armed forces will have a local connection to a district of their choice. This applies to:

- Those currently serving, or having served within the immediately preceding five years.
- Bereaved spouses or civil partners who have recently, or will cease to be, entitled to Ministry of Defence accommodation following the death of their service spouse and the death was wholly or partly attributable to their service.
- Existing or former members of the reserve forces who are suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is wholly or partly attributable to their service.

15.7 Local connection will also be awarded to divorced or separated spouses or civil partners of Service personnel who are required to move out of accommodation provided by the Ministry of Defence.

15.8 Persons from Abroad

If an applicant has been subject to immigration control where they would not have been deemed eligible and subsequently become eligible, the date of where a local connection would apply is the date they moved into the area. Refugees would have a local connection outside of these criteria to the last area they were housed in by the Home Office under asylum support.

15.9 Local connection will not be awarded if the accommodation was not of the applicant's own choice. This includes but is not limited to:

- Approved premises
- Rehabilitation units

15.10 Decisions on local connection will be made based on the facts at the date of the decision and not the date of application.

Verification

This section was vague, and each council verified in different ways and at different times. To have a more comprehensive verification we have added in what documents are needed and what verification is. This also works in with the functions on the HomeseekerPlus website so applicants can upload these when they apply which they previously couldn't do.

Old wording

Applicants will be able to bid for properties advertised, but no tenancy will be offered until verification has been completed.

New wording

19.1 Applicants will be able to bid for properties advertised, but no tenancy will be offered until verification has been completed by the relevant local authority. The purpose of this verification is to establish the accuracy or validity of the application.

19.2 Documents required for verification will depend upon individual circumstances. Documents must be provided to verify medical needs, eligibility and qualifying status etc.

19.3 Key documents will remain valid for 6 months or for the length of validity of the document, whichever is the longer or should your circumstances change then we may require further verification of your documents.

19.4 Key standard documents can include, but are not limited to:

- Identification for all household members on the application
- 2 months bank statements of all household members over the age of 18
- Proof of Child Benefit or an appropriate court order
- Proof of residency to support 'right to rent' checks

Medical and welfare banding

Medical and welfare have been separated into two new bands instead of a combined banding. The assessment criteria has not been altered; this will not change any current applicants banding unless their circumstances have changed.

The reason for this change is to better highlight the types of situations people are being banded for. Medical/Welfare is at present a big category and this will allow a more fine-tuned consideration of households being awarded these bandings.

Old wording

Emergency Band

The applicant assessed as immediate need of re-housing on medical grounds. This is most likely to be when they have had a major incident, are in hospital or other emergency provision and unable to return to the existing home because of changed medical condition.

Or

Exceptional circumstances where there is proven threat to life or limb. This would normally be based on information provided by the Police or Emergency services.

Or

Exceptional circumstances where the current property has a critical detrimental effect on their welfare. This would normally be based on information provided by Emergency services, multi-agency meetings or Social Care services.

These are time limited for 1 month when they will be reviewed. It can be extended if no suitable properties have become available in this time scale or a direct match can be made.

Gold Band

Urgent medical/welfare need or long term disability that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation. This would apply when the situation is so serious that it would not be reasonable to expect the applicant to continue to live at the property for any length of time, given their particular medical/welfare circumstances but not a life threatening emergency.

Proof of the situation would be required from Social Care services, NHS or other medical specialists.

Silver Band

Significant medical or welfare need that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation. This could be situations/medical conditions that could apply to one or more members of the household which because of the particular household circumstances significant distress is caused. Proof of the situation would be required from Social Care services, NHS or other medical specialists.

Depression and asthma are the most commonly quoted medical conditions. Where these are mild and not directly related to the current property priority is unlikely to be awarded.

New wording

Medical Need

Emergency band

22.14 The applicant is assessed as in immediate need of re-housing on medical grounds. This may be when they have had a major incident, are in hospital or another emergency provision and unable to return to the existing home because of their medical condition and immediate adaptations are not available.

This award is time limited for 1 month when it will be reviewed. It can be extended if no suitable properties have become available in this time scale or a direct match can be made.

Gold band

22.15 Urgent medical need or long-term disability that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation. This would apply when the situation is so serious that it would not be reasonable to expect the applicant to continue to live at the property for any length of time, given their particular medical circumstances but not a life-threatening emergency.

Proof of the situation would be required from Social Care services, NHS or other medical specialists.

For example, a member of the household seeking accommodation is disabled and re-housing will enable that person to overcome urgent physical barriers created by current accommodation and it has been established that the home cannot be adapted to meet needs e.g. steps and stairs.

Silver band

22.16 Significant medical need that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation. This could be situations/medical conditions that could apply to one or more members of the household which because of the particular household circumstances significant distress is caused. Proof of the situation would be required from Social Care services, NHS or other medical specialists.

Depression and asthma are the most commonly quoted medical conditions. Where these are mild and not directly related to the current property, priority is unlikely to be awarded.

Welfare Need

Emergency band

22.17 The applicant assessed as in immediate need of re-housing on welfare grounds where there has been a major incident and there is proven threat to life or limb. This would normally be based on information provided by the Police or other specialists.

Gold banding

22.18 Exceptional circumstances where the current property has a critical long-term detrimental effect on their welfare. This would normally be based on information provided by multi agency meetings or Social Care services.

Silver banding

22.19 Significant welfare need that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation. Proof of the situation would be required from Social Care services, housing association or other specialists to establish that a management move would not be appropriate.

This banding would only be used if the housing provider is unable to provide a suitable resolution.

Move on/care leavers

This section was expanded to include the new care leaver duty.

Old wording

Move-on from supported accommodation where a planned move is agreed by the relevant local housing authority. When someone is placed in accommodation based supported housing and is not in their home/lead authority area there is a presumption that they will be reconnected back to their home area when ready to move-on from the supported accommodation. The support provider will also discuss other housing options before putting them forward for social housing.

There are two requirements for this priority:-

1. that the supported accommodation provider has confirmed that the resident is ready for independent living by completing the standard move- on form detailing the work they have completed with the resident and assessment of any remaining support needs.;
2. that the local authority has been involved in the move-on planning and accepts that they are the appropriate local authority to re-house this applicant by awarding this priority.

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Appendix A

New wording

22.20 Gold Band

A young person owed leaving care duties under section 23C of the Children Act 1989 and in a housing need will be awarded gold banding to the area of the Children Services Authority that owes them the duties. HomeseekerPlus comprises of Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire which have different Children Services Authorities, therefore gold will only be awarded to housing authority districts falling within the area of the Children Services Authority.

Move-on from supported accommodation funded County Council commissioned services and where a local connection was agreed at point of referral by the relevant local housing authority.

When someone is placed in accommodation based supported housing and is not in their home/lead authority area there is a presumption that they will be reconnected back to their home area when ready to move-on from the supported accommodation.

The requirements for this priority are:

- that the supported accommodation provider has confirmed that the resident is ready for independent living by completing the standard move- on form detailing the work they have completed with the resident and assessment of any remaining support needs;
- that the local authority has been involved in the move-on planning and accepts that they are the appropriate local authority to re-house this applicant by awarding this priority;
- the accommodation is not low support, temporary or emergency provision or intensive housing management (unless subject to local individual arrangements).

Bedroom need criteria

This section was tweaked to include clarification of shared custody and the reasons for an extra bedroom to be awarded.

Old wording

The bedroom need for a household is assessed to match Housing Benefit rules because from April 2013 the same rules apply to all renting households including social housing.

One bedroom is required for:-

- An adult couple,
- A person aged 16 or over.
- 2 children aged up to 16 years of age of the same sex.
- 2 children aged up to 10 years of age of different sexes.

19.2 When a child is born, the applicant must provide evidence of the birth as soon as possible and the bedroom need will then be re-assessed to ensure it is still correct.

19.3 An extra bedroom will be considered where the following applies:

- A carer who provides the applicant or their partner with regular overnight care, who is not normally living with you. Evidence will be required to substantiate any claim which may include the care component of DLA (Disability Living Allowance), PIP (Personal Independent Payment) or attendance allowance, or details of a care package from a care providing agency funded by Social Services.
- An independent medical adviser has confirmed the need for an extra bedroom.

In all cases an assessment of affordability will be undertaken, with discretion for the final decision being with the relevant local authority and social housing landlord.

19.4 Potential children of foster or adoptive carers will be considered in the bedroom need assessment on an individual basis once they have been accepted by the appropriate Social Care Panel.

19.5. No visiting children should be included on the application and they will not be included in the bed room need assessment.

New wording

18.1 The bedroom need for a household is assessed to match housing costs guidance to ensure suitability and affordability for low income households.

18.2 One bedroom is required for:

- An adult couple
- A person aged 16 or over
- 2 children aged up to 16 years of age of the same sex
- 2 children aged up to 10 years of age of different sexes

18.3 When a child is born, the applicant must provide evidence of the birth as soon as possible and the bedroom need will then be re-assessed. This may not change the bedroom need or banding and any additional award will not be given until evidence of the birth is provided.

18.4 Visiting children will not be counted in this assessment.

Additional bedroom needs criteria

24.1 Households will also be assessed to consider the need for one additional bedroom for each of the following, if they are assessed as being included as part of the household:

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- A tenant requiring a non-resident overnight carer
- Disabled child who cannot share a bedroom with their sibling due to their disability
- An adult child who is serving away with the armed forces
- A room for a foster child or children

24.2 Households can include someone on the application if there is a need for them to live with the household in order to give or receive care or support, where no one in the immediate household is able to provide that care. Evidence will be required to demonstrate:

- that the household is dependent upon this care or support and that other satisfactory arrangements cannot be made
- that the arrangement is 'permanent'

24.3 We will also require evidence that the person requires your support or care; for example, proof that you/they are providing care, are in receipt of care allowances and are able to meet any costs associated with the additional bedroom either through benefits, income or savings.

24.4 We will usually only include members of the household that are currently living with you or that the Council can be satisfied will be reasonably expected to reside (if not currently residing) with you on your application.

24.5 In cases where two parents or guardians have joint access to children, bedroom eligibility will be awarded to the main care provider. Applicants will need to demonstrate that:

- they are the main care provider (children live with you for more than half the week – four nights or more) and are in receipt of child benefit and, if applicable, child tax credits
- that the arrangement is 'permanent'

24.6 Please note the protections afforded by the Equality Act 2010 are intended to be available to all, including children and adolescents. Any required additional bedroom need will be awarded on a case by case basis in line with housing benefit rules and an assessment of affordability.

Demotion

New section not previously clarified. It was only written in general terms.

Old wording

No current section

New wording

26.1 The Lead Authority may decide to demote an applicant to the band below at the end of the time-limited period if it is apparent that the applicant is choosing to wait for a particular type of property or location, and not treating their circumstances as being urgent.

26.2 Applicants are encouraged to make full use of their bids and seek all housing options available to them. Applicants will be assessed by a senior officer if they have unreasonably refused a property or to bid in a reasonable time if the following criteria have been met:

- they deliberately do or fail to do anything and as a consequence they miss out on suitable properties
- it would have been reasonable for them to do so, and there is no other good reason why they have not

26.3 The demotion period will be what the local authority deems reasonable up to 12 months and will be considered on a case by case basis.

Global banding criteria

This section has always been missing from the policy even though we have always had a global band.

Old wording

No current section

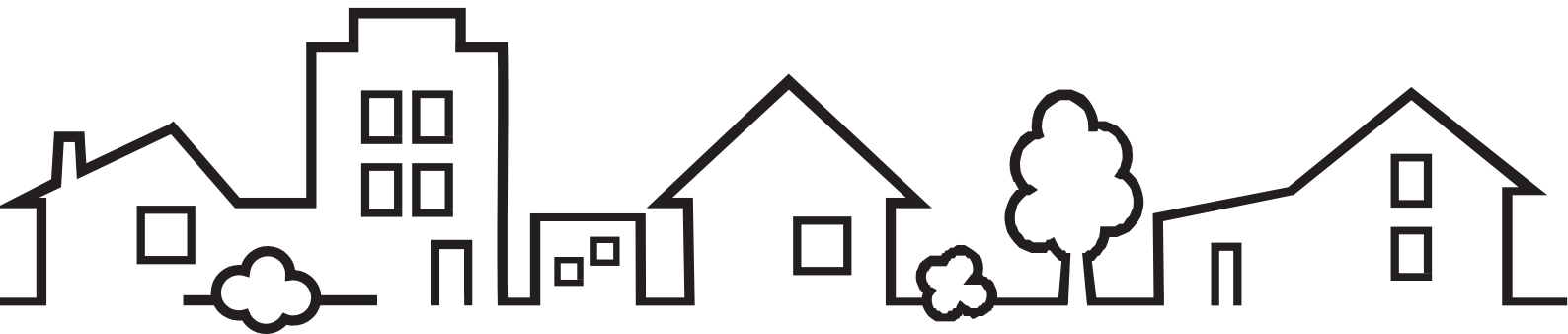
New wording

27.1 Applications will be awarded a global band equal to that of their local banding in all but the below cases:

- Where the lead authority has accepted a full statutory homeless duty to secure accommodation for the applicant. The global banding in this circumstance will be silver.
- Where the lead authority has a gold move on agreement from supported accommodation, the global banding will be bronze.
- Where the lead authority has assessed the property as having a prohibition notice, the global band will be bronze.
- Where the lead authority has awarded a downsizing band, the global band will be silver.

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HomeseekerPlus



Common allocations policy document



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Section 1: Introduction and policy statement

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Homeseekerplus is a choice-based lettings (CBL) scheme run by the seven local authorities in partnership with social housing landlords and any other housing providers that are required to deliver affordable homes through section 106 affordable housing obligations within Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire.
- 1.2 The seven local authorities are Tewkesbury Borough Council, Gloucester City Council, Cheltenham Borough Council, Stroud District Council, Forest of Dean District Council, Cotswold District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council.
- 1.3 Demand for affordable social housing within the Homeseekerplus area is very high and cannot be met from the available social housing resources. Only those in the highest housing need with a local connection to the area are likely to obtain housing through the Homeseekerplus scheme. Each district's Housing Advice Service will be able to advise on a range of housing options including the private rented sector.
- 1.4 This policy explains who is eligible and qualifies to apply on Homeseekerplus and sets out how applications will be assessed based on housing need.
- 1.5 Homeseekerplus aims to allocate social housing in the partner council areas in a fair and transparent way while complying with all legal requirements.

2. Overview of how the partnership functions

- 2.1 Homeseekerplus enables social housing landlords and other housing providers (as detailed in 1.1 above) to advertise their homes. Applicants are able to express an interest in properties advertised; this is known as placing a "bid" for a property. Once a bid is placed the system generates a shortlist, sorting applicants in order of band, band start date and whether they meet the criteria of the advert. Priority for properties goes to those who have a local connection with the local authority in which the property is located, then to those who have a local connection with any of the other Homeseekerplus districts and finally to anyone else.
- 2.2 All applicants seeking social housing across Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire will complete the same application process and will be assessed against the same clear set of criteria. Depending on their circumstances, applicants will be placed into one of four bands: Emergency, Gold, Silver or Bronze subject to final verification by a Homeseekerplus partner.
- 2.3 Once an application has been made, applicants are advised of their banding and banding start date, together with details of how to access the system. This enables applicants to bid

for suitable social housing vacancies being advertised across the whole of Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire.

- 2.4 Once the bid deadline has passed, the successful applicant will normally be the highest priority household at the point of shortlisting. This is assessed against the criteria for the property, including where local connection applies, and taking into account any local letting plans.
- 2.5 Responsibility for letting each available property lies with the social housing landlord. The appropriate landlord must confirm that the details on the application are still correct and may undertake their own assessment to ensure the property is right for the applicant before making an offer. Incorrect information may result in the offer being withdrawn and the applicant's circumstances being re-assessed.
- 2.6 Applications for sheltered and extra care housing schemes may require an assessment of the household's support needs, prior to any offer being made.

3. Policy statement

3.1 This policy aims to:

- Assist in building sustainable communities.
- Enable informed choice of housing/ housing options and improve levels of customer satisfaction.
- Operate a common selection system that offers realistic, informed choice for all applicants.
- Ensure that those who have the greatest need for housing have the greatest opportunity to secure it.
- Ensure that less able applicants are involved in the lettings process and have choices, offering equality of opportunity for all.
- Make best use of available housing resources to meet local need.
- Minimise the refusal of offers of accommodation and reduce rent loss by allowing people to choose where they live, thereby supporting sustainable communities.
- Where possible, give people with a local connection to a district priority in the letting of housing within that district.
- Enable mobility within social housing in Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire.
- Enable the authorities to meet their statutory duties including where duties are owed to homeless Applicants under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, as amended and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
- Contribute towards tackling discrimination.
- Use a common eligibility criteria and housing application process.
- Ensure fairness, simplicity and transparency with a system that is easily understood.
- Promote a feeling of ownership and commitment to their area as they will have chosen to live there.
- Assess applications according to the applicant's needs under the framework of the policy.

