

Report to Cabinet

Subject: Housing Allocations Policy
Date: 10 January 2013
Author: Service Manager, Housing & Localities

Wards affected

Borough-wide.

Purpose of the Report

To recommend that Cabinet endorses a revised Allocations Policy for social housing in Gedling and refers it to Council for approval and adoption.

Key decision

This is not a key decision. The final decision on whether or not to adopt the policy will rest with Council.

Background

- 1.1 All local housing authorities are required by Part VI of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) to publish an allocations scheme setting out how social housing in their district is to be allocated. The scheme must comply with legislation and must have regard to any guidance published by the Secretary of State.
- 1.2 The Localism Act 2011 made a number of amendments to Part VI of the Housing Act 1996, and the Secretary of State published revised statutory guidance in June 2012.¹ These changes have rendered the current joint allocations policy, adopted in 2011, out of date, meaning it is no longer in line with national policy or legislation.

¹ [Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England](#) (DCLG, June 2012)

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
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- 1.3 Extensive discussions have taken place with Broxtowe and Rushcliffe borough councils with a view to updating the shared policy. The conclusion has been reached that each council wishes to use the new flexibilities around allocations in different ways, and hence it is now proposed that each council will publish a separate allocations policy. The three councils will, however, continue to share the same website and software system for the Homesearch choice based lettings scheme.
- 1.4 The proposed policy (Appendix 1) has been developed through consultation with partner agencies, members and parish councils at a consultation event on 3rd October. There was then a further period of public consultation with everyone who attended that meeting, Registered Providers of Social Housing (housing associations) and current applicants on the housing register from 13 November 2012 to 10 December 2012. The proposed policy was available on both the Council website and the Homesearch website during this time. Letters were sent to the 130 applicants who receive the weekly Homesearch newsletter to inform them about the consultation. Emails were sent to the 1,303 current applicants who had provided an email address. In total, six responses were received from people on the housing register. Emails were also sent to all Registered Providers with Social Housing in Gedling, with responses being received from Gedling Homes and Nottingham Community Housing Association.
- 1.5 The draft Allocations Policy was sent to all members of the Policy Review Scrutiny Group, in accordance with the Council's Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules for policies that have been developed in partnership.

Proposal

- 2.1 The proposed allocations policy (attached at appendix 1) makes a number of changes to the current policy. In summary, some of the most significant are:
 - There will be a separate allocations policy for Gedling, rather than one shared with Broxtowe and Rushcliffe. This means that future amendments can be made without requiring the agreement of the partner councils.
 - People with no recognised housing need will not qualify to join the housing register, unless they are over 50 or disabled and in need of sheltered housing.
 - People with no local connection to Gedling will not qualify to join the housing register (there are a number of exceptions to this, including Armed Forces personnel and people who are in need of sheltered housing).
 - "Recognised housing need means" meeting the criteria for priority bands 1 – 3, which have been adapted to make them more flexible. For instance, someone living in housing they cannot afford in the long term would qualify for band 3, as would someone who needed to move nearer family to be supported by them, or closer to a place of work or a child's school.
 - People who are adequately housed but wish to move to a more desirable or convenient location will not qualify for the housing register unless they have a housing need and a local connection
 - Applicants who are serving members of the Armed Forces, or who have left the Armed Forces in the last five years, will be prioritised with nine months' additional waiting time. This reflects the spirit of the Community Covenant the Council supports.

- Homeless applicants will have the period of time in which they can choose accommodation reduced from eighteen weeks to six weeks. For the initial six weeks after the decision their application will be in band 2 after this time, unless there are exceptional circumstances, they will then move to Band 1 and the Council will identify a property (which may be a private rented sector property if suitable) and directly allocate it to them in discharge of its homelessness duties
- Although the Council recognises why many people would prefer to live in social housing (lower rents and greater security of tenure), it will not be available to everybody

2.2 The reasons for these proposed changes are:

- There is not enough social housing to provide it for everyone who wants it. At current levels of grant funding and with the housing market continuing to struggle, this is likely to be the case for the long term.
- An average of 25 social properties are let through Homesearch every month.²
- As at 10 December 2012, there are 2,372 active applicants on the Housing Register, with an average of 108 new applications being received every month.³
- Of these active applicants, 1,535 (65%) are in Band 4 – the lowest priority band
- Only 61 properties have been let to applicants in Band 4 since the scheme was launched in April 2011, representing 12% of all lettings made. Many of these are sheltered housing, for which demand is lower, or are housing schemes where local lettings policies are in place. In general, an applicant in Band 4 has little chance of ever securing social housing in Gedling.
- Properties advertised on Homesearch in Gedling have attracted an average of 54 bids for each property. The greatest number of bids for a property is 168.

2.3 An application in Band 4 still has to be registered and supporting information (such as proof of identity, proof of address, proof of children’s residency, bank statements, pay slips, medical information etc.) still has to be gathered in, dealt with and held securely. Many applicants then contact the Council to enquire about their application and how long it is likely to be before they are housed. This is a poor use of Council resources, which could be better spent on intensive work with applicants in higher housing need, including preventing homelessness, if the burden of dealing with low-priority applications was removed.

2.4 More importantly, the current situation also provides a poor service to the customer, who is given false hope that completing a form, providing supporting information, checking properties on the website, bidding every week and responding to the annual review letter will eventually secure them a social housing property so long as they are willing to wait. Because priority band is a more important factor than waiting time, for most applicants in Band 4, this is not the case, as has been shown above. These applicants would be better advised to look at other options, such as the private rented sector or moving by means of a mutual exchange.

Alternative options

3.1 To adopt a different strategy;

² April 2011 – November 2012.

³ July 2012 – November 2012.

The Council must adopt an allocations policy which is in accordance with the most recent legislation and Government guidance. However, the Council has wide discretion as to what the policy actually says, and there are a number of alternative choices that can be made within the policy. The choices proposed are discussed within the Proposal section. If Council is not satisfied that the proposed policy is appropriate, it could decide not to adopt it, and request that modifications are made and a revised policy is presented to Council

- 3.2 Not to adopt the proposed new Housing Allocations Policy.
- 3.3 If this option was taken the Council would not be acting in accordance with current legislation.

Resource Implications

- 4.1 There will be a cost for the Choice Based Lettings software provider to adapt and reconfigure the software to reflect the new allocations policy. This cost has not yet been quantified, but is estimated to be in the region of £5,000 - £10,000 which can be met from existing resources. Following approval of the new policy, detailed work to specify and cost the required changes will take place with Abrisas.
- 4.2 The proposal to restrict applications to people with housing need and with a local connection will greatly reduce the number of applications, and their supporting paperwork, that have to be received, registered, scanned, indexed, and checked, then renewed every year. It will also eliminate the need to deal with enquiries relating to their housing application from people in Band 4 of the housing register (although many of these people will still receive advice about other housing options such as the private rented sector and mutual exchanges). This change has the potential to create considerable efficiency savings in Customer Services, Corporate Administration and Housing Options staffing, which will be fully quantified following implementation although these efficiencies may not be cashable.