4. Equal opportunities and social inclusion

- 4.1 All partners of Homeseekerplus agree that applicants should be given every possible assistance to access the housing register and search for suitable properties. Applicants who are identified as being potentially disadvantaged by the scheme may be contacted to discuss alternative options.
- 4.2 All partners of Homeseekerplus are committed to the elimination of discrimination. They promote equality of opportunity for all and work towards this goal in the provision of services.
- 4.3 We are committed to:
- Eliminating discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Equalities Act 2010
 - Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and others who do not share it
 - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it
 - Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic
 - Taking steps to meet the needs of people who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of people who do not share it
 - Encouraging those people who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low
 - Making the best possible use of the existing and potential workforce and resources by enabling cross boundary moves
- 4.4 Applicants potentially disadvantaged by the scheme will initially be identified from the application process and they may be offered a home visit or interview. Staff will seek to establish any support needs and identify ways of enabling the applicants to fully participate in Homeseekerplus. This may include sending copies of the adverts in large print to an applicant or simply providing advice. Translation services may be provided where appropriate.
- 4.5 Disadvantaged applicants are able to nominate a person (including family members, friends or a professional worker) to help them bid, or to bid on their behalf for suitable properties. Signed consent will be required if requests are made by a third party.
- 4.6 The local authority may bid for suitable vacancies on a vulnerable applicant's behalf if they are at risk of being disadvantaged by the scheme and have no support to enable them to make bids themselves. This may include the use of the 'Autobid' function.
- 4.7 Agencies providing support may be able to assist their client with help on housing issues.

5. Legal Framework

- 5.1 Homeseekerplus complies with the local authorities' statutory duties under Part VI and VII of the Housing Act 1996 as amended, and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, in addition to any other relevant legal duties, and has regard to the following:
- Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England 2020
 - Equalities Act 2010
 - Public Sector Equality Duty
 - Data Protection Act 2018
 - Localism Act 2011
 - Immigration Act 2014
 - Local letting plans
 - S.106 agreements
 - Armed Forces Act 2011
- 5.2 Furthermore, this policy will have due regard to any subsequent superseding acts and/or guidance.

6. Data retention

- 6.1 As part of the application process, personal data is required to support any housing application. We will comply with all data protection legislation. This includes:
- For active applications, data is stored for as long as the application is active.
 - For housed applications, data is stored for three years
 - If Homeseekerplus is not accessed for a period of one year, then the case will be set to 'removed' and removed after six months.
 - Homeless applications are stored for three years.

7. Definition of social housing providers for Homeseekerplus

- 7.1 For the purposes of this policy, affordable housing is defined as being social rented and affordable rented housing provided to eligible households who otherwise would be unable to secure alternative provision, and who have been assessed under this policy. Housing providers who operate within the Homeseekerplus boundaries are defined as being registered providers, arm's length management organisations or stock owning Councils. Eligibility and qualifying criteria for providers is set by this policy.
- 7.2 All partners have a common goal to provide homes for local people in housing need with eligibility determined within this policy framework.

8. Types of tenancies

- 8.1 Depending on the landlord and applicants' circumstances, an applicant may be offered either an introductory, secure, starter, assured, fixed term, assured short hold or flexible tenancy.

9. Who is eligible to register?

- 9.1 Homeseekerplus is open to anyone in housing need who is not subject to immigration rules which would otherwise exclude them. Eligible households may include, but are not limited to, existing tenants looking to transfer to another property, homeless households looking for a permanent home and other households who might, for example, reside in the private sector or lodge with family and friends. A household includes anyone that may reasonably be expected to live together with them as part of their application.

10. Who is not eligible to register?

- 10.1 Persons from Abroad

- 10.2 Persons subject to immigration control who are eligible for an allocation of housing accommodation, the following classes of persons subject to immigration control are persons who are eligible for an allocation of housing accommodation under Part 6 of the 1996 Act:

- Class A – a person who is recorded by the Secretary of State as a refugee within the definition in Article 1 of the Refugee Convention and who has leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom;
- Class B – a person:
 - who has exceptional leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom granted outside the provisions of the Immigration Rules; and
 - who is not subject to a condition requiring him to maintain and accommodate himself, and any person who is dependent on him, without recourse to public funds;
- Class C – a person who is habitually resident in the United Kingdom, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man or the Republic of Ireland and whose leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom is not subject to any limitation or condition, other than a person—
 - who has been given leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom upon an undertaking given by his sponsor;
 - who has been resident in the United Kingdom, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man or the Republic of Ireland for less than five years beginning on the date of entry or the date on which his sponsor gave the undertaking in respect of him, whichever date is the later; and

- whose sponsor or, where there is more than one sponsor, at least one of whose sponsors, is still alive; and
 - Class D – a person who left the territory of Montserrat after 1st November 1995 because of the effect on that territory of a volcanic eruption.
- 10.3 If the local authority decides that an applicant is not eligible to register for any of these reasons, they will notify the person of the decision in writing, including the reason.
- 10.4 Other:
- Applicants under 16 years of age at the date they apply are not eligible to register for Homeseekerplus.
- 10.5 Persons who are ineligible for a tenancy in their own right may still be included within a household application and for determining the number of bedrooms needed for the household.

11. Who does not qualify?

- 11.1 Homeseekerplus has been established under the terms of the Housing Act 1996, as amended, and the Localism Act 2011. This gives local authorities the right to decide who will not qualify for social housing.
- 11.2 Applicants who may initially be eligible to register on Homeseekerplus but, following assessment, do not qualify, will be excluded from Homeseekerplus. Others may be eligible and qualify to be included but are subsequently suspended from bidding
- 11.3 The following are persons who do not qualify for Homeseekerplus:
- An applicant may not hold two tenancies at one time, applicants must be able to end their current tenancy within a reasonable period from being made an offer.
- An applicant will not qualify for social housing if the local authority has undertaken an affordability check which has shown that they have sufficient financial resources to adequately resolve their own particular housing need through outright purchase, lease or mortgage. This check will consider the type of accommodation needed to meet these needs to resolve their own housing need within their district.
 - Homeowners who own or part own a property which is suitable for the household's needs or where those needs can be resolved through adaptation, and where it is safe to remain.
- 11.4 If the local authority decides that an applicant does not qualify, they will notify the applicant of their decision in writing and the reasons for it.
- 11.5 Applicants who do not qualify will need to reapply in full if they feel their circumstances have changed to the extent that they may now qualify.

12. Suspending and demoting an application

12.1 Applications to Homeseekerplus may be suspended or demoted if any of the following circumstances are identified

12.2 Tenancy Debts:

If an applicant has rent arrears or other housing debt with a social landlord or any other housing provider (as detailed in 1.1 above), which accrued less than 6 years ago, the applicant will be given the opportunity to clear the debt before a decision to suspend the application is made. If the applicant is unable to do this, they may be suspended for a period sufficient to reduce the debt to below the equivalent of eight weeks arrears, as well as having a repayment plan in place and payment being made before they can bid for properties.

12.3 Each case will be considered on its own merit, For example, an application would not be suspended if rent arrears arose as a result of domestic abuse.

12.4 Existing social housing tenants who are suspended because of rent arrears will be considered as an exception on an individual basis if proved that they cannot afford to stay in their current tenancy as a result of Welfare Reform Act changes.

12.5 If a partner landlord becomes aware of such a debt they will inform the relevant local authority when arrears are reduced. The local authority may unsuspend the application or advise the applicant to submit a change of circumstances for their application to be reassessed.

12.6 Time Limited Bands:

Applicants who have been awarded time limited bands are expected to bid on all suitable property types available within their local connection area. Failure to do so may result in suspension or demotion for a period the local authority deems appropriate.

12.7 Repeated Refusal of Properties:

Whilst Homeseekerplus aims to give applicants choice, it also needs to help social landlords let their available homes in an efficient way. If an applicant refuses three properties that the local authority considers suitable, the application will be demoted or suspended for a period of 6 months from the time of their last offer. This provision does not apply to final offers of accommodation made in order to discharge homeless duties under part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) or Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

12.8 Financial

Applicants who have unreasonably disposed of financial resources that could have enabled them to purchase/obtain their own accommodation will be suspended.

Financial Assessments of armed forces applicants will have due regard of statutory guidance to social housing for members of the armed forces.

12.9 Unreasonable behaviour/rent arrears

The applicant, or a member of their household, has been responsible for unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable to be a tenant of the local authority or a social housing landlord at the time of application.

12.10 Behaviour that may be regarded as unacceptable is as follows: -

- Criminal activity in the vicinity of the property
- History of anti-social behaviour or disruptive nuisance to neighbours
- Racial harassment
- Illegal drug use or dealing
- Any other breach of the tenancy agreement such that the landlord would be likely to apply for and obtain a possession order.

12.11 As part of the assessment, consideration will be given to the household's personal circumstances, the severity of the situation and any other factors that may be relevant.

12.12 Such applicants will be informed of the actions required from them to demonstrate that there has been a change in their behaviour such that they will become qualifying e.g. obtaining a satisfactory landlord reference for a period of six months or where regular repayments are made without fail against an agreed repayment plan for a period of six months.

12.13 Deliberately worsening their circumstances

An immediate review of an application will be undertaken if an applicant is found to have acted (or failed to act) in a way which deliberately worsened their housing situation. This could lead to the applicant being suspended, or being demoted to a lower band, for a minimum of 6 months.

12.14 Exceptions to these qualifying criteria include:

- Those people fleeing harassment or violence where the Police, Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVA) or Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) support a move
- Proven social or medical/welfare needs

12.15 In exceptional circumstances where the applicant has an urgent need to move, the local authority may waive this qualification and suspension criteria.

12.16 Requesting a review of a suspension / demotion:

Applicants will be advised as to what action/s will be necessary to lift the suspension or demotion.

12.17 Applicants who are suspended will need to contact their relevant local authority to ask for a review of this suspension if they feel their circumstances have changed. If agreed, their application will be reactivated and reassessed.

13. Providing false information and change of circumstances

- 13.1 Any applicant who knowingly or recklessly gives false information or knowingly withholds information in order to secure a home to which they are not entitled may lose any home provided to them and may also be prosecuted. Where false information is given and the applicant becomes non-qualifying or ineligible, the application will be removed. Where false information is given and the applicant still qualifies, the application will be suspended for a period of 3 months and the applicant will have to reapply with correct information. The law imposes severe penalties, including substantial fines up to £5000 or imprisonment, when an offence is proven.

14. Local Connection

- 14.1 Due to the exceptional demand for housing across the Homeseekerplus area and the difficulty in solving local housing need, preference will normally be given to applicants with a local connection to the appropriate district.
- 14.2 Homeseekerplus local connection is defined by any of the following:
- Those who are, or were in the past, normally resident in the local authority area, and that residence was of their own choice during six out of the past 12 months or during three out of the past five years.
 - those who are employed in the local authority area
 - Those who have immediate family connections in the local authority area for five years
 - Members of the armed forces
 - Other special circumstances
- 14.3 Local connection will be awarded by the lead authority only.

15. Local connection clarification

15.1 Normal residence

‘Normal residence’ is to be understood as meaning ‘the place where, at the relevant time, the person in fact resides.’ Residence in temporary accommodation provided by a housing authority can constitute normal residence of choice and contribute towards a local connection. In the case of a person who is street homeless or insecurely accommodated (‘sofa surfing’) within their district, the housing authority will need to satisfy themselves that the applicant has no settled accommodation elsewhere, and if from inquiries the authority is satisfied that the applicant does in fact reside in the district, then the applicant will be considered as normally resident.

- 15.2 Where the applicant raises family associations, this may extend beyond partners, parents, adult children or siblings. They may include associations with other family members provided there are sufficiently close links in the form of frequent contact, commitment or dependency. Family associations should be determined with regard to the fact-specific circumstances of the individual case.

15.3 Employment

For the purposes of employment, a member of the application should work in the district they are applying too: it would not be sufficient if the employer's head office is located in the relevant district, but their place of work is not. In the case of self-employment, local connection will be defined by the address at which their business is registered. For agency, casual or other types of employment, proof must be provided that the employment contract is not short-term, casual or ancillary.

15.4 Special Circumstances

Special circumstances include but are not limited to the need to be near special medical or support services which are available only in a particular district and where transport links are not sufficient to meet those needs. Special circumstances will be assessed on their own individual merits.

15.5 Care leavers

Care leavers who are owed a 'Leaving Care' duty, will have a local connection to all districts within the area of the Children's Services Authority. Care leavers who have been placed in accommodation in a different district to that of the Children's Services Authority, and they have lived in the other district for at least 2 years, including some time before they turned 16, they will also have the same local connection until they are 21. Any local care leavers protocol applies.

15.6 Armed Forces

Members of the armed forces will have a local connection to a district of their choice. This applies to:

- Those currently serving, or having served within the immediately preceding five years.
- Bereaved spouses or civil partners who have recently, or will cease to be, entitled to Ministry of Defence accommodation following the death of their service spouse and the death was wholly or partly attributable to their service.
- Existing or former members of the reserve forces who are suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is wholly or partly attributable to their service.

- 15.7 Local connection will also be awarded to divorced or separated spouses or civil partners of Service personnel who are required to move out of accommodation provided by the Ministry of Defence.

15.8 Persons from Abroad

If an applicant has been subject to immigration control where they would not have been deemed eligible and subsequently become eligible, the date of where a local connection would apply is the date they moved into the area. Refugees would have a local connection

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outside of these criteria to the last area they were housed in by the Home Office under asylum support.

15.9 Local connection will not be awarded if the accommodation was not of the applicant's own choice. This includes but is not limited to:

- Approved premises
- Rehabilitation units

15.10 Decisions on local connection will be made based on the facts at the date of the decision and not the date of application.

Section 2: Assessment of applications

16. How to register

- 16.1 Applicants are able to register for social housing through the Homeseekerplus website at www.homeseekerplus.co.uk. Homeseekerplus is an online application only and has been designed to be accessible to all with speech, reading and translation tools. Applicants needing advice and assistance with their application are advised to contact the authority they are applying to.
- 16.3 When an applicant applies through the Homeseekerplus website and has registered their household, they will complete an application for social housing, giving details of their housing situation. If, after completion of the application and provision of any necessary proof or further information, the applicant is assessed as being eligible, they will be given a band start date and placed in a local housing band.
- 16.4 Special rules are required for those in the armed forces to comply with The Localism Act recognising the services they have offered the country. On discharge members of the armed forces, with Homeless priority need (dependent children or vulnerable as a result of disability) will be awarded Gold band for 6 months from the discharge date. Homeless with a non - priority need are given Silver band from their discharge date. Should they become homeless again within 5 years of the discharge priority need or unintentionally homeless applicants will be awarded Gold band again for 6 months from Notice being received. Non-priority need or Intentional homeless will get Silver band backdated for 6 months from the Notice being received.
- 16.5 Applicants should make sure that they include all relevant details on the application so that proper consideration can be given to the application. Homeseekerplus may contact any of the applicants' previous landlords or agencies to check the details given.
- 16.6 All applicants will be given unique login details which can be updated from the account.
- 16.7 Applicants will be informed if further information or clarification is required. Failure to complete the online application form will result in it being deleted from the system.

17. Assessment of an application

- 17.1 By registering to join Homeseekerplus, the applicant will need to freely give their consent for enquiries to be made to verify their circumstances. Applicants will need to confirm that the information they have given is true and accurate.
- 17.2 The information the applicant has provided will guide the decision on which band they will be placed in. Applicants will be required to provide the lead authority with documentation to evidence the stated housing need.

18. Bedroom need assessment

- 18.1 The bedroom need for a household is assessed to match housing costs guidance to ensure suitability and affordability for low income households.
- 18.2 One bedroom is required for:
- An adult couple
 - A person aged 16 or over
 - 2 children aged up to 16 years of age of the same sex
 - 2 children aged up to 10 years of age of different sexes
- 18.3 When a child is born, the applicant must provide evidence of the birth as soon as possible and the bedroom need will then be re-assessed. This may not change the bedroom need or banding and any additional award will not be given until evidence of the birth is provided.
- 18.4 Visiting children will not be counted in this assessment.

19. Verification

- 19.1 Applicants will be able to bid for properties advertised, but no tenancy will be offered until verification has been completed by the relevant local authority. The purpose of this verification is to establish the accuracy or validity of the application.
- 19.2 Documents required for verification will depend upon individual circumstances. Documents must be provided to verify medical needs, eligibility and qualifying status etc.
- 19.3 Key documents will remain valid for 6 months or for the length of validity of the document, whichever is the longer or should your circumstances change then we may require further verification of your documents.
- 19.4 Key standard documents can include, but are not limited to:
- Identification for all household members on the application
 - 2 months bank statements of all household members over the age of 18
 - Proof of Child Benefit or an appropriate court order
 - Proof of residency to support 'right to rent' checks

20. Banding reasons

- 20.1 Applicants will be awarded a band appropriate to the household circumstances assessed from the information provided in their application.
- 20.2 To qualify for a particular band, applicants need to meet at least one of the criteria set out in the banding table below.

- 20.3 Applicants will be awarded two bands – one for their “local” band (lead authority) and one for their “global” band (other 6 authorities). In some cases, these may be with the same authority, depending on circumstances. However, having a local connection to another authority would not automatically deem a household to have a higher banding in that district.
- 20.4 An applicant’s banding may be time- limited due to the type of housing need, therefore, the household would be expected to bid for and accept any suitable property offered within that time limit. Failure to do so may lead to a direct match or demotion.

21. Right to move

- 21.1 Right to Move is for social housing tenants who need to move to another district in order to take up a job or live closer to employment or training. In order to qualify, social housing tenants must demonstrate that the job/apprenticeship will alleviate significant hardship and that there are no other options available to them.
- 21.2 To determine qualification, the following detail will need to be established:
- The distance and/or time taken to travel between work and home
 - The availability of transport, taking into account level of earnings
 - The nature of the work and whether similar opportunities are available closer to home
 - Other personal factors, such as medical conditions and child care options, which would be affected if the tenant could not move
 - Whether failure to move would result in the loss of an opportunity to improve employment circumstances or prospects, for example, by taking up a better job, a promotion or apprenticeship
- 21.3 Those who qualify for Right to Move will get a local banding preference of Silver, identifying that there is a “Significant welfare need that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation”.

22. Band criteria

a. Property size

22.1 Emergency Band

Existing Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire social housing tenants willing to move from family accommodation to non-family social housing property within the partnership area.

22.2 Gold Band

Existing Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire social housing tenants willing to move to smaller family sized accommodation if this has been agreed with the relevant local authority to release a property of higher demand or limited availability.

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or

There is major overcrowding in the current property - lacking 2 or more bedrooms (this will not apply if the applicant has unreasonably allowed one or more people to move in to the property, as this is deliberately worsening the situation).

or

Environmental Health has inspected the property and has served a Prohibition Notice (or suspended Prohibition Licence) on the landlord due to overcrowding - subject also to the applicant not deliberately worsening the situation.

22.3 Silver Band

There is overcrowding in the current property - lacking 1 bedroom - (this will not apply if the applicant has unreasonably allowed one or more people to move in to the property, this is deliberately worsening the situation).

b. Property condition

22.4 Emergency band

Where Environmental Health has inspected the property and requires immediate vacation of the property because of an imminent risk of harm due to disrepair, major defects or grossly inadequate facilities. An Emergency Prohibition Order can be served on the landlord in these circumstances.

This award is time limited for 1 month when it will be reviewed. It can be extended if no suitable properties have become available in this time scale, or a direct match can be made.

22.5 Gold band

Where Environmental Health has inspected the property and has served a Prohibition Order

or

A Suspended Prohibition Order on the landlord that repairs have to be undertaken but the landlord is unable/unwilling to comply. In most cases the landlord will be required to undertake repairs to remedy the problem and when completed this should resolve the issue.

22.6 These only apply to the Local band so only when bidding for properties in the home/lead local authority area.

c. Homelessness

22.7 Homelessness is defined by Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 but was significantly updated by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The Homelessness Reduction Act set out new duties to local authorities to, amongst other things, prevent or relieve homeless.

22.8 Therefore applications to Homeseekerplus from those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness will fall into the following categories:

- A Prevention of Homelessness duty is ongoing or
- A Relief of Homelessness duty is ongoing or
- A Main Duty of Homelessness is ongoing or
- The applicant has made a homeless application to one of the Homeseeker Plus Local Authorities and remains assessed as eligible for assistance and homeless after the homelessness duties have ended.

22.9 More information on these duties can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities>

22.10 For the purpose of this policy and how banding will be assessed should the local authority owe you a duty under this legislation, banding will fall into either:

22.11 Gold banding (Main Duty)

The applicant has made a homelessness application under part VII of the housing act 1996, (as amended) to one of the Homeseekerplus local authorities, the 56 days of the Relief Duty have expired and the full s193 statutory homeless duty to secure accommodation for the applicant has been accepted by that authority. If this duty applies to an applicant, the applicant will receive a letter from the relevant local authority advising of this.

This is time limited for 1 month when it will be reviewed. It can be extended if no suitable properties have become available in this time scale. A suitable tenancy in the private sector or a direct match into social housing may be made to end the homelessness duty at any time.

22.12 Silver banding (Prevention or Relief Duties)

The applicant has made a homeless application to one of the Homeseekerplus local authorities and either:

- A Prevention of Homelessness duty has been accepted
- A Relief of Homelessness duty has been accepted

or

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The applicant has made a homeless application under part VII of the housing act 1996, as amended to one of the Homeseekerplus local authorities and remains assessed as eligible for assistance and homeless but has been found either non-priority or intentionally homeless.

d. Medical Need

22.13 None of the below refer to having a medical condition in its own right. It is only when the current housing is directly affecting that medical condition that priority is awarded. In other words, even if a member of the applicant's household has a very severe set of medical conditions, if their housing has little or no bearing on their health then no priority will be awarded.

22.14 Emergency band

The applicant is assessed as in immediate need of re-housing on medical grounds. This may be when they have had a major incident, are in hospital or another emergency provision and unable to return to the existing home because of their medical condition and immediate adaptations are not available.

This award is time limited for 1 month when it will be reviewed. It can be extended if no suitable properties have become available in this time scale or a direct match can be made.

22.15 Gold band

Urgent medical need or long-term disability that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation. This would apply when the situation is so serious that it would not be reasonable to expect the applicant to continue to live at the property for any length of time, given their particular medical circumstances but not a life-threatening emergency.

Proof of the situation would be required from Social Care services, NHS or other medical specialists.

For example, a member of the household seeking accommodation is disabled and re-housing will enable that person to overcome urgent physical barriers created by current accommodation and it has been established that the home cannot be adapted to meet needs e.g. steps and stairs.

22.16 Silver band

Significant medical need that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation. This could be situations/medical conditions that could apply to one or more members of the household which because of the particular household circumstances significant distress is caused. Proof of the situation would be required from Social Care services, NHS or other medical specialists.

Depression and asthma are the most commonly quoted medical conditions. Where these are mild and not directly related to the current property, priority is unlikely to be awarded.

e. Welfare Need

22.17 Emergency band

The applicant assessed as in immediate need of re-housing on welfare grounds where there has been a major incident and there is proven threat to life or limb. This would normally be based on information provided by the Police or other specialists.

22.18 Gold banding

Exceptional circumstances where the current property has a critical long-term detrimental effect on their welfare. This would normally be based on information provided by multi agency meetings or Social Care services.

22.19 Silver banding

Significant welfare need that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation. Proof of the situation would be required from Social Care services, housing association or other specialists to establish that a management move would not be appropriate.

This banding would only be used if the housing provider is unable to provide a suitable resolution.

f. Move on/care leavers

22.20 Gold band

A young person owed leaving care duties under section 23C of the Children Act 1989 and in a housing need will be awarded gold banding to the area of the Children Services Authority that owes them the duties. Homeseekerplus comprises of Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire which have different Children Services Authorities, therefore gold will only be awarded to housing authority districts falling within the area of the Children Services Authority.

Move-on from supported accommodation funded County Council commissioned services and where a local connection was agreed at point of referral by the relevant local housing authority.

When someone is placed in accommodation based supported housing and is not in their home/lead authority area there is a presumption that they will be reconnected back to their home area when ready to move-on from the supported accommodation.

The requirements for this priority are:

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- That the supported accommodation provider has confirmed that the resident is ready for independent living by completing the standard move- on form detailing the work they have completed with the resident and assessment of any remaining support needs;
- That the local authority has been involved in the move-on planning and accepts that they are the appropriate local authority to re-house this applicant by awarding this priority;
- The accommodation is not low support, temporary or emergency provision or intensive housing management (unless subject to local individual arrangements).

g. Multi-Agency

22.21 Gold band

As a result of a multi-agency decision agreed by the relevant housing authority. Where multi agencies including the local housing authority are involved with a particular household and agree on a way forward to resolve an urgent housing situation, this priority can be awarded to better protect the public or local neighbourhood.

23. Banding Table

	Property Size etc.	Property conditions (this only applies to the district where the Notice is made)	Homelessness (this only applies to the district where any duty is owed)	Medical needs	Welfare needs	General
EMERGENCY BAND	Existing Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire social housing tenants willing to move from family accommodation to non-family social housing property within the partnership area.	Where Environmental Health has inspected the property and requires immediate vacation of the property because of an imminent risk of harm due to disrepair, major defects or grossly inadequate facilities.	The applicant has made a homelessness application under part VII of the Housing Act 1996, as amended to one of the Homelessness local authorities and the full s193 statutory homelessness duty to secure accommodation for the applicant has been accepted by that authority.	The applicant assessed as immediate need of re-housing on medical grounds.	The applicant assessed as immediate need of re-housing on welfare grounds where there has been a major incident and there is proven threat to life or limb.	A young person owed leaving care duties under section 23C of the Children Act 1989 and in a housing need or Move-on from supported accommodation funded County Council commissioned services and where a local connection was agreed at point of referral
GOLD BAND	Existing Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire social housing tenants willing to move to smaller family sized accommodation if this has been agreed with your local authority to release a property of higher demand or limited availability. or There is major overcrowding in the current property - lacking 2 or more bedrooms or Environmental Health has inspected the property and has served a Prohibition Notice	Where Environmental Health has inspected the property and has served a Prohibition Order or Suspended Prohibition Order on the landlord that repairs have to be undertaken but the landlord is unable/unwilling to comply.	A Prevention or relief duty has been accepted or The applicant remains assessed as eligible for assistance and homeless but has either has been found either Non-priority, Intentionally homeless.	Urgent medical need or long-term disability that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation.	Exceptional circumstances where the current property has a critical long-term detrimental effect on their welfare.	Significant welfare need that would be alleviated by a move to more suitable accommodation.
SILVER BAND	There is overcrowding in the current property - lacking 1 bedroom					Right to move
BRONZE BAND						

All other Applicants

24 Additional bedroom needs criteria

- 24.1 Households will also be assessed to consider the need for one additional bedroom for each of the following, if they are assessed as being included as part of the household:
- A tenant requiring a non-resident overnight carer
 - Disabled child who cannot share a bedroom with their sibling due to their disability
 - An adult child who is serving away with the armed forces
 - A room for a foster child or children
- 24.2 Households can include someone on the application if there is a need for them to live with the household in order to give or receive care or support, where no one in the immediate household is able to provide that care. Evidence will be required to demonstrate:
- That the household is dependent upon this care or support and that other satisfactory arrangements cannot be made
 - that the arrangement is 'permanent'
- 24.3 We will also require evidence that the person requires your support or care; for example, proof that you/they are providing care, are in receipt of care allowances and are able to meet any costs associated with the additional bedroom either through benefits, income or savings.
- 24.4 We will usually only include members of the household that are currently living with you or that the Council can be satisfied will be reasonably expected to reside (if not currently residing) with you on your application.
- 24.5 In cases where two parents or guardians have joint access to children, bedroom eligibility will be awarded to the main care provider. Applicants will need to demonstrate that:
- they are the main care provider (children live with you for more than half the week -four nights or more) and are in receipt of child benefit and, if applicable, child tax credits
 - that the arrangement is 'permanent'
- 24.6 Please note the protections afforded by the Equality Act 2010 are intended to be available to all, including children and adolescents. Any required additional bedroom need will be awarded on a case by case basis in line with housing benefit rules and an assessment of affordability.

25. Time limited bands

- 25.1 Certain categories have a time limit of one month or more. This is given to recognise an urgent need. It is therefore important that applicants in this category are bidding for all suitable properties each week and in a wide range of locations.
- 25.2 At the end of the period the case will be reviewed by the Lead Authority.
- 25.3 If the applicant is in a time limited band and has either not bid for suitable properties advertised within one month or has been unsuccessful in obtaining an offer of a tenancy within the limit, a direct match of a property may be considered. Where a private sector

tenancy is available, suitable and affordable at the time the Local authority or its agents may look to secure a tenancy in the private rented sector.

26. Demotion

- 26.1 The Lead Authority may decide to demote an applicant to the band below at the end of the time-limited period if it is apparent that the applicant is choosing to wait for a particular type of property or location, and not treating their circumstances as being urgent.
- 26.2 Applicants are encouraged to make full use of their bids and seek all housing options available to them. Applicants will be assessed by a senior officer if they have unreasonably refused a property or to bid in a reasonable time if the following criteria have been met:
- they deliberately do or fail to do anything and as a consequence they miss out on suitable properties
 - it would have been reasonable for them to do so, and there is no other good reason why they have not
- 26.3 The demotion period will be what the local authority deems reasonable up to 12 months and will be considered on a case by case basis.

27. Global banding criteria

- 27.1 Applications will be awarded a global band equal to that of their local banding in all but the below cases:
- Where the lead authority has accepted a full statutory homeless duty to secure accommodation for the applicant. The global banding in this circumstance will be silver.
 - Where the lead authority has a gold move on agreement from supported accommodation, the global banding will be bronze.
 - Where the lead authority has assessed the property as having a prohibition notice, the global band will be bronze.
 - Where the lead authority has awarded a downsizing band, the global band will be silver.

28. Completed applications

- 28.1 Once the applicant has been assessed and accepted on to the Homeseekerplus scheme, a notification will be sent, where possible within 28 days, confirming the application details.
- 28.2 This will include:
- a) The band in which the applicant has been placed
 - b) The property size for which the applicant is eligible
 - c) The registration date
 - d) Band start date

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- e) Reminder about the importance of notifying any change in circumstances
- f) A unique reference
- g) Details of the verification documents required
- h) Details of the appeal procedure

29. Annual Review process

- 29.1 Where an applicant has not made any bid on any property, nor updated their application in any way within the previous twelve months, they will be contacted to see if they still wish to remain on the Homeseekerplus Register. If there is no response within 28 days from the date of notification, the application will be closed. If the applicant contacts the Local Authority within 28 days of their application being closed and indicates that they still wish to be considered for housing, the application will be reinstated.
- 29.2 Applicants must renew their application if requested to do so by Homeseekerplus.

30. Removing applications

- 30.1 An application will be removed from Homeseekerplus:-
- At the request of the applicant
 - Where an applicant does not respond to an application review within the specified time limit
 - Where the applicant moves and does not provide a contact address
 - Where the applicant has died
 - Where an applicant ceases to be eligible

Section 3: Scheme Details - Properties

31. Bidding

- 31.1 Once applicants have been registered as live on Homeseekerplus and notified of banding and log in details, they can start to look and bid for a suitable property of their choice subject to their banding criteria.
- 31.2 Applicants may bid for eligible properties at any time before the deadline. It makes no difference to the final shortlist what time during the week the bid was placed. Property details and information should be carefully read as some properties may have additional requirements that make the property unsuitable for the applicant; for example the number of people the property is suitable for – some have only single bedrooms.
- 31.3 Applicants may have up to a maximum of three active bids at any one time. Until a decision has been made as to who will receive the offer, a bid will remain live. The applicant can withdraw their bid if they wish to bid for another property during the same cycle.
- 31.3 At the time the bid is placed, the applicant will be given their current position on the shortlist. This is only an indication, as the position can change, as other people bid, or bids are withdrawn. All shortlists are live and subject to change.

32. Advertisements

- 32.1 All partner landlords are committed to advertising their available properties as widely as possible. Properties will be advertised in several ways on daily basis.
- A dedicated website for Homeseekerplus is accessible to anyone with internet access. The website will allow applicants to view all available properties across the whole of Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire and bid 'on-line' for properties of their choice.
 - Adverts displayed in a number of localities across the Homeseekerplus partnership including local authority offices.
 - In any other format on request to aid those with particular needs, in line with the public sector equality duty.

33. Property descriptions

- 33.1 Properties advertised will carry (where possible) a photograph of the property location and a full description which will include the following details if applicable:
- Type of property and eligibility criteria
 - Number of bedrooms and eligible household size appropriate
 - Location of property
 - Any adaptations and therefore restrictions on who may apply

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- Services provided
- Heating type
- Rent/service charges
- Local connection requirement
- Additional features, marketing information and pet restrictions
- Details on those who will be given priority
- Where rural settlement or local letting policies apply
- If a Social Housing Landlord's allocation policy applies
- Void start date or, for new build, when it is expected to be ready for occupation
- Any rent in advance payable
- Floor level of property

34. Rural settlements and local letting plans

- 34.1 Additional local connection criteria will apply for properties in rural villages where there are particular shortages of housing sites with planning conditions (Section 106 agreements, Local Letting Plans, affordable housing and rural exception sites) attached to them. In these cases, priority will be given to Applicants who are unable to live in their community due to the lack of affordable housing, who have a local connection to the parish or surrounding parishes by means of living in the parish, working in the parish or having immediate family connections to the parish. Where this applies the details will be explained in the property advertisement.
- 34.2 The Homeseekerplus Partnership is committed to creating balanced communities. For new developments and in areas where there are known problems, such as antisocial behaviour or abandoned properties, a local lettings plan may be applied. The plan will take into account the needs of the current and new residents and the makeup of the block, street or cluster of streets, to ensure a responsible letting is made. The local authorities will review each letting plan periodically with landlords.

Section 4: Allocations

35. Shortlisting

- 35.1 Once the advert deadline has passed, a shortlist will be produced for each advertised property showing all the applicants who have bid. For each property advertised, the successful applicant will generally be the applicant who has the highest band and the oldest band start date that is eligible to bid (i.e. who best meets the criteria in the advert and the policy)
- 35.2 The system will produce a shortlist based on the applicant's banding, banding start date, local connection and any other criteria stipulated in the advert.
- 35.3 Each Social Housing Landlord is responsible for checking to ensure there has been no change of circumstances including eligibility for social housing to the housing need assessment of the applicant since originally verified. This is to ensure that social housing is not allocated incorrectly to applicants who no longer match the criteria.
- 35.4 Each applicant will be given the opportunity to view the property before signing for a tenancy.
- 35.5 Should an applicant be at the top of the shortlist for more than one property, one of the Social Housing Landlords of the properties will contact the applicant as quickly as possible to ask them to decide which property they wish to be considered for. Once they have made their decision, their other bids will become invalid. In this circumstance, viewing of any of the properties before a decision is taken is unlikely to be available and will be at the Social Housing Landlord's discretion.
- 35.6 If an applicant is direct matched for a property, any other bids they have made will become invalid.
- 35.8 Any applicant who has a propriety interest in a property must be able and willing to dispose of that interest in a reasonable period.