Appendices

- 5. Appendix 1: Choice Based Lettings and Housing Allocations Policy

Background papers

- 6. Equality Impact Assessment.

Recommendation

It is recommended that:

Cabinet endorse the proposed allocations policy for social housing in Gedling and refers it to Council for approval and adoption.

Reason for recommendation

7. In order to make the most effective use of scarce social housing within the Borough.
- 7.1 In order to comply with the Council's statutory duties under the Housing Act 1996 (as amended).

Choice Based Lettings and Housing Allocations Policy

Gedling Borough Council



**Draft for consultation
November 2012**

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Broxtowe, Gedling and Rushcliffe Choice Based Lettings Scheme

Applications for and allocations to social housing in Broxtowe, Gedling and Rushcliffe are administered through a Choice Based Lettings (CBL) scheme known as **Homesearch**. The three councils share a website and software system, but they each have their own allocations policy, which outline how the scheme works, sets out how properties are advertised, who can bid, how bids are made and how lettings and offers of accommodation are made.

1.2 Broxtowe, Gedling and Rushcliffe Allocations Policies

Broxtowe, Gedling and Rushcliffe Borough Councils have individual allocations policies, which control the way the scheme operates in their respective areas. It is important that you make sure that you refer to the correct policy for the area in which you live to find out whether or not you qualify to join the scheme.

This is The Gedling Allocations Policy ('the Policy') which sets out who can apply for social housing in Gedling and how priority is given to different applicants.

In the Policy:

'we', 'us', 'our' refers to the Gedling Borough Council, and
'you' 'your' refers to any applicant or potential applicant under the policy.

If you need to contact us about the Policy, you can do so as below (but please note that there are other contact details about how you bid in section 24):

- By e mail on www.gedling.gov.uk
- By e mail to housingneeds@gedling.gov.uk
- By letter addressed to The Civic Centre, Arnot Hill Park, Arnold, Nottingham NG5 6LU
- By telephone on 0115 901 3861 (ask for the Housing Needs Team)
- In person by coming to the Civic Centre at Arnot Hill Park during usual business hours.

If you would like a copy of this document in another format such as large print, Braille, audio tape or translated into a different language, please contact us on 0115 901 3861 or e mail housingneeds@gedling.gov.uk,

1.3 Legal Framework

The policy has been drafted to comply with the requirements of Part VI of the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and Localism Act 2011, which states that all councils must have and publish an allocations policy and ensure that properties are let according to that policy.

- 1.4** Part VI of the Housing Act 1996 covers:
- Allocations of local authority housing to new tenants
 - Transfers requested by local authority tenants with reasonable preference
 - Transfers requested by current tenants of Registered Providers with reasonable preference; and
 - Nominations that the Council makes to Private Registered Providers and Registered Social Landlords.
- 1.5** The policy has regard to the latest guidance on the allocation of housing, published by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in June 2012.⁴
- 1.6** The policy identifies the groups that will be given preference for social housing. The scheme applies to existing tenants wishing to transfer from one tenancy to another and to new applicants, including people who are homeless. When we refer to an “applicant” in this document, it will refer to both new applicants including homeless people and tenants wishing to transfer (unless otherwise stated).
- 1.7** The policy will be effective from 1st April 2013 and will be kept under regular review to reflect changes in legislation or local housing priorities.

⁴ [Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England.](#)

2. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

- 2.1 We will promote equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practices when providing services. Communities thrive and prosper where individuals and groups are treated fairly and with respect, and are given equality of access to services.
- 2.2 The aim of the Policy is to ensure that you and all applicants for housing are treated fairly. In implementing this policy, people who can join this scheme will not be discriminated against on the grounds of race/ethnicity, age, disability, gender re-assignment, gender, religion or belief, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, sex or sexual orientation.
- 2.3 We have carried out an Equalities Analysis and this will be kept under review.

3. STATEMENT ON OFFERING CHOICE

- 3.1 We will offer the greatest choice possible in allocating social housing within the Borough. However, the ability to offer choice has to be balanced against a legal requirement for an allocation scheme to ensure that those in greatest housing need are given priority for social housing.
- 3.2 It must also be recognised that there is very high demand for affordable housing in the Gedling Borough and that this demand cannot be fully met from the current social housing stock.
- 3.3 If you have been in a high priority band for a long period of time, we may, in some circumstances, limit your choice by allocating a property directly to you. Details of when this will apply are set out in section 18.1

4. CONFIDENTIALITY

- 4.1 Details about you, including the fact that you are registered on the scheme, will not be given to any third party without your consent.
- 4.2 You will be asked on the application form to give permission for us to share the information provided with other members of the Choice Based Lettings scheme (such as Registered Providers) and other relevant agencies. Information will only be shared if your permission is given.
- 4.3 Sometimes, information must be shared even without your consent, e. g. to the police to prevent and/or detect crime (Crime and Disorder Act 1998, section 17).
- 4.4 Subject to limited exceptions, you have the right to access the personal information we hold about you. This includes information we hold as paper and electronic records. If you would like to access the information we hold about you, please contact the Data Protection Officer at Gedling Borough Council.

5. HOW THE HOUSING ALLOCATION SCHEME WILL OPERATE

5.1 We, and our partner Councils will offer properties through **Homesearch**, a Choice Based Lettings scheme, which gives people looking for housing more choice in where they live. The scheme is designed to be simple to use and easy to understand, but some words have a special meaning as follows:

Register – to register you need to complete an application form (available from us – contact information as above) or register online

Qualify – we will decide whether you qualify for social housing in Gedling Borough (see section 7 for details)

Bid – you need to look at the property adverts or weekly newsletter and tell us about the property you are interested in by phone, post, text, website or in person (contact numbers are in section 24). This is known as *bidding*.

5.2 When you apply to join the scheme, we will process your application and assess whether you *qualify* for social housing. If you do, we will give it a *priority band* (see sections 15-17), which reflects your level of housing need. We will also explain any limitations on the size and type of property you can bid for. Once we have received your application form and all supporting information, we aim to process your application and allocate you to a band within 10 working days.

5.3 Properties are advertised every week, from Thursday at 00:01 to Tuesday at 23:59. This is known as the “advertising cycle”. The advertisements can be found on the Homesearch website or on free property sheets, which are available at libraries, advice centres and council offices. The advertisements give information about each property, such as the number of bedrooms, location, rent, property type, and whether pets are allowed. The advertisements also say who is eligible to bid for the property.

5.4 Once you have found a property that you are interested in that you are eligible to bid for, you can let us know by phone, via the website, by text or in person (contact details in section 24). Bidding does not involve any money (except the cost of a phone call, text message or postage). It is an expression of interest, not a financial offer. You can bid for up to three properties every week.

5.5 Before you bid for a property, make sure you read any eligibility criteria carefully to make sure that your bid is not wasted. During the bidding cycle, you can check your position in the queue for that property, and move your bids to different properties where you are better placed, to increase your chances of being successful.