36. By-passing

- 36.1 A by-pass is where an applicant has bid for a property but is not offered the tenancy.
- 36.2 The appropriate Social Housing Landlord will inform the household of the reason for the by-pass and of any steps needed to prevent further by-passes for the same reason.
- 36.3 By-passing will be carried out in line with the Social Housing Landlord's lettings policy, local letting plans and Homeseekerplus policy and applicants will be informed where reasonable.
- 36.4 Applicants will be required to match the requirements of this policy and match the criteria of the individual property as detailed in the advert. The advert includes details of both the type of applicant that is eligible for the property and any further restriction due to the Social Housing Landlord's own published allocation policy. If the applicant is at the top of the

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shortlist but does not meet all these criteria, the Social Housing Landlord may not consider the applicant.

- 36.5 Where an offer is being made to a current tenant of a Social Housing Landlord within the partnership, it is made subject to the satisfactory conduct of the present tenancy and approval of that Social Housing Landlord (which may include a home inspection).

37 Withdrawal

- 37.1 A property shortlist may be withdrawn at any stage during advertising or shortlisting or an offer of a tenancy may be withdrawn at any stage up to the signing of the tenancy agreement.
- 37.2 This may happen in certain circumstances, such as the tenant of that particular property has failed to vacate the property or the property has been incorrectly labelled on the advert.
- 37.3 If this happens, the Social Housing Landlord will inform the successful applicant that the property is no longer available. If the property is not ready for occupation following a successful bid and the applicant is likely to wait some considerable time before being able to sign the tenancy agreement, the Social Housing Landlord will inform the applicant and give them the option to withdraw their bid so they can bid for any other suitable properties. If the property was mis-labelled on the advert it will be re-advertised.

38. Refusals

- 38.1 Applicants are expected to take reasonable care when bidding for a property to ensure it meets their needs. If however an applicant decides to refuse an offer of accommodation, the property will be offered to the next suitable applicant on the shortlist. An application will be reviewed if an applicant refuses three offers of accommodation which the local authority or its agents deem suitable. This could lead to the applicant being suspended for a minimum of six months or being placed in a lower band.
- 38.2 If an applicant in a time limited band refuses an offer of accommodation the application will be reviewed and may be suspended for a minimum of six months or placed in a lower band.

39. Homelessness Refusals

- 39.1 The local authority or its agents will normally expect an applicant to whom it has accepted a full homeless duty to bid for a wide range of suitable properties within the time limit in the Gold Band.
- 39.2 If the main homeless duty is accepted, the applicant will be placed onto autobid from the start of this duty.
- 39.3 At the same time the local authority or its agents may look to discharge the homeless duty into an affordable and suitable private sector tenancy. If one is identified, the

Homesekerplus application will be reviewed and any homeless banding priority awarded will be removed whether or not the applicant accepts the private sector property found. This will still be subject to the statutory review process.

- 39.4 If a homeless applicant has not been actively bidding for all suitable properties or a suitable private sector property is not available at the end of the one month time limit, the local authority or its agents will secure an offer of suitable, affordable settled accommodation for the household, subject to availability.
- 39.5 Due to limited resources, high demand, and duties to provide accommodation to some groups of applicants in urgent housing need the degree of choice that the local authority is able to offer may be limited.
- 39.6 Applicants will be able to express a preference regarding the area in which they would like to live and the property type they would like, but should be aware that the local authority ability to satisfy a preference is limited. Expressing a preference over where an applicant would like to live does not mean that this preference can be met, or that the local authority will not offer suitable accommodation outside of a preferred area. The local authority will consider whether the property is suitable and is a reasonable offer in order to meet its duties under Section 189B (2) relief of homelessness duty or the main section 193 (2) duty under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996.
- 39.7 Not all properties that become available will be advertised and offered through the Band and date order procedure

40. Direct matching

- 40.1 A direct match is a property which is not available through Homesekerplus. All the partner social housing landlords are committed to advertising as many of their vacant properties as possible through Homesekerplus. There will be occasions when certain properties will not be advertised and the reasons for these exclusions will be monitored. Some examples are: -
- Over-riding social reason to move the household for safety reasons, as recommended by the Police, partner organisations, or as agreed through multiagency need and risk assessment panels.
 - Those let to discharge statutory duties to Homeless applicants in certain circumstances.
 - Properties required for existing tenants whose properties are subject to major works requiring them to vacate their own properties (either on a temporary or permanent basis).
 - Extra-care vacancies and any supported accommodation where there is an applicant with a Care package that needs a specific property.
 - Applicants who have succeeded to a tenancy or, in certain circumstances such as following the death of a family member, left in occupation but who need to move to alternative accommodation.
 - Where a property has been adapted and meets the specific needs of a client.
 - Applications subject to the Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976.
- 40.2 There will be circumstances where for urgent operational reasons there is a need to make direct offers of housing outside of the normal policy banding and date order criteria.

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- 40.3 This may also restrict the time an applicant is able to bid for accommodation. The offer of accommodation would be in any area of the district that is considered reasonable and the property is suitable and safe for the applicant to live in.
A decision to make a direct match offer could be where:
- An applicant is not being realistic in the areas they are bidding for accommodation and as a result they may be occupying accommodation provided as homeless longer than they need to.
- or
- To assist the local authority in effective management (including financial) of its homeless accommodation

Section 5: Monitoring and review

41. Review/appeal procedure

- 41.1 All applicants have the right to request a review of any Homeseekerplus decisions. The review/appeal should include the reason why the applicant believes the decision is incorrect, together with any additional information.

41.2 Stage One – Internal Review

If you disagree with the way we have assessed your application for housing, or with the housing need band in which we have placed your application, you may request a review which will be decided by a senior housing officer who was not involved in the original decision from the local authority or the agent dealing with your application. To request a review:

- You must complete a Stage 1 - Internal Review Request Form which can be downloaded from the Homeseekerplus website www.homeseekerplus.co.uk and when completed in full, send to the council you applied to within 14 days of receiving your letter or notification.
- We will deal with your request within 14 days or let you know if we will require additional time.
- We will write to you with the outcome of the review within a further seven days of being determined.

41.3 Stage Two –Homeseekerplus Appeal Panel

- 41.4 If you disagree with the outcome of the stage 1 internal review, you can request that your case be taken to the Homeseekerplus Appeal Panel. This Panel is made up of three or more Senior Housing Officers from three of the Partner Councils. These Officers will not have been involved in the original decision or the Officer decision on internal review. The applicant must submit a request for an appeal in writing and send to the Homeseekerplus Co-ordinator within 14 days of the review notification letter. The local authority or its agent will acknowledge receipt of the request for an appeal within 14 days and provide the applicant with contact details of the officer dealing with the request and the time it will take to reply

to the applicant. If the review cannot be completed within 56 days, the applicant will be informed and the timescales for the review set out.

- 41.5 The panel will be made up of senior housing officers from three or more of the other local authorities. The appeal will consider the facts surrounding the case and your request should specify whether there are additional facts the Panel should take into consideration or whether you feel that the original facts you submitted with your application have not been fully taken into account. If you have additional evidence, such as additional medical reports, then these should also be submitted up to one week before the panel meet.
- 41.6 The Panel will consider the review on the papers submitted by the applicant and the housing officer from the local authority involved in the case. If determined by the Homeseekerplus Co-ordinator the applicant or the relevant Housing Officer may be asked to attend this review hearing in person if additional information from either party is required. The applicant can bring a representative.
- 41.7 The Homeseekerplus Co-ordinator will chair this panel and a nominated representative for the applicant will be present at the Hearing to ensure that all relevant information has been presented and is dealt with correctly.
- 41.8 The panel must come to a majority decision, should this not be the case, the Homeseekerplus Co-ordinator and chair of the panel will arbitrate.
- 41.9 Once the appeal has been determined, or if the Panel require the applicant to attend a further Hearing, the Homeseekerplus Co-ordinator will write to the applicant giving full details within 14 days or as soon as reasonably practicable thereafter.

42. Local Authority Complaints Procedure

- 42.1 If you feel that you have been treated unfairly or you believe the process has not been carried out as described above you can use your Local Authority's (or its agents) Complaints Procedure to make a formal complaint.
- 42.2 The complaint must be made in writing to the appropriate authority within 14 days of the date of the written notification of the decision of the Homeseekerplus Appeal Panel.
- 42.3 If the applicant is still dissatisfied, they may complain directly to the Local Government Ombudsman.

43. Subject access requests

- 43.1 Applicants are entitled under the Data Protection Act 2018 or any superseding legislation to request details of their personal data held by the seven local authorities.

44. Use of statistical information

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- 44.1 The information supplied by Applicants on their housing application may also be used for housing management and research purposes within legal guidelines (such as identifying what size and where new housing is required). No individual will be identified in collating such information.

45 Policy management

- 45.1 The Homeseekerplus Co-ordinator will run regular reports to monitor performance of the scheme in meeting the aims of the policy.
- 45.2 The Homeseekerplus policy will be regularly reviewed and at least annually to ensure that it takes into account change in demand and need within the district, that it continues to meet its aims and objectives and that it complies with any legislative changes.
- 45.3 Any changes to the Homeseekerplus Policy will be implemented only with the majority agreement of the members of the Partnership. An interested party may contact any of the local authority partners to make observations to be considered at the next review.

STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

HOUSING COMMITTEE

2 NOVEMBER 2021

Report Title	MOBILITY SCOOTERS POLICY IN COUNCIL PROPERTIES			
Purpose of Report	To inform Housing Committee of a new Mobility Scooters Policy for all users in Stroud District Council Housing.			
Decision(s)	The Committee RESOLVES to adopt the Mobility Scooters Policy in Council Properties.			
Consultation and Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involved tenants and Officers. Feedback invited by email to lynne.mansell@stroud.gov.uk 			
Report Author	Lynne Mansell Service Delivery Manager (Independent Living) Tel: 01453 754173 Email: lynne.mansell@stroud.gov.uk			
Options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Option 1 – By not implementing this policy, fire, health and safety risks may heighten. To implement the policy and continue to increase designated storage facilities with Independent living sites in line with Modernisation programmes. 			
Appendices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appendix A – Mobility Scooters Policy Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment 			
Implications (further details at the end of the report)	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	No	Yes	Yes	No

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 More and more people are purchasing mobility scooters to aid their independence as they get older and/or less mobile and the storage of these items in communal areas is a potential hazard especially around fire.
- 1.2 In recent years, mobility scooters have become increasingly prevalent, especially in the Council's Independent Living sites however these cannot be stored, parked or charged in communal hallways and corridors.
- 1.3 Whilst Stroud District Council remain committed to supporting tenants and residents who have mobility issues and wish to utilise scooters to increase their mobility, independence and therefore improve their quality of life; zero tolerance with regard to clutter in communal hallways and corridors is in operation and the Council want to ensure that guidance and recharging of mobility scooters is clear.

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2.0 MAIN POINTS

- 2.1 This policy aims to highlight the positive aspects of owning and using a mobility scooter whilst also highlighting that the storage and charging must be accomplished safely for all.
- 2.2 Clear guidance is provided on the safe use and storage of mobility scooters in mobility scooter stores, permitted properties and locations in Independent Living sites, general needs and leaseholder accommodation.
- 2.3 The policy will ensure a consistent approach in considering whether permission should be granted to keep a mobility scooter and not refusing permission unreasonably.
- 2.4 It is recognised that this policy is designed to carefully balance the needs of those tenants and residents whose dependence on mobility scooters is key to their ongoing independence with the health and safety of all users of the buildings.
- 2.5 The policy covers all aspects of storage and charging of mobility scooters in Council properties and once implemented should allow officers to manage the safe storage of mobility scooters much more successfully across the district.

3.0 RISK

- 3.1 The risk is severe limitations to someone's independence if they are refused permission to have a mobility scooter. To mitigate these impacts, the Council will not unreasonably withhold permission for alterations to a property to allow the provision of storage facilities, ramp, access path or hard standing to facilitate a mobility scooter, following an Occupational Therapist assessment.
- 3.2 In certain exceptional circumstances where the tenant has severe mobility issues and wholly dependent on the mobility scooter to go about their daily activities the Council will consider rehousing into a more suitable property.
- 3.3 With lack of clear policy guidance, the risk of non-compliance with regard to Fire Risk Assessments and zero tolerance heightens which may potentially lead to risk of tenants' safety being compromised.

4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The policy reinforces the Council's commitment to enabling tenants and residents to keep their independence whilst providing guidance on how and where mobility scooters can be stored and their batteries recharged.
- 4.2 The policy makes clear that the unauthorised storage of mobility scooters causes hazards in housing blocks as well as being a risk to the health and safety of tenants, residents, visitors, staff and emergency personnel, is also a clear breach of the tenancy agreement.
- 4.3 The Tenancy Agreement already states that all communal areas should be kept clear as well as stating permission must be sought before purchasing a mobility scooter. The development of this policy will provide clarity to the safe storage, charging and use of mobility scooters whilst mitigating the risk of fire and health and safety of the buildings.

- 4.4 This policy will support the Council's ability to meet its obligations for Fire Risk Assessments under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Implications

There are no financial implication arising directly from this report.

Jon Coldridge, Principal Accountant

Tel: 01453 754030 Email: jon.coldridge403@stroud.gov.uk

5.2 Legal Implications

The Council has a duty under the Consumer Rights Act 2015 to ensure that its requirements of tenants and leaseholders are not unfair, and a general duty as a local authority to act reasonably.

Adopting a general policy in respect of mobility scooters helps to ensure that such obligations are consistent and fairly applied across the Council's properties, whilst also taking account of its Equality duties set out below.

One Legal

Tel: 01684 272691 Email: legal.services@tewkesbury.gov.uk

5.3 Equality Implications

This report takes into account the Council's duties under the Equalities Act 2010 and the need to have 'due regard' to the impact of the policy on any person with protected characteristics. The Council will work with all tenants and residents to identify appropriate solutions to individual needs.

5.4 Environmental Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

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Mobility Scooters in Council Properties

November 2021

Tenant Services

Last updated: *November 2021*

Next document review by: *November 2022*

Reviewed by: *Lynne Mansell. Service Delivery Manager (Independent Living)*

Approved by: Housing Committee

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Appendix A

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- 2. Scope and Definitions**
- 2. Aims**
- 3. Requesting Permission**
- 4. Terms and conditions of the permission**
- 5. Storing and Charging**
- 6. Breach of Mobility Scooter Policy**

Policy Statement

This policy sets out how Stroud District Council will consider requests from tenants and leaseholders to keep electric mobility scooters and the factors it will take into account when granting or refusing permission.

- 1.1 Stroud District council is committed to maximising choice and independence and recognises the value of mobility aids such as mobility scooters to tenants in maintaining their independence.
- 1.2 At the same time, the Council has duties to ensure high standards of Health and Safety within blocks of flats, maisonettes and Independent Living sites for tenants, leaseholders, staff and visitors. The Council has limited storage facilities for mobility scooters which are becoming more common, especially in Independent Living accommodation.
- 1.3 This Policy aims to balance the needs and aspirations of tenants and leaseholders to keep mobility scooters with its duties to maintain a safe living environment for tenants and leaseholders; particularly in relation to potential fire risks.

Scope and Definitions

- 2.1 A mobility scooter is defined for the purpose of this policy as an electric scooter or electric wheelchair designed specifically for outdoor use. This does not apply to lightweight wheelchairs suitable for indoor use.
- 2.2 Powered scooters are defined as 'Invalid Carriages' under the Use of Invalid Carriages on Highways Regulations 1998. The regulations divide these machines into three classes:

Class 1 – Manual wheelchairs (not covered by the Policy)

Class 2 – applies to motorised wheelchairs, designed for use on the pavement travelling at speed of up to 4mph. They may also be used to cross the road or where there is no pavement.

Class 3 – applies to machines that can be used both on the pavement where, like class 2 vehicles they are limited to 4mph, and on the road where they can travel up to 8mph. These vehicles are required by law to be registered with the DVLA for road use. These vehicles will be licensed in the disabled taxation class and must display a nil tax disc. Insurance is not a legal requirement but is essential if the vehicle is to be stored in an Independent Living site.

Aims

- 3.1 The aim of the policy is to:

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- Ensure the council takes a consistent approach to granting permission to tenants and leaseholders to keep a scooter.
- Ensure tenants ask for written permission before obtaining a new scooter.
- Accommodate all requests for permission to keep a scooter where practicable, and not to refuse permission unreasonably.
- Carry out a full assessment prior to a decision on whether or not to grant permission.
- Ensure that, where permission is granted the tenant has been advised in relation to adequate insurance and understands and commits to the terms and conditions they are required to adhere to.
- Provide clear information on the terms permission is granted.
- Provide a clear explanation, in writing of the reason(s) for refusing permission.
- Manage the number of scooters in any one site so as not to compromise the safety of tenants, leaseholders and other users of the site.
- Ensure that tenants are aware of their responsibilities to others.

Requesting Permission

- 4.1 Stroud District Council's Tenancy Agreement sets out the rights and responsibilities of the tenants and the Council.

Section 4. The Property > 4.4 Vehicles and driveways > 4.4.5 If you wish to keep a mobility aid such as a scooter, motorised wheelchair (or any other type of similar type of mobility aid) you must get our written permission first. This permission will not be unreasonably withheld and will be based on any relevant health and safety requirements being kept to. Any requests for permission will need to be made in writing to Tenant Services.