5.6 Once the advertising cycle closes, all the bids received for each property are drawn together in a shortlist, and the property is normally offered to the person at the top of it (see section 25 for more details.) However, there may be instances where the property is offered to an applicant lower down the list, for example, to avoid under-occupation (where the household moving in has more bedrooms than they need) or to make the best use of the property. Note that it is the Landlord (NOT us) who makes the decision about whom the property is offered to. Please also note that if you have any arrears of rent which are not being repaid under an agreement then a Landlord may decide not to offer to you but to offer to someone who is lower on the shortlist but who has no rent arrears.

- 5.7** The property is usually offered to the applicant who is in the highest priority band, has been waiting the longest and who meets the criteria of any local lettings policy of the Landlord. If that applicant refuses, the property is offered to the next highest placed applicant and so on, working down the shortlist until the property is let. If the property is subsequently refused and a long period has passed since the property was advertised, it may be re-advertised.
- 5.8** Each week, you can see feedback from properties that have previously been let through Homesearch, including how many people bid for them, which band the successful applicant was in, and how long they had been waiting. This can help you to decide what type of properties to bid for in future, and see how likely you are to be successful.

6. ELIGIBILITY

6.1 To be eligible to join the housing register, you must:

6.1.1 Be aged 16 or over; AND

6.1.2 Live in the Common Travel Area at the time of the application; AND

(The Common Travel Area is the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland), the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man and the Republic of Ireland)

6.1.3 Belong to one of the following groups

- British and Irish Citizens
- Commonwealth Citizens permitted to stay in the UK
- People from the European Economic Area who have the right to reside in the UK
- Refugees who have been granted leave to remain within the UK.

6.2 There are some other people who are eligible to apply, such as vulnerable British nationals formerly resident in Zimbabwe who are part of the UK Government's Zimbabwe Planned Resettlement Programme; if you think this may apply to you, you should contact your local council's Housing Needs Team.

6.3 By regulations⁵ made in November 2012, there are certain further people who are not eligible to apply for housing. These are:

- those who have rights of residence in the UK as a result of regulation 15A(1) and (4A) of the Immigration (European Economic Area) (Amendment) (No 2) Regulations 2012
- those who have a right derived from Article 20 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, in a case where rights of residence arise because a British citizen would otherwise be deprived of the genuine enjoyment of the substance of their rights as a European Union citizen

6.3 If you are not sure whether you are eligible, you should contact the Housing Needs Team for advice.

⁵ [Allocation of Housing and Homelessness \(Eligibility\) \(England\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2012](#)

7. QUALIFICATION

- 7.1 The Localism Act 2011 has given local authorities greater freedom to set their own policies about who can apply for social housing in their area. This means that we now have more freedom over how we operate our allocations scheme and can now set criteria for who *qualifies* to join the housing register. If you do not qualify, then we will not register your application.
- 7.2 We have consulted partners and examined the housing applications that have been made since 2011. The vast majority of applications fall into the lowest priority band (previously band 4). A large number of these applicants wished to move house but were adequately housed where they were. Very few allocations were made to band 4 applicants, who therefore had a minimal chance of securing social housing.
- 7.3 We have therefore decided to restrict applications to people who have a clear need for rehousing, and that people who are adequately housed but have a desire to move will not qualify for social housing. The only exceptions to this are;
- i) applicants willing to downsize to a smaller social housing property, and/or
 - ii) older applicants who would be eligible for retirement housing, and/or
 - iii) applicants who are in receipt of the medium or high rate of the care element of Disability Living Allowance, who are willing to move into a retirement living property. This is because the supply of retirement housing is closer to the demand for that type of housing, whereas demand for “general needs” social housing greatly outweighs the supply.
- 7.4 To qualify, you must also have a local connection to the Gedling Borough area, or must fall into an exemption category (see list 2 below) in order to qualify.
- 7.5 To qualify to join the housing register, you must meet at least one criterion from list 1, and at least one criterion from list 2 - you must:

LIST 1	Need for housing
1a	Demonstrate your need for rehousing by meeting the criteria set out for Bands 1, 2 or 3 (see sections 15 to 17).
1b	Occupy a social housing property in Gedling Borough and have one or more spare bedrooms, and be willing to move to a smaller property.
1c	Have no one in your household aged under 50, and be willing to move into a retirement living property
1d	not have any children but you or at least one person in your household be receiving the medium or high rate of the care element of Disability Living Allowance ⁶ , and you are willing to move into a retirement living property

⁶ This will be reviewed to take into account Personal Independence Payment when it is introduced from June 2013.

LIST 2 Local connection, or exemption	
2a	Have lived in the Gedling Borough continuously for the last 12 months, or for 3 out of the last 5 years.
2b	Currently be working in paid employment in the Gedling Borough for 16 hours per week or more, and have been employed in Gedling Borough for at least 6 months.
2c	Have a parent, sibling or adult child who has lived in Gedling for at least the last five years, and you demonstrate a need to move to Gedling Borough to support them or receive support from them (e. g. confirmation from social services – a GP’s letter is not sufficient to demonstrate this)
2d	Have been accepted by Gedling Borough Council under the homelessness legislation
2e	Have been accepted for priority re-housing as a reciprocal arrangement with another council or Registered Provider (RP)
2f	Have been placed in care as a child outside the area, but wish to return to Gedling (and previously lived in Gedling)
2g	Have been accepted as part of a witness protection recommendation by the police
2h	Have been living in temporary accommodation provided by a local housing authority outside Gedling, but had a local connection to Gedling (2a, 2b, 2c) before you were placed there.
2i	Be serving in the regular Armed Forces, or have left the regular Armed Forces in the last five years.
2j	All people in the your household are aged 50 or over, and are willing to move into a retirement living property
2k	have no children but at least one person in your household is receiving the medium or high rate of the care element of Disability Living Allowance, and you are willing to move into a retirement living property

- 7.6 If you have committed criminal or anti-social behaviour then you may not qualify to join the housing register, even if you meet the criteria set out in lists 1 and 2 above. We will assess each case on its own circumstances. Further details are set out in section 9.
- 7.7 If you do not qualify to join the scheme, we will give you advice about other housing options that may be available to you, such as renting a home in the private sector.

8. WHO CANNOT JOIN THE SCHEME

8.1 People under 16

You must be at least 16 years old or over at the time of applying.

8.2 People living outside the Common Travel Area

You must be resident in the Common Travel Area at the time of applying.

8.3 People who are not ‘habitually resident’ in the UK

If you have lived outside the Common Travel Area within the last two years, you may not be classified as ‘habitually resident’, even if you are a UK citizen. People who are not ‘habitually resident’ are not eligible for re-housing.

8.4 People subject to immigration control

If you are subject to immigration control, as described by the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996, you are not eligible for social housing. These groups of people are set out by regulations.⁷

8.5 People who have no housing need (or exception)

If you do not meet at least one of the criteria set out in list 1 above, you cannot join.

8.6 People who have no local connection (or exception)

If you do not meet at least one of the criteria set out in list 2 above, you cannot join.