- 4.2 This policy sets out the circumstances in which the Council will grant permission to keep a mobility scooter or motorised wheelchair. The Council will generally grant permission, provided the aid can be stored and charged safely.
- 4.3 This policy will apply to all new requests to keep a scooter, to customers considering moving into a council property and retrospectively to existing tenants who already have a scooter without permission.
- 4.4 Tenants and residents who wish to obtain a mobility scooter must apply in writing to Stroud District Council for permission as stated at 4.4.6 in the tenancy agreement.
- 4.5 The Council will respond to requests within 28 days of receipt. The terms and procedures in force at the time of applying for permission will determine whether permission is granted.
- 4.6 Requests to keep a mobility scooter will be considered by Stroud District Council in conjunction with the Health and Safety team who will carry out a risk

assessment prior to permission being granted or refused. This may involve a visit to the property in some cases. This can be carried out prior to the tenant obtaining a scooter provided the tenant can provide details of the model they are planning to get.

- 4.7 In considering whether permission should be granted, account will be taken of potential impact on other people and will only be granted where the needs and wellbeing of other tenants, residents and other users of the building are not adversely put at risk.
- 4.8 The Council will consider requests based on the information received from the tenant or leaseholder. The Council will assess whether there is an approved safe area to store and charge the scooter.
- 4.9 Permission may be refused where:
- There is no safe storage in the tenant or leaseholders flat and no alternative safe storage and charging space can be provided.
 - A major physical alteration to the premises is required which the Council believes to be unreasonable in terms of cost and/or disruption to other service users.
 - A tenant/leaseholder fails to take out the necessary insurance cover.
 - If the scooter is too large to fit through the internal or external doors.
 - If the tenant wishes to keep more than one scooter.

This list is not exhaustive.

- 4.10 Examples of safe storage and charging spaces may include:
- A designated room within the property
 - A designated area within the property that does not impede escape.
 - A designated communal scooter storage area.
 - A suitable charging unit is used for outdoor use e.g. a waterproof transformer.
- 4.11 Where permission is refused, the Council will explain the reasons and give details of the appeal process which is on line with the complaints process. Where permission is given, this will be conditional and will outline the storage and charging arrangements available.

Terms and conditions of the permission

- 5.1 Where permission is granted, this will be based on certain conditions. The letter granting permission will specify the size and type of scooter that can be kept. It is tenants'/leaseholders responsibility to ensure that their scooter will fit in the external doors, lifts and internal doors.

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- 5.2 Tenants who apply for permission will be expected to have the relevant insurance and tax registration as necessary which must be produced. Absence of adequate insurance cover may result in the permission granted being refused or withdrawn.
- 5.3 Permission may be withdrawn if these conditions are not adhered to, and/or if the tenant/leaseholder purchases an additional or larger scooter or if the policy is updated to meet new regulatory requirements.
- 5.4 The Council will undertake periodic checks to ensure the policy is complied with.

Storage and Charging

- 6.1 Mobility scooters must not be stored or charged in communal hallways, stairwells or communal lounges **at any time** because they could increase the risk of fire or obstruct a fire escape route.
- 6.2 If a mobility scooter is stored within a tenant/leaseholder's property they must ensure that there is sufficient space within the home to store the scooter safely and the battery must be Lithium.
- 6.3 As part of this assessment, the council may provide minor adaptations such as small fillet ramps, smoke alarms, electrical charging sockets and an internal fire door as required to flats to enable the mobility scooter to be stored safely when it was not in use.
- 6.4 Tenants/leaseholders will need to gain permission for any alterations, for example the provision of storage facilities, ramp, access path or hard standing. The Council will not unreasonably withhold permission for alterations, however there may be instances where it is not feasible to provide adequate facilities due to the layout of the property. Leaseholders may be recharged for the cost of any such alterations.
- 6.5 In some Independent Living sites there are designated storage facilities for mobility scooters. The storage areas for scooters will be allocated on a first come first served basis and permission is still required for the scooter. Where designated scooter storage and charging sheds for individual use are available for rental, there will be a weekly charge attached to this. The cost will be available at the time of enquiry.
- 6.6 Service charges may apply for the use of scooter stores provided. These charges cover the cost of the electricity supply for charging scooters. Some sites have a weekly fee for electricity charge.
- 6.7 Tenants are responsible for ensuring their scooter is serviced and maintained regularly, and for having an annual PAT (Portable Appliance Test). This is

something the Council will carry out when notified to do so. If any charging equipment fails the PAT, it is the tenant's responsibility to repair or replace it before using it or the electricity supply.

- 6.8 Visitors should leave their mobility scooters outside the property ensuring they are not blocking access and fire exits. If this is not possible, the scooter must be taken into the visiting accommodation to ensure Zero Tolerance in communal areas, walkways and corridors.

Breach of mobility scooter policy

- 7.1 The Council understands the positive difference to quality of life a scooter can make. However, the Council's Tenancy Agreement requires tenants obtain written permission to keep a mobility scooter. Where there is a breach of the agreement, the Council will take appropriate action.
- 7.2 The Council will endeavour to identify a safe and secure storage and charging area as set out in section 4.10 above. Where it is not possible, the Council will consider alternative options including assisting with a move. Wherever possible, the Council will seek to negotiate a satisfactory outcome with the tenant.
- 7.3 Where a scooter is stored or charged on Council premises without permission, or outside the term of permission granted, the Council reserves the right to remove the scooter to ensure health and Safety which may result in a recharge to the tenant.

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Equality Analysis Form

By completing this form you will provide evidence of how your service is helping to meet Stroud District Council's General Equality duty:

The Equality Act 2010 states that:

*A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have **due regard** to the need to –*

(a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010;

(b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;

(c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The protected characteristics are listed in Question 9

Stroud District Equality data can be found at: <https://inform.gloucestershire.gov.uk/equality-and-diversity/>

1. Persons responsible for this assessment:

Name(s): Lynne Mansell	Telephone: 01453 754173
	E-Mail:lynne.mansell@stroud.gov.uk
Service: Tenant Services	Date of Assessment: 1 October 2021

2. Name of the policy, service, strategy, procedure or function:

Mobility Scooters in Council Properties

Is this new or an existing one? **New**

3. Briefly describe its aims and objectives

To highlight positive aspects of owning and using a mobility scooter whilst highlighting the importance of safe storage and charging

4. Are there external considerations? (Legislation / government directive, etc)

The Council has a duty under the Consumer Rights Act 2015 to ensure that its requirements of tenants and leaseholders are not unfair, and a general duty as a local authority to act reasonably. Adopting a general policy in respect of mobility scooters helps to ensure that such obligations are consistent and fairly applied across Council's properties whilst also taking account of its Equality duties.

5. Who is intended to benefit from it and in what way?

It is intended for all tenants who require a mobility scooter to aid their mobility and independence and maintain a good quality of life without compromising the health and safety of others.

6. What outcomes are expected?

Continued independence for users. Full compliance with regard to Fire Risk Assessments under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

7. What evidence has been used for this assessment? (eg Research, previous consultations, Inform (MAIDEN); Google assessments carried out by other Authorities)

Research into other authorities for best practice.

Fire/Smoke mock up with Fire service 2016 – highlighting dangers of non-compliance with zero tolerance in communal areas.

8. Has any consultation been carried out?

Details of consultation;
Involved tenants and officers
Feedback invited by email.

If NO please outline any planned activities

9. Could a particular group be affected differently in either a negative or positive way?

(Negative – it could disadvantage and therefore potentially not meet the General Equality duty;

Positive – it could benefit and help meet the General Equality duty;

Neutral – neither positive nor negative impact / Not sure)

Protected Group	Type of impact, reason and any evidence (from Q7 & 8)
Age	Positive – The overall impact of this policy on the protected characteristics will be positive as it will protect all residents from the risk of fires. There is no age restrictions.
Disability	Positive – The overall impact of this policy on the protected characteristics will be positive as it will protect all residents from the risk of fires.
Gender Re-assignment	It is not anticipated that the policy will have a negative impact relating to this protected characteristic
Pregnancy & Maternity	It is not anticipated that the policy will have a negative impact relating to this protected characteristic
Race	It is not anticipated that the policy will have a negative impact relating to this protected characteristic
Religion – Belief	It is not anticipated that the policy will have a negative impact relating to this protected characteristic
Sex	It is not anticipated that the policy will have a negative impact relating to this protected characteristic
Sexual Orientation	It is not anticipated that the policy will have a negative impact relating to this protected characteristic
Marriage & Civil Partnerships (part (a) of duty only)	It is not anticipated that the policy will have a negative impact relating to this protected characteristic.
Rural considerations: le Access to services; transport; education; employment; broadband;	Occasionally, the area in which a mobility scooter is requested may not be possible due to location. Council will work with all agencies to exhaust opportunity. Where it is impossible and will result in a detrimental effect to lifestyle and independence, housing need will be explored.

10. If you have identified a negative impact in question 9, what actions have you undertaken or do you plan to undertake to lessen or negate this impact?

Please transfer any actions to your Service Action plan on Excelsis.

Action(s):	Lead officer	Resource	Timescale


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Appendix B

Declaration

I/We are satisfied that an Impact Assessment has been carried out on this policy, service, strategy, procedure or function * (delete those which do not apply) and where a negative impact has been identified, actions have been developed to lessen or negate this impact.

We understand that the Equality Impact Assessment is required by the District Council and that we take responsibility for the completion and quality of this assessment

Completed by: Lynne Mansell	Date: 1 October 2021
Role: Service Delivery Manger (Independent Living)	
Countersigned by Head of Service/Director: 	Date: 21 10 21

STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

HOUSING COMMITTEE

NOVEMBER 2021

Report Title	CORRECTIVE ACTION TO STRENGTHEN THE COUNCIL'S OUT OF HOURS CALL OUT PROVISION			
Purpose of Report	To inform Housing Committee of the corrective action being undertaken to strengthen operational procedures in the management of Out of Hours Service provision.			
Decision(s)	The Committee RESOLVES: a. To Note the action plan and corrective actions already implemented and; b. That the Lead officer shall provide an update on progress at the April 2022 Committee meeting			
Consultation and Feedback	Consultation consisted of:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briefings with the Chair and Vice-Chair of Housing Committee • Strategic Director of Communities • ARA 			
Report Author	Joe Gordon, Head of Contract Services Tel: 01453 754190 Email: joe.gordon@stroud.gov.uk			
Options	N/A			
Background Papers	N/A			
Appendices	Appendix A - Corrective action plan			
Implications (further details at the end of the report)	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	No	No	No	Yes

1. Background

- 1.1 Stroud District Council provides a routine call-handling and message-taking service outside of the council's normal working hours, which is available for use during periods when services shut down, in emergency situations, and during public holidays. This contract is currently managed within council's Contract Services team. This is because of the large proportion of calls in relation to tenant matters (repairs), but service provision actually extends beyond this and is council-wide. For example, calls relating to environmental health matters (pollution, noise, flooding, and fire), council owned public conveniences (parks, playgrounds, and cemeteries), and issues such as homelessness.
- 1.2 Following reports of service failures over the 2020/21 Christmas and New Year holiday period, an investigation into the performance of the Council's Out of Hours (OOH) service

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was undertaken. A report (OOH Failure Report) was produced, which identified a number of corrective measures.

- 1.3 The Strategic Director of Communities, sought further reassurance and requested that Audit Risk Assurance (ARA) Stroud District Council's internal audit service undertake a review of the OOH service provision.
- 1.4 The final audit report presented to Audit and Standards Committee on 28 September made a series of recommendations to strengthen the management and delivery of the service going forward. These have been incorporated into an action plan.

2. Key Findings and Actions

- 2.1 As noted above, this critical piece of work was referred to the council's internal audit services by the Strategic Director in order key issues could be identified and action put in place to strengthen the service and ensure lessons are learnt.
- 2.2 A summary of its key findings and actions are set out below. Most fieldwork was completed between 12-16th July 2021, so it is important to note that this audit provides a "snapshot" of the service area at this time. The council is also in the process of rolling-out a new Contract Management Framework (CMF), to be launched later this year.
- 2.3 There is strong and focused commitment to strengthening the OOH service and a number of actions have already been completed to deliver improvements and resilience.
- 2.4 The review and its scope were shaped by both the Strategic Director of Communities and Head of Contract Services, with their aim being a comprehensive investigation to identify control weaknesses and areas of improvement. Their focus and engagement with internal audit has allowed this review to be delivered in a timely manner and well in advance of the 2021 Christmas break.
- 2.5 The internal audit report specifically noted that work has already commenced on the implementation of some of the agreed actions.

3. Areas for improvement

- 3.1 The report identified a number of high priority issues where improvement was required. Alongside these, it considered a range of lower order operational/medium priority areas for improvement.
- 3.2 The council's Contract Management Service is wholly committed to delivering the best possible service to our tenants and will address any identified areas for improvement. This work has already begun. This review found that:
 - i. The end-to-end process, procedures, roles, and responsibilities had not been documented in a Procedures Manual (or similar);
 - ii. The key risks and internal controls in place to manage the OOH service had not been adequately reported;

- iii. There had been no consistent reporting on contract performance from the Contract Manager to the Head of Contract Services;
- iv. The outsourced OOH repairs service, currently provided by an independent private contractor, required review;
- v. The risks associated with contracting-out the service were not captured in the risk register and potential risks were not properly reported;
- vi. An OOH heating engineer/boiler-repair service was not procured and needed to be addressed;
- vii. The arrangements for coordination with other council departments needed to be formalised;
- viii. The role of the call handling service in the council's wider flood management / flood response strategy was not clear;
- ix. The call-handling materials (flowcharts, for example) in circulation were not adequately monitored;
- x. Key business continuity planning considerations had not at the time of the audit been put in place and so posed a serious risk to the process as a whole.

3.3 In addition to these 10 findings, the audit report noted that the out of hour maintenance contact was extended shortly before the period during which service failure was identified (Christmas 2020/21) and identified three high priority issues to be considered. These are currently being reviewed ahead of specific recommendations or action being agreed.

4. Improvement Actions

- 4.1 In response to these findings, a detail action plan is now in place to strengthen the service (appendix a). The target date for most of the accepted recommendations is the 1st December 2021. The aim is to ensure that key actions are completed prior to the 2021 Christmas break.
- 4.2 Significant progress has already been made in addressing weaknesses in processes, and ensuring robust back up measures are in place should there be any initial failure in delivery. An OOH Emergency Helpline Procedures Manual (Procedures Manual) will be drafted and circulated to all relevant officers. Service Leads from other departments will be identified, and their roles, responsibilities, and obligations agreed and documented in the Procedures Manual. The primary actions in the Action Plan are summarised below:
 - i. The council now has a dedicated phone line into the OOH call centre, additional call centre staff have been trained to deal with Stroud specific calls, and the on-call contractors process now includes escalation up to Director level.

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- ii. The guidance in place for call-handling materials (flowcharts, for example) and the process for monitoring these will be updated in line with Internal Audit's recommendations.
- iii. An improved risk register will be developed, capturing key risks for the OOH call-handling and the OOH repairs service.
- iv. The internal controls in place to manage risk will be more clearly documented and monitored. The Head of Contract Services will reiterate to his staff his expectations and desired approach with regards to risk management across the department. Additionally, the expectations for the management of contract extensions will be reiterated to all Contract Managers.
- v. A review into OOH contractor's performance and service provision has commenced. This will involve providing clear and comprehensive service specifications to help manage their performance.
- vi. The Head of Contract Services will review all options available for service provision until in-sourcing can be achieved.
- vii. Any barriers to the in-sourcing of the OOH repairs service will be identified and addressed, to ensure that in-sourcing can proceed in a timely manner.
- viii. In advance of the winter period, there will be robust, reliable, and adequate arrangements in place to provide OOH heating, and repair and boiler-repair services for Council tenants;
- ix. The council will ensure the call handling service is provided with adequate guidance on handling calls relating to flooding.

5. Governance, Management, and Scrutiny

- 5.1 Following the production and implementation of the new procedure manual monitoring and review of the arrangement will continue to be developed to ensure there is continual learning, ensuring best practice is adopted throughout the life of the contract.
- 5.2 Reviews will look at positioning and oversight of the contract within the corporate structure over the longer term.
- 5.3 The Voids and Repairs Task and Finish Group along with the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment task and Finish Group will provide input into reviews to ensure outcomes for stakeholders is considered across the widest possible spectrum.

6. Next Steps

- 6.1 Officers who have been tasked to deliver the actions and outcomes have been notified.

- 6.2 Regular meetings to assess progress and delivery of the actions will be scheduled.
- 6.3 Monitoring of the Action Plan will be added to the work plan for the Repairs and Voids Task and Finish Group
- 6.4 A report will be brought to April 2022 Housing Committee which will provide an update of the progress made in delivering the action plan and lessons learned.
- 6.5 Review the resources, management, and position of the contract to ensure it delivers the necessary corporate outcomes.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 Although complaints compared to call volume was low in number, over the Christmas and New Year period we acknowledge that service provision should have been significantly better, and after reviewing the processes and service failures we implemented a number of changes immediately.
- 7.2 The initial investigation into performance over the Christmas and New Year period did not show that there was systemic failure in service provision. However, it did highlight that a more holistic approach to the management of the contract would be beneficial to all stakeholders, as well as a review of some processes and procedures, and on that basis the action plan has been developed as well as the recommendations from the audit report.

8. IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

Jon Coldridge, Principal Accountant
Email: jon.coldridge@stroud.gov.uk

8.2 Legal Implications

None directly arising from this report but legal support will be provided, as necessary, to assist in the delivery of the action plan.