8.7 People who have committed criminal or anti-social behaviour

We will assess each case on its circumstances as to whether your history of criminal or anti-social behaviour (if any) disqualify you from the scheme. Details are set out in section 9.

8.8 Homeowners

If you own part or all of a home you will not be able to join the scheme unless:

- The only property you own is outside the United Kingdom, and it is not reasonable to expect you to occupy it;
- You are an older or disabled owner-occupier living in poor housing conditions or in unsuitable accommodation, although resources available to you would be taken into account (including grants available for repair etc. and the capital value of the property) before a decision is taken about whether you would qualify to register on the scheme;
- There are exceptional circumstances, such as if you have a serious medical condition and so are no longer able to remain in your own property and are unable to afford suitable accommodation in the private market. This is at our discretion.

9. CRIMINAL AND ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

9.1 Some people's behaviour means that they are unsuitable to become tenants. If you or anyone in your household who is on the application with you, have behaved or are currently behaving anti-socially then you may not be allowed to join the scheme. Examples of behaviour that may disqualify you are as follows:

- If you (either in your current tenancy or in a previous one) have been in serious breach of your tenancy conditions due to anti-social behaviour;
- If you have been served with an injunction;
- If you have been or are currently subject to another court order (such as a suspended possession order) on the grounds of anti-social behaviour;
- If you have been evicted by your landlord because of anti-social behaviour;
- If you (or anyone in your household or any of your visitors) have caused wilful damage to a council or Registered Provider property. If you have a history of, or are currently perpetrating, serious anti-social behaviour and/or criminal behaviour.

⁷ [Allocation of Housing and Homelessness \(Eligibility\) \(England\) Regulations 2006 \(as amended\)](#)

9.2 Behaviour likely to be considered as serious anti social behaviour includes:

- Physical assaults (such as domestic, racial and homophobic violence);
- Severe damage to property (including buildings, cars etc.), for example, arson attacks;
- Threats of violence and/or damage, including threats to kill (this includes perpetrators of domestic violence);
- Persistent and offensive verbal abuse, due to a person's religion, ethnicity, sexuality, disability or other reason;
- The use of dwellings for the cultivation, supply or use of drugs;
- Persistent/widespread criminal activity such as burglaries or vehicle crime;
- Very serious and persistent noise nuisance continuing for long periods of time;
- Violence to or threatening behaviour towards staff of Gedling Borough Council, a Registered Provider, another previous landlord, the police, Councillors, Emergency Services personnel, or NHS workers.

9.3 Your application will be considered on its individual circumstances before a decision is made whether or not you qualify for the scheme. We will take into account the nature and severity of the criminal or anti-social behaviour, how long ago the incidents occurred, and anything you tell us about them, when deciding whether you qualify and, if not, how long the disqualification will apply.

9.4 If at any time after you have been accepted onto the scheme, we or a partner in the Homesearch scheme obtains evidence that you have exhibited unacceptable behaviour as outlined above, then your application may be suspended or cancelled. You will be informed in writing of this, and will have the opportunity to appeal against this decision, in accordance with the appeals procedure (see section 19 about appeals)

10. APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

10.1 This section contains the requirements you will be expected to fulfil.

10.2 Family Applications

You will be considered as a family household if you have at least one dependent child is living permanently within your household. Dependent children are defined as children aged up to 18 and who must be living with you as their main home. This includes children who are adopted or fostered on a long-term basis. Children aged over 18 but still living at home are regarded as adult members of the household.

10.3 Children who do not live permanently in your home, or who have their main home elsewhere (for example, due to access arrangements), are not considered as permanent members of the household and will not be counted for bed spaces.

10.4 Joint Applications

Joint applications can be accepted from couples and people who are not couples but have a long term commitment to live together, up to a maximum of four. If this applies to you then you and all the other applicants must agree that you are applying together.

You may make a joint applications if:

- you want to share a home as with another person as your partner
- You and some of your relatives wish to live together if there is a long term commitment to a shared home
- You and a friend (or friends) wish to live together where there is a long term commitment to a shared home
- You a carer for the person with whom you want to apply (or they are your carer).

10.5 Applicants no longer wishing to apply jointly

If you and any other applicants in a joint application no longer wish to apply jointly, then you can all make separate applications. When a request to split the joint application is received, yours and any other person's circumstances will be reassessed separately and an appropriate band awarded from the original application date. However, if the re-assessment results in a higher band for one of you, then the waiting time will only be effective from the date of the re-assessment.

10.6 Single applications

Single applicants can include single people living on their own, single parents with dependent children living with them or people wanting to apply for a tenancy in their own right who may have other people included in their household on their application. If this applies to you and you are offered and accept a tenancy, the tenancy will be granted only in your name. A joint tenancy with a person who was not listed on the application will not normally be granted.

10.7 Pregnant Applicants

If you are pregnant you will be accepted as a family applicant, requiring appropriately sized accommodation, as soon as your pregnancy has been confirmed.

10.8 16 and 17 year olds

If you are aged 16 and 17, you can apply to Homeseach, but most landlords will only consider you for housing when you have reached 18. Landlords may consider granting a tenancy to you if you are 16 or 17 year olds and a suitable support package is in place and if:

- you are accepted by us under homelessness legislation;
- You are a care leaver (referred by Children's Services);
- you have been referred and placed in specialist or supported accommodation by us and are ready to move on to independent living;
- There are exceptional circumstances following an assessment by the Housing Needs Team and where a guarantor for you will be available.

10.9 Members of HM Forces

If you are a former or serving members of the Armed Forces you will qualify for housing if you meet the criteria from list 1 in section 7 (recognised need for housing, or exception). You do not need a local connection to Gedling Borough in order to qualify. If you do qualify for housing then you will be given additional preference by the Council, as described in section 17.

However, if you are a former or serving member of the Armed Forces and do not have a housing need, or do not meet the criteria set out in list 1 in section 7, then you will not qualify to join the scheme.

We define former and serving members of the Armed Forces as:

- People who left the regular Armed Forces within the last 5 years, except those dishonourably discharged;
- Serving members of either the regular or reserve Armed Forces who need to move because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service;
- Bereaved spouses and civil partners of members of the Armed Forces leaving Services Family Accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner.

10.10 Prisoners

If you are a prisoner serving a custodial sentence then you will not have your application activated until 8 weeks after your release date. This is because it would not be fair for you to apply for the scheme and build up waiting time while you are serving a custodial sentence and are in no position to move home. The release date must be verified by probation or prison staff. Your last settled address will be used to establish whether you have a local connection.

10.11 Applicants with rent arrears

If you have current or former rent arrears from a private, Council or Registered Provider tenancy then you may join the Scheme, but may only receive an offer of accommodation if you have made arrangements to pay the arrears and adhered to a re-payment plan for an agreed period. Any offers will be at the discretion of the landlord in accordance with their policy and landlords prefer tenants whom they know will pay their rent on time.

10.12 Foster Carers

If you have been approved as a foster carer and need an additional bedroom to commence a placement then you will be placed in Band 2 as soon as we have confirmation from the local children's services authority.