One Legal
Tel: 01684 272691 Email: legalservices@onelegal.org.uk

8.3 Equality Implications

An Equality Impact assessment has been undertaken, mitigations have been included in the action plan and due regard will be given to any implications.

8.4 Environmental Implications

There are no environmental implications to be considered as part of the report.

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Strengthening the Council's Out of Hours Service: Action Plan

Internal Ref#	Lead	Audit report number and Title	Commitment	Deadline	Status		Completed on	Updated at	Priority
					Open	Complete			
					Overdue				
207	Adrian Erwood	1 OOH Audit Procedures Manual	An OOH Emergency Helpline Procedures Manual Procedures Manual will be prepared by the Contract Manager and circulated to all relevant Officers Once developed it will be subject to a periodic review to ensure that it remains up to date ACTION A new Procedures Manual will be drafted and reviewed by the project team	01/12/2021	Open			13/10/2021	High
208	Adrian Erwood	2 OOH Audit Development of a Risk Register	The key risks associated with the OOH emergency helpline end to end service contract and the internal controls in place to manage these will be documented The Contract Manager will ensure that third parties are informed of any responsibilities they may have in managing risk and that this responsibility is documented within the Procedures Manual. ACTION A risk register will be developed to cover the OOH emergency call handling service and the OOH repairs service	01/12/2021	Open			13/10/2021	High
209	Joe Gordon	3A OOH Audit Embed ongoing risk management and use of excelsis into contract management processes	The Head of Contract Services will ensure that ongoing risk management and the use of risk registers and Excelsis is embedded into the contract management process within Contract Services at the Contract Manager level where appropriate. ACTION The Head of Contract Services will reiterate his expectations for the capture assessment and monitoring of risk to all staff across Contract Services	30/09/2021	Completed		14/10/2021	14/10/2021	High
210	Jon Priest	3B OOH Audit Update Exelsis to capture key risks with OOH Contract	The use of Excelsis to capture key risks managed within Contract Services will be revisited This will also form part of the implementation of Recommendation 2 H to ensure that key risks associated with the OOH emergency helpline are visible to all officers across the Council This will aid in improving the visibility of the OOH emergency helpline as a Council wide service	01/10/2021	Completed		08/10/2021	08/10/2021	High
211	Adrian Erwood	4 OOH Audit Review of reporting and stakeholders on the OOH Contract	The Contract Manager and Head of Service will agree the form frequency and content of reporting on the OOH emergency helpline call handling contract. The wider recipients of any reporting other key stakeholders will also be identified. The Procedures Manual will be updated to contain guidance on the agreed reporting arrangements and report template	01/12/2021	Open			13/10/2021	High
212	Adrian Erwood	5 OOH Audit Key objectives to be identified and documented	The key objectives of the OOH emergency helpline call handling contract and service will be identified and documented These objectives should be considered when preparing a risk register ACTION	01/12/2021	Open			13/10/2021	Medium
213	Adrian Erwood	6 OOH Audit Review Service Requirements Responsibilities and expectations with the OOH maintenance contractor	Service requirements responsibilities and expectations for the OOH repairs service will be reviewed with the OOH maintenance contractor This should build on the service requirements agreed to with the Head of Contract Services pre Christmas ACTION Conduct review into oncall contractors performance Draft clear and comprehensive service specification to manage performance. Review alternative options for delivery of the OOH repairs service	01/11/2021	Open			13/10/2021	High
214	Adrian Erwood	7 OOH Audit Review KPI for the OOH repairs service	Information to the call handlers will contain clear guidance on setting customer expectations. This is particularly important where the call handling contractor pass the call over to another contractor to resolve For example flowcharts covering repairs by the OOH maintenance contractor willrefer to the four hour deadline for attendance by the contractor and repairs being completed the call handling contractor should advise customers that if their repair is not addressed in this time they should call back the call handling contractor can then escalate the matter This four hour deadline will constitute a KPI for the OOH maintenance contractor	01/11/2021	Open			13/10/2021	Medium

Internal Ref#	Lead	Audit report number and Title	Commitment	Deadline	Status	Completed on	Updated at	Priority
					Open Complete Overdue			
215	Adrian Erwood	8 OOH Audit Review OOH call centre flow charts	The Contract Manager should review all flowcharts in consultation with the call handling contractor to ensure that these reflect the actual approach taken by the call handling contractor In particular the Contract Manager should review the flowcharts covering repairs to ensure that there is no ambiguity in who should be contacted when and how ACTION Flowcharts will be reviewed and redistributed the call handling contractor will be consulted as part of the review process	01/11/2021	Open		13/10/2021	Medium
216	Adrian Erwood	9 OOH Audit Review OOH call centre escalation flow charts	The Contract Manager should ensure that where the call handling contractor are required to contact another contractor or third party the flowcharts clearly set out the escalation procedure that should be followed If this is exhausted the flowchart should clearly direct the call handling contractor to an appropriate on call Council officer this may be the initial escalation procedure in some cases ACTION Flowcharts will be reviewed and escalation procedures clearly set out as part of the new format	01/11/2021	Open		13/10/2021	Medium
217	Adrian Erwood	10A OOH Audit Acceleration of the insourcing of OOH repairs	In advance of the winter period the Council will ensure that there are robust reliable and adequate arrangements in place to provide OOH heating repair and boiler repair services for its tenants ACTION Ensure robust reliable and adequate heating engineer boiler engineer coverage in place by December 2021	01/12/2021	Open		13/10/2021	High
218	Joe Gordon	10B OOH Audit Insourcing callout employee terms	ACTION The Head of Contract Services will identify the key barriers to in sourcing the OOH repairs service and remedy these as soon as practicable This will ensure that in sourcing can proceed without there being any unresolved issues to impede progress The intention is to complete the in sourcing of the OOH repairs service by March 2022	30/10/2021	Open		13/10/2021	High
219	Adrian Erwood	11 OOH Audit Review roles and responsibilities for OOH Contract Manager and Repairs Contract Manager	At present the division between the Contract Manager for the OOH call handling contract and the Contract Manager for the OOH repairs contract is not clear The roles responsibilities and obligations of the two elements should be agreed. ACTION Clarify and document within the Procedures Manual	01/12/2021	Open		13/10/2021	Medium
220	Adrian Erwood	12 OOH Audit Identification of service leads and their roles responsibilities and obligations	Service Leads will be identified and their roles responsibilities and obligations formally documented in the Procedures Manual.. ACTION Service Leads will be identified and their roles responsibilities and obligations agreed and documented in the Procedures Manual	01/12/2021	Open		13/10/2021	High
221	Joe Gordon	13A OOH Audit Contract extensions forms Service Level	The contract extension form process will be monitored to ensure performance is as expected and this aligns with corporate expectations and satisfactory performance levels are documented prior to contract extensions	30/10/2021	Open		13/10/2021	High
222	Sarah Turner	13B OOH Audit Contract extensions forms Corporate Level	There will be clear expectations set out within Contract Services for a timely review of performance well in advance of a contract s expiry date the expiry of the initial term. ACTION The P G Team will incorporate the requirement to evidence satisfactory levels of performance as part of the contract extension form in the CMF This will also be incorporated into the subsequent training	31/12/2021	Open		13/10/2021	High
223	Adrian Erwood	15 OOH Audit Documentation tracking	The Contract Managerwill prepare an OOH Call Handling Materials Tracker to ensure an adequate level of control over the call handling materials in circulation ACTION A Tracker to monitor the call handling materials flowcharts for example in circulation will be rolled out alongside the Procedures Manual	01/12/2021	Open		13/10/2021	High
224	Adrian Erwood	16 OOH Audit Call Handling Material Templates	The Contract Manager will set out clear guidance for the format of all call handling materials ensuring a consistent approach between departments ACTION All flowcharts and other materials in circulation will be modified to fit this guidance logged on the Tracker and rolled out to the call handling contractor The Operations Manager will liaise with the call handling contractor and with officers across the Council to ensure that the call handling contractor are adequately prepared for all call scenarios	01/12/2021	Open		13/10/2021	High

Internal Ref#	Lead	Audit report number and Title	Commitment	Deadline	Status	Completed on	Updated at	Priority
					Open Complete Overdue			
225	Adrian Erwood	17 OOH Audit Review the call handling contractors role in flood management strategy	The call handling contractor s role in the Council s broader flood management strategy will be more clearly defined and documented the call handling contractor should be equipped with the necessary materials to undertake their role in managing flooding calls enquiries ACTION The Operations Manager will liaise with the Environmental Health team to ensure that the call handling contractor s role in the Council s broader flood management strategy is clarified documented and shared with the call handling contractor	01/12/2021	Open		13/10/2021	High
226	Sarah Turner	18 OOH Audit Review Contract Management Framework	The Contract Management Framework the Contract Management Policy should be updated to include guidance on Council wide joint services. ACTION P G Team will incorporate guidance in the CMF relating to council wide joint contracts	31/12/2021	Open		13/10/2021	Medium
227	Adrian Erwood	19A OOH Audit Document Roles and Responsibilities of Contact Manager and Owner	The roles and responsibilities of the Contract Manager and Contract Owner will be more clearly documented within the Procedures Manual and the Contract Manager will complete a Contract Management Plan	01/12/2021	Open		13/10/2021	Medium
228	Sarah Turner	19B OOH Audit Guidance Roles and Responsibilities of Contact Manager and Owner	The procedure guidance will be updated to ensure the procurement contract management and contracts register have the same defined roles	31/12/2021	Open		13/10/2021	Medium
229	Adrian Erwood	20 OOH Audit Document Performance Management Arrangements in the Procedures Manual	The performance management arrangements for the OOH call handling contract willd be clearly set out in the Procedures Manual. ACTION the call handling contractor s KPIs will be reviewed to ensure that they are challenging but achievable The rollout of their new telephony system may allow new KPIs to be identified which will be actioned in line with the requirements of the CPPRs The process for managing the call handling contractor s performance will be documented in the Procedures Manual	01/12/2021	Open		13/10/2021	Medium
230	Helen Coughlan	21 OOH Audit Document process for managing the outbound telecommunications system in Procedures Manual	The process for managing the outbound telecommunications account should be reviewed and then documented in the Procedures Manual In particular the controls in place for ensuring timely payment to the outbound telecommunications provider should be documented. The new login access information will be securely held outside of the Procedures Manual and shared only with designated officers The officers who will be allowed access will be listed in the Procedures Manual	01/12/2021	Open		18/10/2021	High
231	Helen Coughlan	22 OOH Audit Identify required areas and create BCP within procedures manual	The Contract Manager in consultation with other key stakeholders will identify the areas of the OOH emergency helpline service that require business continuity planning ACTION A BCP will be created and contained within the Procedures Manual The OOH call handling process including the OOH repairs service will be considered from end to end and a business continuity plan BCP developed.	31/10/2021	Open		13/10/2021	Medium
232	Sarah Turner	23 OOH Audit Contract Management Framework guidance for Service Failures	The Contract Management Framework will contain guidance and principles for conducting service failure reviews for contracted out services ACTION The CMF will be updated to incorporate clear guidance on reporting service contract failures	31/12/2021	Open		13/10/2021	Medium
233	Sarah Turner	24 OOH Audit Contract Management Framework service failure reporting	The Contract Management Framework should set clear guidelines for reporting on service failures This should also address the manner and frequency by which updates are provided ACTION The CMF will be updated to incorporate clear guidance on reporting service contract failures	31/12/2021	Open		13/10/2021	Medium
234	Joe Gordon	25A OOH Audit Setting of Annual Review Date for OOH Contract and OOH Repairs Contract	The dates for the Annual Review of the OOH emergency helpline call handling contract and the OOH repairs service and contract should be confirmed ACTION The Head of Contract Services will reiterate to all Contract Managers the existing process and his expectations for managing annual reviews of service providers	30/09/2021	Completed	20/10/2021	13/10/2021	Medium
235	Adrian Erwood	25B OOH Audit Setting of Annual Review Date for OOH Contract and OOH Repairs Contract	ACTION The dates for the annual reviews of the call handling contractor and the OOH maintenance contractor will be agreed at the earliest possible stage	01/11/2021	Open		13/10/2021	Medium

						Status				
						Open				
						Complete				
Internal Ref#	Lead	Audit report number and Title	Commitment	Deadline	Overdue	Completed on	Updated at	Priority		
236	Sarah Turner	25C OOH Audit Contract Management Framework Annual Reviews and lessons learned	The dates for the Annual Review of the OOH emergency helpline call handling contract and the OOH repairs service and contract should be confirmed ACTION Annual reviews and lessons learned should be carried out by contract managers	31/12/2021	Open		13/10/2021	Medium		

STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL**HOUSING COMMITTEE****2 NOVEMBER 2021**

Report Title	VOLUNTEERING POLICY (INDEPENDENT LIVING)			
Purpose of Report	To inform Committee of a new Volunteering Policy for Independent Living to provide a structure for our Volunteers to work within.			
Decision(s)	The Committee RESOLVES to adopt the Volunteering Policy for Independent Living			
Consultation and Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involved tenants and Officers. Feedback invited by email to lynne.mansell@stroud.gov.uk 			
Report Author	Lynne Mansell Service Delivery Manager (Independent Living) Tel: 01453 754173 Email: lynne.mansell@stroud.gov.uk			
Options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To introduce a new Policy for Volunteers will give clear guidance of roles and responsibilities in promoting wellbeing of tenants and residents in the Stroud District. To continue without a Policy will lead to lack of clarity around the roles, rights and responsibilities of our Volunteers. 			
Appendices	Appendix A – Volunteering Policy Appendix B – Older People's Housing Strategy (HRA) Appendix C – Equality Impact Assessment			
Implications (further details at the end of the report)	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	No	No	No	No

1.0 INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In 2019, Stroud District Council (SDC) adopted the Older People's Housing Strategy (OPHS) Appendix B which sets out the vision along with the strategy for our older people's accommodation for the next 5 years. Following the Task and Finish groups findings (which can be found in the OPHS) and being presented to Housing Committee in February 2019, the recommendations were approved which enabled initiation of Independent Living HUBS in 2020 across the Stroud district. The aim of the HUBS is to promote the wellbeing of all older people in the Stroud district and help make later life enjoyable and more fulfilling.

2.0 MAIN POINTS

- 2.1 There are currently four Independent Living HUBS across the Stroud district sited in Nailsworth, Stonehouse, Cam and Minchinhampton. They are the centre of the Independent living communities for the area. Social activities such as health and wellbeing and recreational events are organised and held within the HUBS. These are also extended to tenants and residents in the wider community.

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- 2.2 Tenants at Independent Living sites across the district are invited to join in any group activities in the HUB sites, however they are also able to benefit from communal spaces within their own living environment, allowing the ability to socialise, building neighbourly relations and a support network.
- 2.3 Residents of suitable outlying properties in the surrounding areas of the HUBS and Independent Living sites are also given the opportunity to attend activities. This gives the opportunity to extend community networks and reduce social isolation and loneliness.
- 2.4 Volunteers are an extremely valuable resource within our HUBS and Independent Living sites, using and sharing their skills, knowledge and experience and bringing a different perspective to that of professional staff which adds additional value to the HUBS. Their time and skills are given without financial remuneration.
- 2.5 The Volunteering Policy sets out roles, rights and responsibilities of volunteers. The policy also acknowledges the value of volunteers whilst providing support and good practice. The policy will ensure fairness and consistency in managing volunteers; it also helps volunteers know where they stand and how they can expect to be treated. The policy will help to involve a range of diverse volunteers because it defines the roles clearly. Everyone has a right to take part in volunteering and to have a fulfilling and productive experience.
- 2.6 As Safeguarding is at the heart of all we do, a programme will be initiated to ensure all volunteers undertake a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check. This will make certain we are making safer decisions about who we are recruiting as volunteers. The Volunteer Coordinator will work with prospective volunteers to complete this which comes without a fee.

3.0 CONCLUSION

- 3.1 Volunteers are an essential part of providing opportunities to tenants and residents within our Independent Living sites. Through the involvement of volunteers, we can build sustainable and vibrant communities.
- 3.2 By introducing volunteers, we can offer opportunities for involvement, learning and development for larger groups, especially where paid resources are not readily available or sustainable.
- 3.3 The Policy will provide volunteers with clarity around roles, rights and responsibilities as well as principles of good practice.
- 3.4 Recruitment and Selection is explained in the Policy along with knowledge of support and development opportunities available.
- 3.5 There is clear guidance on relationships with paid staff and relationships with other group and organisations that may be involved in the HUBS.

4.0 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial Implications

There are no significant financial implication arising directly from this report.

Jon Coldridge, Principal Accountant

Tel: 01453 754030 Email: jon.coldridge@stroud.gov.uk

4.2 Legal Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

One Legal

Tel: 01684 272691 Email: legalservices@onelegal.org.uk

4.3 Equality Implications

An EqlA has been carried out by Officers in relation to the decision made in this report and no equality implications arise.