10.13 Homeless Applicants

If you have been accepted by us as homeless, and in priority need, and not intentionally homeless then you will be placed in Band 2, where you will have six weeks to choose to bid for the properties that become available.

10.14 If you have not been offered a property six weeks after receiving your homelessness acceptance decision then you will be moved in Band 1 and placed on *autobid*, unless there are exceptional circumstances. This means that the system will place bids without your direct involvement on any property which is suitable for you. We can also look to identify a property which is suitable for your needs, and *directly match* you to that property. This may include a private rented sector property.

10.15 We will only offer one suitable property to you if you are homeless and placed in Band 1, and this offer will discharge our duties to you in full. If you refuse this offer, then you will be moved from Band 1 to Band 3. You will be able to request a review if you do not believe the property is suitable for your needs. However, you will be advised to accept the tenancy while awaiting the outcome of this review as, if it proves unsuccessful, we will have discharged

our homelessness duties and you may be required to leave any temporary accommodation provided. No further accommodation will be offered.

10.16 If you are homeless with no fixed abode then you must provide a 'care of' address where you can receive post. This could be a friend, a relative or a support agency's address.

11. INFORMATION YOU NEED TO PROVIDE

11.1 To accompany your application form, you will need to provide some information about you and your household. Your application cannot be registered without this information, so please make sure you have provided the following:

11.2 Identification – Proof of identity for all members of your household is required, such as a passport, driving licence or birth certificate.

11.3 Children – You will need to provide proof for all children who live permanently at your address. This must be a letter confirming Child Benefit or Tax Credits for each child living with you permanently. Please make sure that the letter shows your child/children's name and date of birth.

11.4 Immigration status – If you are not a UK citizen you will need to provide proof that you are eligible for social housing in the UK, such as Home Office documentation.

11.5 Residency Checking – We have to confirm that you are living at the address you state on your application form. We may use a credit reference agency to do this. If you are not registered for Council Tax or are not on the electoral roll, you will need to provide some other proof that you live at the address on your application form (such as a utility bill in your name, an NHS medical card, bank statements, benefit letters etc.)

11.6 Proof of local connection – If you do not live in Gedling Borough at present, you will need to prove another local connection from list 2 in section 7, such as that you work in the Borough or have immediate family living here. This could include a family member's utility bill, driving licence, tenancy agreement, benefits letters, or a letter from your employer confirming your place of work. If a family member is providing your local connection you will also need to provide proof that your move to Gedling Borough is necessary to either give or receive care.

11.7 Please see the "Supporting Documentation Checklist" in the application form, which will tell you the information required.

11.8 You must also give full information about any criminal and/or anti social as detailed in section 9 above.

12. ASSESSING APPLICATIONS

12.1 Medical Need

If you are applying to move because you have a medical condition, a mobility problem or a permanent physical disability, you will need to provide information about your condition and

how your condition is affected by your current housing (e.g. you need to move following a stroke which has affected your mobility to such an extent that you can no longer manage stairs and require ground floor accommodation).

12.2 We may need further information regarding your need to move home. This could be a letter from your GP, social worker, occupational therapist or other health or social care professional who knows about your condition. We may also send out a medical form for you to complete to assist us to decide what level of medical need you have. A home visit by a Housing Needs Officer may also take place.

12.3 Welfare Need

You should provide as much information as possible about why you need to move. Examples of a need to move on welfare grounds could include: because you need to provide essential care to a relative, or because you need to be near essential services that you could not access without moving. You may need to provide proof of your need from your GP, social worker or other health or social care professional.

12.4 Threatened with loss of accommodation

If you have been asked to leave your home, you will need to provide proof, such as a copy of your notice to quit; possession order or letter from your employer (if you live in tied accommodation).

12.5 Deliberate worsening of circumstances

Deliberate worsening of circumstances arises where we decide that you have given up accommodation that was suitable for your needs where there was no requirement or obligation to do so. To reduce the likelihood of people moving into poorer accommodation in order to qualify for quicker re-housing, if you are found to have deliberately worsened your circumstances, you will not normally qualify for housing based on this situation for 12 months after you deliberately worsened your own circumstances. Examples of deliberate worsening of circumstances might include:

- Selling or giving up a privately rented property that was affordable and suitable for your household's needs
- Moving from a secure or assured tenancy to insecure or overcrowded accommodation with family or friends, where there is no good reason for this move
- Where there is evidence that it was reasonable that you could have remained in your original accommodation
- Arranging for another person to move into your home, creating an overcrowded situation, where there was no good reason for this move.

12.6 Where you have little or no control over your move to alternative accommodation, this will not normally be considered as a deliberate worsening of circumstances.

13. FALSE STATEMENTS AND WITHHOLDING INFORMATION

13.1 Section 171 of the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002, states:

- (1) A person commits an offence if, in connection with the exercise by a local housing authority of their functions under the Act –*
- a) he knowingly or recklessly makes a statement which is false in a material particular, or*
 - b) he knowingly withholds information which the authority has reasonably required him/her to give in connection with the exercise of those functions.*

13.2 This means that it is an offence for which you may be prosecuted in the Magistrates Court to give false information or knowingly withhold information you have been asked for regarding your housing application.

13.3 If you are found to have given false information, you may be excluded from registering with Homesearch. If you have given false information and have obtained a property through Homesearch, the landlord may bring proceedings for possession of the property.

ALLOCATIONS POLICY AND BANDING SCHEME

14. BAND ONE – URGENT PRIORITY

14.1 Urgent Medical Priority

This applies if you have a permanent (life-long or terminal) or chronic medical condition, illness or disability and as a result of this condition you are unable to continue to occupy your current accommodation. Your current home must be assessed by a housing, health or social care professional as no longer being accessible or suitable. You will only be awarded Urgent Medical Priority where rehousing is the only realistic option. Examples include:

- If you cannot be discharged from hospital to your present home; or
- If you are unable to access essential parts of your home e.g. bathroom, kitchen.

14.2 Urgent Property Factors

This applies to you if:

- You are a tenant of a partner Registered Provider and live in the Gedling Borough but are required to leave your home as a result of a regeneration scheme, major repair or demolition/clearance; or
- Your home is subject to a demolition order; or
- Your home is subject to Environmental Health action, such as statutory overcrowding, or has a Category 1 hazard (as defined by the Housing Act 2004) which cannot be resolved and is likely to lead to homelessness, or which presents an immediate risk to the your health and safety.; or
- You live in the Gedling Borough, and are unable to return to your home due to extensive works required following a fire or flood.

14.3 Statutory Overcrowding

This applies to you if your current accommodation has been assessed as being statutorily overcrowded by an Environmental Health Officer, as defined in Part X of the Housing Act 1985. This assessment will take into account the number, ages, and gender of your household living with you in the property along with the number and sizes of rooms.

A claim of overcrowding is usually only considered where it arises as the product of natural growth (i. e. when a new child is born, adopted or fostered). Overcrowding caused by people of any age coming (back) to live in the property would not usually be awarded this priority, unless there is proof that the person causing the overcrowding had no other option but to move into the property. In this case, the application will only be placed in this band once the situation has existed for 6 months. We will determine over-crowding after considering the best use of the rooms available to the household.