4.5 Environmental Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

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Volunteering Policy

November 2021

Independent Living

Last updated: *November 2021*

Next document review by: *November 2022*

Reviewed by: *Lynne Mansell. Service Delivery Manager (Independent Living)*

Approved by: Housing Committee

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The aim of Stroud District Council's Independent Living Community HUBS is to promote the wellbeing of all older people in the Stroud district and help make later life a fulfilling and enjoyable experience. Volunteers are an essential part of providing these opportunities.
- 1.2 Stroud District Council is committed to involving a diverse range of people in our work through both formal volunteering and other forms of community activity. We do this because we believe that:
- Volunteers, in their diversity of age, experience, cultural background and their involvement within communities, bring to our work a value which adds to our understanding of, and response to, older people's needs.
 - Through the involvement of volunteers, we contribute to the building and support of active and sustainable communities based on mutual respect.
 - The development and support of vibrant community networks and individuals within them is vital to the wellbeing of older people.
 - We will work more effectively with and on behalf of older people by providing opportunities for people to use their skills, knowledge and experience through volunteering.
 - As volunteers who reflect the diversity of their communities, bringing a different perspective to that of professional paid staff, which adds additional value to our work.
 - People of all ages care about and want the opportunity to contribute to make later life a more fulfilling and enjoyable experience for everyone.
 - Older people with whom we work value the involvement of volunteers.
 - By introducing volunteers, we can offer opportunities for genuine involvement, learning and development for larger groups.
 - Without the contribution of volunteers, we would only be able to achieve a small percentage of our work with and for older people.
- 1.3 A volunteer is anyone who freely chooses to undertake supporting our Independent Living Community HUBS through the giving of their time, skills and experience without financial remuneration beyond out of pocket expenses. It is support undertaken by choice and is unpaid.
- 1.4 Volunteers:
- help with the delivery of our services
 - are active in projects and community-led activities supported by Community Services
 - help raise funds to support our work.
- 1.5 We believe that our relationship with volunteers will be of mutual responsibility and commitment within which Independent Living Community HUBS/Stroud District Council and volunteers have both rights and responsibilities. We aim to ensure that volunteers enjoy their involvement with us and gain from it in terms of their own personal objectives. Stroud District Council's Independent

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Appendix A

Living Community HUB team will devote sufficient personnel, resources and training to support volunteers in their role.

2. Purpose of this policy

2.1 Our purpose in adopting this policy is to:

- Highlight and acknowledge the value of the contribution made by volunteers.
- Reflect the purpose, value, standards and strategies of Stroud District Council in its involvement of volunteers.
- Recognise the respective roles, rights and responsibilities of volunteers in the Stroud district.
- Confirm Stroud District Council's commitment to involving volunteers in its work.
- Help to ensure the quality of both the volunteering opportunities on offer and the work carried out by volunteers.
- Acknowledge the current areas of volunteer involvement in the Stroud district.

2.2 Stroud District Council will appoint a Volunteer Co-ordinator to recruit, and deploy volunteers within the Independent Living sites and provide support.

3. Scope of the Volunteer Policy

3.1 Unless specifically stated otherwise, the policy applies to all volunteers in all programmers and projects undertaken by or on behalf of Independent Living Community HUBs and site of operation.

4. Statement of principles of good practice

4.1 General

When involving volunteers, we will be guided by the following principles of good practice whilst taking into consideration confidentiality and data protection:

- Tasks will be clearly defined so that all concerned with volunteers' activities are sure of their respective roles and responsibilities.
- Volunteer roles will complement the work of paid staff.
- Stroud District Council's Volunteer Policy will be reviewed annually, subject to any legislative or other local or national factors (e.g. pandemic) and consideration will be given as to how any changes will affect volunteers.
- Volunteer contribution will be recognised on an annual basis. This may include a celebration event free of charge to the volunteer.

5. Recruitment and Selection

- 5.1 Volunteer opportunities will be promoted in a manner that ensures there is wide accessibility to the positions we offer. Stroud District Council's equal opportunities statement applies to the recruitment and selection of volunteers.
- 5.2 Prospective volunteers will be required to complete an application form. If required, the Volunteer Coordinator will provide support to complete the form.
- 5.3 People who offer to volunteer will hear from the Volunteer Coordinator within 10 days of their initial enquiry and will be offered an informal interview.
- 5.4 Potential volunteers will be asked to understand and agree the values and principles of Stroud District Council that inform the way in which we work.
- 5.5 Volunteers will be asked to sign a statement saying they understand the specific policies that affect them in their role and will be given help and assistance if needed to be able to do this. The statement will not form a legal contract between either party.
- 5.6 We will ensure that procedures are in place to explain, support and monitor good practice requirements for volunteers selected to work with vulnerable older people. Safeguarding is at the heart of all we do therefore all volunteers will be required to undertake a Disclosure and Barring service check.
- 5.7 Volunteers will be placed in activities which match their skills, talents and interests.

6. Support for Volunteers

- 6.1 We will provide an induction programme and a review session for volunteers to assess the progress of their placements and resolve any problems at an early stage.
- 6.2 We will provide funding for volunteers' out of pocket expenses. Volunteers will be given clear information about what expenses can be claimed and how to make a claim.
- 6.3 Volunteers will be given information on legislation and other policies which may affect them e.g. Health and Safety, Code of Conduct and Equalities. In these respects, volunteers will be treated in the same way as staff for liability purposes.
- 6.4 All volunteers will be offered access to support and supervision on a regular basis, with the Volunteer Coordinator.
- 6.5 All volunteers will be offered access to appropriate training to enable them to develop their capabilities, competence and learning in relation to their volunteering role.

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Appendix A

6.6 Opportunities will be provided for changing/upgrading volunteer responsibilities as requested by the volunteer and appropriate to Independent Community HUBs needs.

6.7 Volunteers will be made aware of Stroud District Council's complaints procedure and whom to contact if they have a complaint about an aspect of their role.

7. Relationship with paid staff

7.1 We will ensure that paid staff at all levels are clear about the role of volunteers and that good working relationships are fostered between them.

7.2 Appropriate training, support and resources will be provided for those who work alongside volunteers and for those who have a supervisory role in relation to them.

7.3 Volunteers will be given clear information about the roles undertaken by paid staff and of their value to Independent Living Community HUBS.

7.4 Stroud District Council will appoint a Volunteer Coordinator whose primary function is to recruit and place volunteers within the Independent Living sites and to oversee the implementation of this volunteering policy and ensure that Stroud District Council's volunteering practices are of a high standard.

7.5 In the rare event of industrial action by staff, volunteers will not be engaged to do the work of paid staff.

8. Relationships with Other Groups and Organisations Meeting the Needs of Older People

8.1 In all our relationships with other groups, organisations or partners we will: promote volunteering as an important means of contributing to the building and support of active and sustainable communities based on mutual respect. promote good practice in volunteering.

9. Local Volunteering

9.1 We will develop relationships with local organisations which support volunteering on the following principles:

- There is a need for a strategic approach to the development of volunteering locally.
- There is a need to support the work of local volunteering in providing leadership in developing awareness of, and standards for, practice in volunteering.

This Volunteer Policy will be reviewed every 12 months.

Equality Analysis Form

By completing this form you will provide evidence of how your service is helping to meet Stroud District Council's General Equality duty:

The Equality Act 2010 states that:

*A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have **due regard** to the need to –*

(a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010;

(b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;

(c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

1. Persons responsible for this assessment:

Name(s): Lynne Mansell	Telephone: 01453 754173
	E-Mail: lynne.mansell@stroud.gov.uk
Service: Tenant Services	Date of Assessment: 01/10/2021

2. Name of the policy, service, strategy, procedure or function:

Volunteering Policy

Is this new or an existing one? **New**

3. Briefly describe its aims and objectives

The main aims are:

- Introduce a policy for clear guidance
- Provide a good structure to work within
- To ensure requirements of the equality duties are met with equal opportunities in respect of gender, race and disability.

4. Are there external considerations? (Legislation / government directive, etc)

Equality Act 2010 provides a legal framework to protect rights of people and promote equal opportunities for everyone, clarifying what must be done to ensure people with protected characteristics are not disadvantaged.
This applies when recruit volunteers.

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Appendix C

5. Who is intended to benefit from it and in what way?

Volunteers, residents and tenants in the Stroud district will benefit through skill and information sharing as well providing and receiving social inclusion for all; using the policy will mitigate the risk of discrimination.

6. What outcomes are expected?

To recruit volunteers to assist with Independent living HUBS across the district promoting the wellbeing of all older people which will also feed into Independent living + sites across the district

7. What evidence has been used for this assessment?: (eg Research, previous consultations, Inform (MAIDEN); Google assessments carried out by other Authorities)

Previous research and consultations include

- CIH Report – 2014
- Ark Report - 2015
- Consultation with Housing Committee members through a Task and Finish Group
- Older people's accommodation survey undertaken by Future Focus Research 2018 – 500 Stroud district residents were surveyed

8. Has any consultation been carried out?

Yes

Details of consultation

- Informed tenants
- Officers at Stroud District Council
- Independent living tenants (during site meetings)

If NO please outline any planned activities

9. Could a particular group be affected differently in either a negative or positive way?

(Negative – it could disadvantage and therefore potentially not meet the General Equality duty;

Positive – it could benefit and help meet the General Equality duty;

Neutral – neither positive nor negative impact / Not sure)

Protected Group	Type of impact, reason and any evidence (from Q7 & 8)
Age	<p>Positive There were 118,130 residents in Stroud in 2017, approximately 8% more than 2001. This is below the county average of just over 10%.</p> <p>The proportion of people aged 65+ (22.2%) exceeds the County and national average of 21%. The second most common household composition is 'pensioner households' standing at 24.4% of households - 3.7% higher than the average for England.</p> <p>In recognition of loneliness and social isolation, this activity will give everyone an opportunity to be involved equally.</p>
Disability	<p>Positive 17% of residents in Stroud had a limiting long term illness/disability (LLTI) in 2017. This compares to 18% across England.</p> <p>Independent Living HUBS have been modernised to allow access for in all communal areas (in terms of disabled, turning circles and lifts where required, wider doors and mid-height light switches)</p>
Gender Re-assignment	Neutral
Pregnancy & Maternity	Neutral
Race	<p>Neutral 94.9% of the Stroud population identified themselves as White British in 2017. This is significantly higher than the England average of 79.8%. This could potentially lead to some residents of different ethnic origin feeling isolated.</p> <p>The creation of HUBS allows Stroud District Council to actively encourage tenants and residents to participate in activities. In addition to this, SDC's tenancy agreement and sign up process highlights the importance of respecting the individuality and views of others (including disability, race etc).</p> <p>Volunteering is expected to have a neutral impact upon different race groups.</p>
Religion – Belief	<p>Positive The communal areas of schemes have been improved for all tenants. Old artwork is being removed and being replaced with new artwork which will create a homely feel for anyone regardless of religion/beliefs.</p> <p>Potentially positive impact.</p>
Sex	<p>Neutral A range of activities in the 'hubs' will be provided to encourage equal</p>

Agenda Item 9

Appendix C

	opportunities for men and women to get involved.
Sexual Orientation	Neutral Volunteering is expected to have a neutral impact on sexual orientation.
Marriage & Civil Partnerships (part (a) of duty only)	Neutral SDC allow same sex couples to have tenancies and we do not discriminate against marriage or civil partnerships. SDC encourage staff to undertake equality training during their induction and there is an e-learning portal available for refresher training at any point.
Rural considerations: le Access to services; transport; education; employment; broadband;	Neutral Although transport may be challenging, there will be no restriction of services and activities offered. All sites have available and accessible broadband/wi-fi

10. If you have identified a negative impact in question 9, what actions have you undertaken or do you plan to undertake to lessen or negate this impact?


Please transfer any actions to your Service Action plan on Excelsis.

Action(s):	Lead officer	Resource	Timescale

Declaration

I/We are satisfied that an Impact Assessment has been carried out on this policy, service, strategy, procedure or function * (delete those which do not apply) and where a negative impact has been identified, actions have been developed to lessen or negate this impact.

We understand that the Equality Impact Assessment is required by the District Council and that we take responsibility for the completion and quality of this assessment

Completed by: Lynne Mansell	Date: 1 October 2021
Role: Service Delivery Manager (Independent Living)	
Countersigned by Head of Service/Director: Keith Gerrard, Strategic Director of Communities 	Date: 21 10 21

STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

HOUSING COMMITTEE

2 NOVEMBER 2021

Report Title	PET POLICY			
Purpose of Report	Review of Pet Policy, to cover pets owned by Stroud District Council Tenants.			
Decision(s)	The Committee RESOLVES to: a) Adopt the revised Pet Policy b) Give delegated authority to the Head of Housing Services, in consultation with the Chair & Vice Chair of Housing Committee to make minor amendments as necessary			
Consultation and Feedback	Consultation has taken place with Involved Tenants, Animal Welfare and other Officers			
Report Author	Michelle Elliott – Housing Manager michelle.elliott@stroud.gov.uk			
Options	N/A			
Background Papers	N/A			
Appendices	Appendix A – Pet Policy Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment			
Implications (further details at the end of the report)	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	No	Yes	Yes	No

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 A pet policy allowing tenants in all properties to keep pets was originally approved by Housing Committee in 2013 and this was seen as an innovative way forward and praised by the Cats Protection League.
- 1.2 Stroud District Council was commended for its “responsible and reasonable” request that pets should be microchipped, vaccinated and neutered, “which has helped prevent problems with multi-cat households and stray/feral cat colonies. In the words of the Cats Protection League, Stroud District Council was named a ‘purrfect landlord’

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- 1.3 Previous to this our existing policy ignored the obvious benefits of pet ownership, particularly in tackling social isolation and improving mental health.

2.0 Feedback

- 2.1 Some of the concerns that have been raised by tenants since our last review in 2019 have included:
- Significant noise from cockerels
 - Multi pet households
 - Dogs loose in communal areas
 - Fouling in communal areas

3.0 Key changes to the policy include:

- 3.1 Permission to house cockerels has been withdrawn.
- 3.2 The breeding and sale of animals from SDC properties has been prohibited.
- 3.3 This policy has also addressed the fact that permissions to have a pet can be withdrawn if the pet criteria is breached.
- 3.4 It has been highlighted that permissions will not be given to house a caged pet on communal land.

4.0 Pet Permissions addressed

- 4.1 A number has not been considered for a multi pet household. The number of permissions will be subject to the pets being looked after in a suitable environment for their needs.
- 4.2 Dogs loose in communal areas and fouling in communal areas is a concern and this will be addressed with permissions being withdrawn for repeat offenders.
- 4.3 Tenants will be reminded that they need to seek permission before homing a new pet and in particular discussing with tenants the need to have a named person responsible for their pet if they are absent.

5.0 Cat Flaps

- 5.1 Cat flaps continue to be raised as a concern by tenants as our current policy does not allow cat flaps in our properties as the integrity of the door can be compromised if a cat flap is installed.
- 5.2 A survey monkey on Facebook, debating a change in policy and the option to cover the cost of a new door when tenants moved was responded to by 38 tenants, 31 of who requested a change of policy, however only 16 would consider paying for a new door when they moved. Given that the response was relatively low the current policy of refusing permission for cat flaps will stand.

6.0 Evictions & Abandonments

- 6.1 Consideration has been given for pets left in a property during an eviction and of a property and pet that has been abandoned, should this be the case and there is no one responsible for the pet then Housing Services will take responsibility and arrange appropriate action.

7.0 IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications directly arising from this report.

Jon Coldridge, Principal Accountant

Tel: 01453 754030 Email: jon.coldridge@stroud.gov.uk

7.2 Legal Implications

The Consumer Rights Act 2015 applies to the Council as it does to any other landlord of residential property. Insofar as the keeping of pets is concerned, the effect of this Act is to apply a requirement that any contractual provision must be fair; terms that are deemed to be unfair are not binding on the tenant. Whilst some terms are automatically deemed to be unfair (e.g. excluding liability in the event of death or personal injury), most are subject to an objective test, bearing in mind all the circumstances of the contract. In any event, the Council, as a local authority, is under a general obligation to act reasonably

When considering pets and property, it would be reasonable and fair to consider the type of pet, personal circumstances (e.g. whether the animal is an assistance animal), the type and location of the property, and the conditions imposed.

The Government has recently issued a Model Tenancy Agreement for Assured Shorthold Tenancies: this document may be considered as being the benchmark for assessing whether or not terms in residential tenancy agreements are fair. Of particular relevance to this report, the Model Tenancy does not impose a blanket ban on keeping pets. Instead:

- The landlord's prior written consent is required, which must not be unreasonably withheld or delayed (28 days is the period allowed);
- Consent should be given where the landlord is satisfied that the tenant is a responsible pet owner and the pet is of a kind that is suitable in relation to the nature of the premises at which it can be kept
- The landlord cannot charge a fee for granting consent.

The proposed Policy would appear to accord with the spirit of the Model Tenancy.

One Legal

Tel: 01684 272691 Email: legalservices@onelegal.org.uk

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7.3 **Equality Implications**

An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken and found in Appendix B.

7.4 **Environmental Implications**

There are no significant implications within this category.



Pet Policy

November 2021

Housing Services

Last updated: *November 2021*

Next document review by: *November 2023*

Reviewed by: *Michelle Elliott, Housing Manager, Housing Services*

Approved by: *Housing Committee*

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Appendix A

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1.0. Introduction

- 1.1 Stroud District Council recognises the health and wellbeing benefits that owning a pet can bring to its owners and accepts that pets should be welcomed in our properties and are happy to support our tenants in pet ownership. However, we also accept that rules have to be adhered to ensuring that irresponsible pet owners are prevented from causing a nuisance to other residents in the community.

2.0. Guidance

- 2.1. Tenant Services will give clear guidance on pet ownership, including:

- What type of pets are acceptable in our properties
- What type of pets are not acceptable in our properties
- Actions that will be taken against irresponsible pet owners
- Appropriate training for staff dealing with pets in our properties

3.0 Legislation

- 3.1 The Animal Welfare Act 2006 states that anyone who owns a pet must care for their animal in a proper manner.