14.4 Urgent management cases

This applies if you are a tenant of a partner Registered Provider and currently live in the Gedling Borough, and your landlord has made a firm recommendation that you should move urgently. This is called a 'management move' and an award of Band 1 will only be awarded following approval by a manager from the registered provider and us.

14.5 Under occupation by two or more bedrooms

This applies if you are a tenant of a partner Registered Provider and live in the Gedling Borough and your current home is too big for the needs of your household by **two** or more bedrooms.

You will only be considered for this category if you are willing to move to a one-bedroom home or give up **two** bedrooms. The property you bid for must have at least two bedrooms fewer than the property you currently live in. For example, if you live in a three bedroom house and accepted in this category, then bid for a two bedroom house, you will not be given Band 1 priority.

14.6 Homelessness (six weeks after duty being accepted)

Where we have accepted a duty to secure that accommodation is available for your occupation under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (i.e. you are eligible, homeless, in priority need, and not intentionally homeless), and six weeks has passed since the date of the decision when you have been on Band 2, but you have not secured a property, then you will be moved up to Band 1, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

When you are moved up to Band 1, we will place bids for you on any suitable properties, including suitable private rented properties. If you are offered a suitable property, whether social housing or private rented housing, and refuse it, then we reserve the right to consider our duty to secure accommodation discharged. If our duty is discharged, then you will be moved to Band 3 (see section 16.6).

15. BAND TWO – HIGH PRIORITY

15.1 Homelessness

Where the Council has accepted a duty to secure that accommodation is available for occupation by you under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (i.e. eligible, homeless, in priority need, and not intentionally homeless). Then you will be allocated to Band 2 for six weeks during which time you will be expected to choose suitable properties and to bid for them. Private sector tenancies are also an option. If you are not successful in this time, then you will be moved to Band One (see section 14.6), unless there are exceptional circumstances.

15.2 Homelessness prevention

If you are threatened with homelessness within 8 weeks and have been assessed by us as likely to be eligible, homeless, in priority need and not intentionally homeless you will be allocated to Band 2. This priority will only be awarded to you following an interview with a Housing Needs Officer and does not normally include family/parental exclusions. You may come in this category if:

- You are a private tenant and have been served with a valid notice to quit through no fault of your own and you do not have the available resources to secure further private accommodation;
- You are an owner-occupier faced with repossession through no fault of your own, where mortgage rescue or other options are not viable, and you do not have available resources to secure accommodation in the private sector;

- You are a tenant of tied accommodation (for example, a caretaker in a school) retiring through age or ill health, or you are being made redundant, or you do not have available resources to secure accommodation in the private sector.

15.3 Personal Protection/Harassment

If you are at risk in your current home in the Gedling Borough because you are experiencing harassment (which may be racial and/or homophobic harassment), domestic violence or other threats of violence, and where all housing options have been explored, then you will be allocated to this category. You will need to provide evidence from the police, anti-social behaviour unit or other relevant agency and will only be offered accommodation which is considered a safe distance from the threat.

15.4 Succession

If you have succeeded to a property in Gedling Borough owned by one of the partner Registered Providers and the property is unsuitable for you, (because, for example, it is too big, or has special adaptations), and you are seeking suitable alternative accommodation then you will be placed in Band 2.

15.5 16/17 year olds and young people leaving care

If you are a young person leaving care or aged under 18 then you will be banded according to the procedures set out within the Nottinghamshire County-Wide Protocol. Available from Nottinghamshire County Council.

15.6 Move-on from specialist and supported accommodation

If you are ready to move on to independent living from supported accommodation then you will be awarded this category (we will need confirmation from the accommodation or support provider that you are ready to move on and have the life skills to maintain an independent tenancy, and detail of any move-on support package in place). This band is available only where we have referral arrangements with the accommodation provider.

15.7 Severe Overcrowding

If your household is subject to severe overcrowding, and is assessed as being two bedrooms short of the number of bedrooms required or where there is gender overcrowding, then you will be placed in Band 2. Gender overcrowding is defined as:

- Where a child aged 10 or over has to share a bedroom with a child or adult of the opposite sex;
- Where a child aged 10 or over has to share a bedroom with their parent or parents.

Household Member	Bedroom Eligibility
Couple/single parent	1 bedroom
Single adult (age 18+)* (siblings of the same sex over the age of 18 who are part of a family application will be expected to share)	1 bedroom
Person with confirmed medical need for own bedroom	1 bedroom
1 child or 2 children of the same sex	1 bedroom
2 children of different sexes, until the eldest is 10	1 bedroom
2 children of different sexes where one is aged 10+	2 bedrooms

15.8 Under-occupation

If you are a tenant of a partner Registered Provider, and live in the Gedling Borough, and your present home is too big for the needs of you and your household by one bedroom, and you wish to move to smaller accommodation, you will be placed in Band 2.

15.9 High medical priority

If you or a member of your household have a serious medical condition, illness or disability which is made worse by your current accommodation, and as a result of this condition it is not reasonable to continue to occupy your current accommodation on long term basis, you will be placed in Band 2

15.10 Foster carers

If you who have been approved as a foster carer and need an additional bedroom to commence a placement (when confirmed in writing by the local children's services authority.) you will be placed in Band 2.

15.11 Social housing tenants who no longer require adaptations

If you are a tenant of a partner Registered Provider currently living in an adapted property where the adaptation (for example, a stair lift, through floor lift or a level access shower) is no longer required (when confirmed by the landlord), then you will be placed in Band 2.

16. BAND THREE – MODERATE PRIORITY

16.1 Lodgers with dependent children or who are pregnant

If you have dependent children, or you are pregnant, or you share facilities (e.g. kitchen, bathroom) with family, friends, an ex-partner or a landlord who lives in the same property (but not people who are tenants, joint tenants or owners of the property they occupy) then you will be placed in Band 3.

16.2 Moderate medical priority

If you or someone in your household has an illness or disability which is made worse by your present home, and you need to move to improve their condition, but a move is not essential, you will be in Band 3.

16.3 Social or financial hardship

If you are experiencing hardship in your current accommodation and you need to move to improve your situation, but a move is not essential you will be placed in Band 3.

Examples could include:

- If you need to be close to specialist educational facilities;
- If you need to move to take up employment or training for a minimum of 6 months;
- If you cannot afford to live in your current accommodation in the longer term, and you can provide financial information to show that this is the case.

16.4 Homeless but not in priority need

If you have been assessed by us as being homeless or threatened with homelessness, but not in priority need, then you will be placed in Band 3

16.5 Intentionally homeless

If you have been or could be assessed by us as being homeless or threatened with homelessness, but you have done or failed to do something as a consequence of which you have lost accommodation that would otherwise be available to them then you will be placed in Band 3.

16.6 Discharged homelessness duty

If you have been accepted as homeless by us, but then have refused an offer of suitable accommodation which means that we have discharged our homelessness duty to you, you will be placed in Band 3 (see section on “Homeless Applicants”).

16.7 General overcrowding

If your household is overcrowded by **one** bedroom then you will be placed in Band 3 (unless it is due to gender overcrowding when you will be awarded additional priority in Band 2).

16.8 Applicants aged 50 or over with no other housing need

If you are over 50 years of age and you require sheltered accommodation but have no other housing need, you will be Band 3.

16.9 Applicants aged under 50 with no children and with no other housing need

If there are no children in your household, but you or another applicant is receiving the medium or high rate of the care element of Disability Living Allowance, and are willing to move into a retirement living property, you will be placed in Band 3.

17. ADDITIONAL PREFERENCE GROUPS

17.1 We have decided that we wish to give additional preference to applicants from certain groups. We will achieve this by applying additional waiting time to these applicants, so that if this applies to you, then you will be placed higher within a single band than you would otherwise be.

17.2 Armed Forces applicants

We support the principles of the Armed Forces Community Covenant. The aims of the Community Covenant are to:

- encourage local communities to support the Armed Forces community in their area and vice versa
- nurture public understanding and awareness amongst the public of issues affecting the Armed Forces community
- recognise and remember the sacrifices faced by the Armed Forces community
- encourage activities which help to integrate the Armed Forces community into local life; and
- encourage the Armed Forces community to help and support the wider community, whether through participation in events and joint projects, or other forms of engagement.

17.3 In order to further these aims, if you qualify for housing (see section 7) and you are a serving member of the regular Armed Forces, or you have left the regular Armed Forces in the five years prior to your application, you will be awarded an additional nine months' waiting time. This means that your effective date will be treated as being nine months prior to the date you provide all information necessary to assess and activate your application.

18. REVIEWS

18.1 Priority Reviews

If you are placed in Band 1 or Band 2, it means that we have accepted that your situation is urgent. Because of this, you are expected to place bids for any properties that match your needs. There is a time limit of 12 weeks for applicants in Bands 1 and 2 after which your application will be reviewed to check whether your circumstances still warrant that level of priority. This may result in your banding being reduced. This does not apply if you have Band 1 or Band 2 priority because you are under-occupying your current home.

Priority Reviews – Homeless Applicants

Homeless applicants accepted as Band 2 Homeless will be allowed to bid for 6 weeks only in Band 2, they will then move to Band 1, unless there are exceptional circumstances. Once in Band 1 the Council will place bids for you on any suitable properties, with either a social or private landlords. After 12 weeks there will be a review.

18.2 Annual review/information reviews

Your application will be reviewed each year, and we will ask you to tell us if your circumstances have changed in any way. It is important to complete and return your review form so that we have up to date information about your need for housing. If you do not return the form or otherwise contact us, we will assume that you no longer need housing and remove you from the housing register.

As well as the annual review, we may review your application at any time in order to confirm that we still have the correct information. If we are not able to contact you, we may suspend your application. If we do this, we will write to inform you. If we still do not hear from you, we may cancel your application. It is important therefore that you tell us if your address or telephone number has changed after you completed the forms.

18.3 Changes in circumstances

You should let us know about any changes in your circumstances immediately. For example, someone moves in or moves out, or there is a change to your income. Changes will mean that we have to review your application and your priority banding may change.

If you are moved to a lower band, because your need for housing has reduced, you will keep the same “effective date” to determine how high up that band you will be. However some changes may mean you no longer qualify to remain on the scheme.

If you are moved to a higher band, because your need for housing has increased, your “effective date” will change to the date your change of circumstances request was agreed. This is so that applicants who have been in this high level of need for a long time will remain above applicants who have recently joined this band.

If you move to a new property, you will need to complete a new form or visit the website to find out if you still qualify to remain on the scheme

If you bid for a property successfully, and it is later found that your housing situation was different from the most recent details you provided to us, then the offer might be withdrawn or the landlord may take action to recover possession of the property.

19. APPEALS

19.1 Appeals against qualification and banding decisions

If you disagree with the band you have been placed in, or have been advised that you do not qualify to join the scheme, you have the right to ask for your application to be looked at again (this is an 'appeal'). You should submit any relevant additional information if you feel that this will support your application. Your request for an appeal should be sent within 21 days of your original registration or banding notification letter. A senior officer will review your application and write to you to tell you the outcome of the appeal, usually within 10 working days.

If your appeal is accepted, and your application is placed in the higher band, your "effective date" will be backdated to the date the new information was provided, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

19.2 Appeals against non-qualification or anti-social behaviour

If you have been notified that you do not qualify to join the scheme, because of criminal or anti-social behaviour, you have the right to appeal against the decision. All appeals should be made within 21 days of you receiving the letter confirming that you are not able to join the scheme.

If you can provide evidence that your behaviour has improved and you are suitable to become a tenant (perhaps following a successful private tenancy or stay in supported accommodation) you may be allowed to reapply to join the scheme. The time needed to demonstrate a change in behaviour will depend on the circumstances of each case and is at our discretion. Any offer of a property will still be at the discretion of the landlord.

19.3 Appeals against suitability of accommodation as a final offer (accepted homelessness duty only)

If you are offered accommodation in discharge of our homelessness duty, you have the right to request a review of the offer if you think the accommodation offered is not suitable⁸. However, if you intend to request a review of this type, we strongly advise to accept the offer pending the outcome of the review so that you will have somewhere to live in the meantime. The request must be made within 21 days of you receiving the offer letter, giving clear reasons for the request.

⁸ Section 202 (1A), Housing Act 1996 (as amended).

20. COMPLAINTS

20.1 Complaints

If you are not satisfied with the way we have dealt with your application, or how we have considered your request for a review or appeal, then you can make a complaint to the Council in a number of ways:

- by using the online complaint form at www.gedling.gov.uk
- by email to: housingneeds@gedling.gov.uk
- by letter (to Civic Centre, Arnot Hill Park, Arnold, Nottingham NG5 6LU)
- by telephone on 0115 901 3901
- or in person at the Civic Centre, Arnot Hill Park, Arnold, Nottingham NG5 6LU.

20.2 You can also get someone else (for example, your local councillor or Member of Parliament) to send us feedback on your behalf.

If you make a complaint to us, we will follow three stage complaint process:

Stage 1 - Service Department Complaint

1. The complaint is investigated at the point of service delivery. Within 2 working days, you should receive a full response or acknowledgement of receipt of your complaint.
2. A full response should be sent within 10 working days of the receipt of your complaint. If this is not possible because of the complexity of the complaint then you will be advised that the investigation is continuing and giving an indication of when it will be completed.
3. You will be advised in our response of what you need to do to progress to stage 2 if you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint.

Stage 2 - Service Department Reviews

1. The relevant Service Manager will ensure that an objective review is carried out for any stage 2 complaint that is received. As well as reviewing the original complaint and our response under stage 1 of the complaint's procedure it will also take in to account any further relevant information provided by the complainant.
2. Within 2 working days, you should receive a full response of the outcome of the review or acknowledgement of receipt of the request for a review.
3. A full response should be sent within 10 working days of the receipt of the request for a review. If this is not possible because of the complexity of the complaint then you will be advised that the investigation is continuing and giving an indication of when it will be completed.
4. You will be advised in the response that you may complain further to the Local Government Ombudsman and sent details of their procedure.