- 3.2 It is a legal requirement to ensure that all pets have:

- Adequate protection from suffering and disease
- A suitable environment to live in
- Able to exhibit a normal behaviour pattern
- Need for a suitable diet and access to a constant supply of fresh, clean water
- Need to be housed with or apart from other animals

- 3.3 *All pets should be looked after in line with guidance given by the PDSA*
<https://www.pdsa.org.uk/taking-care-of-your-pet/looking-after-your-pet/birds-fish-and-other-pets>

4.0 In the Event of an Emergency

- 4.1 There should be a named person who will take responsibility for the pet in an emergency or should the tenant become incapacitated in any way. Tenants should provide Stroud District Council with written and signed confirmation from their emergency contact, showing they are willing to take care of the animals in an emergency.
- 4.2 In the event of an emergency if the named person is not able to take responsibility for the pet then Stroud District Council will arrange accommodation at a kennel or cattery and the cost will be charged to the tenant.
- 4.3 In the event of the tenant becoming incapacitated and there is no person to take responsibility for the pet, then Stroud District Council will arrange for the pet to be taken care of in an appropriate manner. Attempts to rehome an animal will always be the first line of enquiry.
- 4.4 The keeping of a pet is at the sole discretion of Tenant Services. Appeals against any decision may be made to the Head of Housing Services, whose decision will be final.

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Appendix A

5.0 Types of Pets

5.1 Tenant Services consider that the following pets are reasonable to live in our properties, however, permission must be agreed by the appropriate Neighbourhood Management Officer.

- Domestic cats and dogs
- Fish (Tenant Services do not give permissions for ponds to be installed in gardens)
- Budgies and canaries
- Small animals such as rabbits, hamsters and guinea pigs

6.0 Best Practice

6.1 We expect our tenants to ensure:

- All Cats/dogs MUST be neutered/spayed and micro-chipped.
- Pets should be vaccinated and treated appropriately to prevent flea infestation.
- Faeces must be picked up and disposed of correctly. Animal faeces must not be left in communal gardens. This will result in permissions being withdrawn and any cost of cleaning/removal of faeces will be charged to the tenant
- Litter trays and cages (as appropriate) should be cleaned out regularly and disposed of in an appropriate manner.
- Where possible, tenants should always take out insurance for their pets.

7.0 Nuisance Pets

7.1 Tenants will have a responsibility to ensure that their pets do not cause a nuisance to others. This includes the following rules:

- Dogs must be kept on a lead when in communal areas.
- Dogs must have a collar and ID tag worn when outside of the property.
- Excessive noise (such as dog barking constantly) will not be tolerated and will be investigated in terms of a breach of tenancy and may result in permissions being withdrawn.
- Pets should not be allowed to roam in either communal facilities or across the grounds.
- For the consideration of other tenants, pets must not be left on their own for an excessive amount of time as this can cause excessive behaviour problems.
- Pets must not be allowed to damage property. If damage is caused tenants will be subjected to a financial recharge.
- Food must not be left outside the property as this could attract vermin.
- Pets must be controlled and staff, contractors and visitors must not be at risk when attending your home.

7.2 If the pet policy is not adhered to then enforcement action may be taken and permission to keep a pet withdrawn.

7.3 Should you wish to keep pets that need caging, such as chickens, rabbits, guinea pigs etc. then permission must be asked if you wish to house the pet in a cage or hut in the grounds of the property, and this should include a plan of the proposed structure with details of the species that will be housed within. We will not be able to facilitate this request in a communal area.

- 7.4 SDC will not give permission for cockerels to be kept as these have previously led to significant noise complaints.

8.0 Dangerous Dogs Act 1991

- 8.1 Tenant Services will not grant permission for residents to keep dangerous animals, such as dangerous dogs, poisonous insects, spiders, or snakes.

- 8.2 The Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 states it is an offence to keep specific breeds of dogs:

- Pit Bulls
- Japanese Tosas
- Dogos Argentinos
- Filas Brazilerios

- 8.3 Therefore, these breeds will not be acceptable.

9.0 Wild Animals

- 9.1 Wild animals are not allowed to be kept as pets. The dangerous wild animals act 1976 prohibits individuals from keeping wild animals as pets such as (but not limited to):

- Monkeys
- Venomous Snakes
- Crocodiles

10.0 Evictions & Abandonments

- 10.1 Should an eviction be necessary, SDC will ensure that any pets are considered during the eviction process. Where possible appropriate arrangements will be made before the eviction.

- 10.2 Should SDC believe a property has been abandoned and the tenant has no intention of returning but has left pets behind, SDC will make appropriate arrangements to manage the welfare of the animals.

11.0 Breeding and sale of animals

- 11.1 The breeding and sale of animals is strictly prohibited from our properties.

12.0 Cat Flaps

- 12.1 Due to fire legislation we are unable to give permission for cat flaps to be installed in any fire door as this would compromise the integrity of the door and the subsequent safety of any tenant(s). We can also not allow cat flaps to be installed in composite doors as this would invalidate the warranty on the door.

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Equality Analysis Form

By completing this form you will provide evidence of how your service is helping to meet Stroud District Council's General Equality duty:

The Equality Act 2010 states that:

*A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have **due regard** to the need to –*

(a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010;

(b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;

(c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The protected characteristics are listed in Question 9

Stroud District Equality data can be found at: <https://inform.gloucestershire.gov.uk/equality-and-diversity/>

Please see Appendix 1 for a good example of a completed EIA.

[Guidance available on the HUB](#)

1. Persons responsible for this assessment:

Name(s): Michelle Elliott	Telephone:
	E-Mail: michelle.elliott@stroud.gov.uk
Service: Housing Services	Date of Assessment: 18 October 2021

2. Name of the policy, service, strategy, procedure or function:

Pet Policy

Is this new or an existing one? **Existing**

3. Briefly describe its aims and objectives

How requests to keep a pet are made and managed
How SDC will manage pets that are left behind during abandonments/evictions/deaths
How requests to keep a pet can be withdrawn

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Appendix B

4. Are there external considerations? (Legislation / government directive, etc)

**PDSA guidance
Animal Welfare Act 2006**

5. Who is intended to benefit from it and in what way?

Council tenants will benefit depending on the type of pet requested in terms of loneliness and health and wellbeing

6. What outcomes are expected?

The purpose of the policy is to provide a framework for tenants wishing to keep a pet and how pets are managed

7. What evidence has been used for this assessment?: (eg Research, previous consultations, Inform (MAIDEN); Google assessments carried out by other Authorities)

Research with the Pets protection league

8. Has any consultation been carried out?

Yes

Details of consultation

Consultation carried out with Animal Welfare Officers

If NO please outline any planned activities

9. Could a particular group be affected differently in either a **negative** or **positive** way?

(Negative – it could disadvantage and therefore potentially not meet the General Equality duty;

Positive – it could benefit and help meet the General Equality duty;

Neutral – neither positive nor negative impact / Not sure)

Protected Group	Type of impact, reason and any evidence (from Q7 & 8)
Age	Positive Applicants must be over the age of 18 to hold a council tenancy, so those younger than that will be excluded but this is justified.
Disability	Positive – Applicants with disabilities may benefit from the companionship of a pet
Gender Re-assignment	Neutral - Applicants may benefit from the companionship of a pet
Pregnancy & Maternity	Neutral - Applicants may benefit from the companionship of a pet
Race	Neutral - Applicants may benefit from the companionship of a pet
Religion – Belief	Neutral - Applicants may benefit from the companionship of a pet
Sex	Neutral - Applicants may benefit from the companionship of a pet
Sexual Orientation	Neutral - Applicants may benefit from the companionship of a pet
Marriage & Civil Partnerships (part (a) of duty only)	Neutral - Applicants may benefit from the companionship of a pet
Rural considerations: le Access to services; transport; education; employment; broadband;	Positive - Applicants may benefit from the companionship of a pet in rural locations where interaction with other people may be less frequent

10. If you have identified a negative impact in question 9, what actions have you undertaken or do you plan to undertake to lessen or negate this impact?

Please transfer any actions to your Service Action plan on Excelsis.

Action(s):	Lead officer	Resource	Timescale

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Appendix B

Declaration

I/We are satisfied that an Impact Assessment has been carried out on this policy, service, strategy, procedure or function * (delete those which do not apply) and where a negative impact has been identified, actions have been developed to lessen or negate this impact.

We understand that the Equality Impact Assessment is required by the District Council and that we take responsibility for the completion and quality of this assessment

Completed by: Michelle Elliott	Date:20/10/21
Role: Housing Manager	
Countersigned by Head of Service: Kevin Topping	Date: 21/10/21

STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

HOUSING COMMITTEE

2 NOVEMBER 2021

Report Title	GLOUCESTERSHIRE AND SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE WARM & WELL PARTNERSHIP RENEWAL
Purpose of Report	To update Members on the Gloucestershire & South Gloucestershire Warm & Well Scheme and to recommend renewal of the partnership for a further five years.
Decision(s)	<p>The Committee RESOLVES to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Continue to provide advice and support to those in fuel poverty in the district by renewing the Council's membership of the Warm & Well Partnership for up to a further five years; and b. To provide Core funding to support the partnership of £20,000 per annum from the Better Care Fund Disabled Facilities Grant wider social care budget; and c. To approve the extension of the Warm & Well delivery contract for a further two years; and d. Approve as the lead authority the submission and acceptance of the bid for £5.2 million to the Sustainable Warmth Competition for the energy efficiency improvements to the homes of those in fuel poverty across Gloucestershire & South Gloucestershire under the Warm & Well Scheme; and e. To authorise the Chief Executive to undertake all action as necessary to ensure the delivery of the Sustainable Warmth project, including, in consultation with the Borough Solicitor, the entering into of any legal arrangements or other documentation f. If successful, recommend to council the addition of the Sustainable Warmth Bid to Stroud District Council's capital programme.
Consultation and Feedback	Consultation has taken place with all Gloucestershire District Councils, South Gloucestershire Council and Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group.
Report Author	Maria Hickman, Housing Renewal Manager Email: maria.hickman@stroud.gov.uk

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Options	Not to renew membership of the Warm & Well Partnership which would mean; either <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No longer providing support and advice to those in fuel poverty, at a time when household income is diminishing, fuel prices are rising and we are facing a climate challenge, or • Establishing an alternative system of support for those in fuel poverty, this is likely to be resource intensive and it is unlikely that a single district is going to be able to achieve as much as the partnership has been able to achieve especially when bidding for external funding. 			
Background Papers	None			
Appendices	None			
Implications (further details at the end of the report)	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	No	Yes	No	Yes

1. INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Gloucestershire and South Gloucestershire have benefitted in having a successful locally managed and controlled, non-profit delivery partnership for energy advice and support for home energy improvements known as Warm and Well since 2001
- 1.2 SDC are the lead partner in the partnership between the six Gloucestershire district councils and South Gloucestershire Council which has been delivered since 2001 by local sustainable energy agency, Severn Wye, a registered charity. Whilst not formal partners the scheme works closely with Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group and Gloucestershire County Council.
- 1.3 The Warm and Well Scheme promotes the health benefits of energy efficiency in the home, and delivers a programme of energy efficiency improvements which offers the benefits of personalised support from a dedicated local team, with the flexibility to offer tailored support for vulnerable households.
- 1.4 The Warm & Well Scheme annual reports can be viewed here www.stroud.gov.uk/environment/energy-efficiency/affordable-warmth-strategy
- 1.5 Stroud District Council contributes £20,000 per annum towards the core costs of the scheme which enables advice and support to be offered to households. This funding currently comes from the Disabled Facilities Grant allocation received from the Better Care Fund.
- 1.6 During the last four years the Warm & Well partnership has offered advice and support to 13,618 households (1,882 in Stroud District) and enabled the installation of 3,015 energy efficiency measures (476 in Stroud District).
- 1.7 The partnership has brought in a total £3.8 million in funding for the measures from Energy Company Obligations (ECO), Public Health and Better Care Fund.

- 1.8** In December 2017 a successful bid was made to the National Grid Warm Homes Fund for £5 million for the installation of first time heating systems to 1200 homes.
- 1.9** In September 2020 a successful bid was made to the Government Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery Fund (LADS) phase 1A for £1 million to externally insulate 100 park homes and provide 50 air source heat pumps.
- 1.10** In December 2020 a further successful bid was submitted to LADS phase 1B for a further £1 million to insulate a further 100 park homes.

2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1** For every £1 invested by the local authorities in the core Warm & Well Scheme in 2020/21 residents benefited from support and funding worth £8.76.
- 2.2** The current partnership agreement between the councils will end on 31st March 2022.
- 2.3** If the councils are to continue to work together to support those in fuel poverty through the successful Warm & Well Scheme, then a new formal partnership agreement will need to be entered into. It is the existence of a successful partnership that has enabled the successful bids to have been made.
- 2.4** A further funding opportunity became available in August 2021 when Central Government opened up the Sustainable Warmth Competition to bids. Bids had to be submitted before the end of August with the outcome expected mid October 2021.
- 2.5** As the lead partner for the Warm & Well Partnership SDC submitted a bid for £5,247,985 to install 675 measures including insulation and heating including renewables. The bidding timetable did not enable the matter to be brought before Committee for a decision before submitting and accepting. The project delivery timetable is from January 2022 until March 2023.
- 2.6** If a new partnership is not agreed, then we will have to withdraw from the Sustainable Warmth Competition.
- 2.7** The current delivery contract undertaken by Severn Wye Energy Agency will also end on the 31st March 2022. In order to be able to effectively deliver the Sustainable Warmth programme without interruption the current contract will need to be extended for a further 2 years.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1** That at a time of rising fuel prices and increasing pressure on household income, in order to continue to effectively support those in the district living in fuel poverty, the appropriate action for the Council to take is to renew its membership and lead role of the Warm & Well Partnership for up to a further five years.
- 3.2** That a contribution of £20,000 per annum to support the core activities of the scheme be provided from the Better Care Fund Disabled Facilities Grant wider social care budget.

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- 3.3 That as the lead partner, the Council extends the current Warm & Well delivery contract with Severn Wye Energy Agency for a further 2 years.

4. IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications directly arising from this report. The £20,000 per annum core funding to support the Warm and Well partnership being funded from the Disabled Facilities Grant allocation received from the Better Care Fund (via Gloucestershire County Council).

Jon Coldridge, Principal Accountant

Tel: 01453 754030 Email: jon.coldridge@stroud.gov.uk

4.2 Legal Implications

The Council has a contract with Severn Wye Energy Agency expires on 31 March 2022. Officers have been given legal advice as to how the contract can be lawfully extended for a further two years.

One Legal

Tel: 01684 272691 Email: Legalservices@onelegal.org.uk

4.3 Equality Implications

There are not any specific changes to service delivery proposed within this decision.

4.4 Environmental Implications

The Warm & Well Scheme has actively encouraged the installation of renewable technologies through the provision of bespoke energy advice and surveys and the development of the installer network. The use of such technologies is particularly important not only in the reduction of carbon but in rural areas they are often the most cost effective means of achieving affordable warmth.

In the first four years of the current Warm & Well delivery cycle an average of 687 tonnes of Co₂ has been saved per annum.

HOUSING COMMITTEE

2 NOVEMBER 2021

WORK PROGRAMME

Date of meeting	Matter to be considered	Notes (e.g. lead Member/Officer)
07.12.21	Housing Committee Estimates and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Medium Term Financial Plan	Accountancy Manager
	Budget Monitoring 2021/22 – Quarter 2 Report	Principal Accountant
	Annual Review of the HRA Delivery Plan	Head of Housing Services
	Progress update on Key action plans (Cleaner Estates & Service Standards)	Housing Manager
	Member/Officer Reports a) Retrofit/Carbon Reduction Task and Finish Group Update b) Tenant Engagement and Empowerment Task and Finish Group Update c) Housing Repairs and Voids Task and Finish Group Update	Lead Members
01.02.22	Tenant Handbook	Housing Manager
	Independent Living – Approval of Schemes for 2022/23	Project Manager
	Decant Policy	Head of Housing Services
	Play Areas Strategy	Head of Housing Services, Community Services Manager
	Tenant Involvement & Empowerment Strategy	Housing Manager
	Older Persons Strategy and action plan review	Head of Housing Services Service Delivery Manager (Independent Living)
	Member/Officer Reports a) Retrofit/Carbon Reduction Task and Finish Group Update b) Tenant Engagement and Empowerment Task and Finish Group Update c) Housing Repairs and Voids Task and Finish Group Update	Lead Members
05.04.22	Budget Monitoring 2021/22 – Quarter 3 Report	Accountancy Manager
	Update on Corrective Action to Strengthen the Council's Out of Hours Provision	Head of Contract Services

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	Member/Officer Reports a) Retrofit/Carbon Reduction Task and Finish Group Update b) Tenant Engagement and Empowerment Task and Finish Group Update c) Housing Repairs and Voids Task and Finish Group Update	Lead Members
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Items to be considered at a future meeting

- De-pooling Rent and Service Charges - General Needs (TBC) – Head of Housing Services, Principal Accountant
- New Homes Programme Update – Project Manager
- Corporate ASB Policy – Head of Housing Services / Head of Community Services

Future Information Sheets:

- Updated Local Plan Affordable Housing Policies (Spring 2022)– Head of Strategic Housing Services (interim)
- Pet-friendly temporary accommodation (Winter 2021)– Head of Strategic Housing Services (interim)
- Review of the Action Plan for the Strategy for New Council Homes - New Homes & Regeneration Manager