Stage 3 – Local Government Ombudsman

If you are still dissatisfied, then you can contact the Local Government Ombudsman, who will investigate the complaint on your behalf. You can contact the Local Government Ombudsman at:

PO Box 4771
Coventry
CV4 0EH

Telephone: 024 7682 1960

Website: www.lgo.org.uk

The Local Government Ombudsman has a leaflet called "Complaint about the Council? How to complain to the Local Government Ombudsman." You can get a copy by telephoning or writing to the address above, or you can download it from the Ombudsman's website.






If you contact the Local Government Ombudsman without giving us the opportunity to resolve the issue first, then your complaint will be judged as premature and passed to us to resolve.

21. CHOOSING A HOME

- 21.1 Properties are advertised every week. The adverts are available on the website at www.home-search.org.uk. The website can be viewed from any computer that has internet access (such as at the local library or through friends and relatives) and from the computer kiosks provided our offices. If you are not sure how to access the website, or don't have access to the internet, there are many other ways you can use the scheme – we can give you advice.
- 21.2 We also provides free property advert sheets, which are available at:
- Our offices and contact points
 - Local libraries
 - Community centres
 - Advice centres
 - Housing support services and charities
 - Hostels and temporary accommodation
- 21.3 If you have no access to the internet, and cannot leave your home or access the adverts in any other way, we can send the free property sheet directly to you every week.

22. CHOOSING THE RIGHT PROPERTY

- 22.1 The advertisements contain details of the property type, who the landlord is, where the property is and how much the rent is. The advertisements contain a range of symbols which give you more details about the property and help you to bid for the right property for your household.

	How many bedrooms the property has		Wheelchair accessible or adapted for disabled use
	Minimum age for bidders		Maximum age for bidders
	Property has a garden		No pets allowed
	Sheltered accommodation		Off-road parking

22.2 Property Types

The property advertisement will tell you who is allowed to bid for each property. The table below shows who is eligible for what type and size of property. Here are some general guidelines:

2 Bed Houses – Usually let to families with one or two children.

3 Bed Houses – Usually let to families with two or more children, dependent on the age and sex of the children.

1 bed flats/maisonettes – Let to single people or couples without dependent children.

2+ bed flats/maisonettes – Usually let to families with children.

Parlour houses – These are houses with two living rooms and are usually let to larger families or families who have a medical recommendation for a ground floor bedroom.

1 Bed Bungalows – General Let – Usually let to single people or couples who need single level accommodation.

2 Bed Bungalows – General Let – Usually let to families with one or two children where there is a need for single level accommodation.

1 Bed Bungalow – Sheltered or Retirement Housing – Usually let to single people or couples over 50*, or sometimes younger if they receive Disability Living Allowance, who need sheltered accommodation and where there is a need for single level accommodation.

2 Bed Bungalows – Sheltered or Retirement Housing – Usually let to single people or couples over 50*, or sometimes younger if they receive Disability Living Allowance, who need sheltered accommodation with two bedrooms (for example, where they need for a second bedroom for a carer), and where there is a need for single level accommodation.

Supported accommodation (sheltered or retirement housing) – Usually let to people over 50*. People aged under 50 who receive Disability Living Allowance and who have a need for the services of sheltered or retirement accommodation may also be eligible.

Group/Alarm linked – Usually let to people over 50*, who live independently but need low level support. People aged under 50 who receive Disability Living Allowance and who have a need for the services of sheltered or retirement accommodation may also be eligible.

* Many different housing providers participate in Homesearch, and each may have different age restrictions for their sheltered or retirement accommodation. The advertisement will state what the minimum age requirement for any property is.

22.3 Local Lettings Policies

In some circumstances we and the social landlord may agree a local lettings policy to allow some under-occupation, for instance, in order to reduce the number of children on a certain estate. The advertisement will indicate those properties to which the local letting policy applies.

Please refer to the table below, which shows which types of household are eligible to bid for which type of property.

	Single person	Couple	Single pregnant/ couple and pregnant	Family with 1 child	Family with 2 children	Family with 3 or more children	Single person over 50	Couple both over 50	Single person with overnight carer
Studio flat	✓								
1 bed flat	✓	✓							
2 bed flat			✓	✓	✓				✓
3 bed flat					✓				
1 bed maisonette	✓	✓							
2 bed maisonette			✓	✓	✓				✓
3 bed maisonette					✓				
1 bed house	✓	✓							
2 bed house			✓	✓	✓				
3 bed house					✓	✓			
4+ bed house						✓			
1 bed bungalow (general)	✓	✓					✓	✓	
2 bed bungalow (general)			✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
1 bed bungalow (age restricted)							✓	✓	
2 bed bungalow (age restricted)							✓	✓	✓
Group/ alarm linked or Retirement Living							✓	✓	

23. RESTRICTIONS

23.1 Rural Exception Sites

These are properties that have been built in to meet the local need in rural communities. These properties are restricted to people who have a connection to the parish or village only and cannot be let to people who do not have a connection. The property advert will tell you if this applies. If you indicate that you have a link to a particular parish, you will have to provide evidence of this at the time of your application.

23.2 Age

Some properties are only suitable for people over a particular age (see section 22.2 for details). The property advertisement will tell you if there is any age restriction.

23.3 Local Lettings Policies

These are policies that have been agreed with the landlord to help create sustainable communities. They are restricted to particular areas or estates and each have different criteria to meet the objectives of each scheme. The property advertisement will tell you if there is a local lettings policy in place and what the criteria are.

23.4 Sensitive Lets

There will be occasions where certain properties are advertised in Homesearch as “sensitive lets”. These will generally be properties where it has been identified that it is in the best interest of the community for them to be allocated to a particular type of household, for instance, a person of a certain age. Each landlord will have their own procedures for identifying properties that will be subject to “sensitive lets”.

23.5 Direct Lets

A direct let is where a property is let to a registered applicant without it being advertised. All members of the Homesearch partnership have the ability to undertake direct lets under certain circumstances. This may include (but is not limited to):

- Lets to homeless applicants who have not secured a property within a reasonable timescale (See section 10.14 for further information);
- Emergency re-housing when requested by the police or other statutory organisation (only by the agreement of a senior housing manager);
- In other exceptional circumstances (by agreement of a senior housing manager).
- Where a property has previously been advertised on Homesearch but there have been no suitable applicants.

Direct lets are rare and it is the intention of the Homesearch Partnership to let the vast majority of available vacancies via the property advertisements.

23.6 Hard to Let Properties

Where no bids have been placed on a property for two consecutive weeks and a direct let is not suitable, the Registered Provider will be able to advertise for a tenant by methods other than Homesearch (for example, in the local press).

24. HOW TO BID (EXPRESSING YOUR INTEREST)

- 24.1** Expressing your interest (also known as bidding) in a property lets the council know which properties you would like to be considered for. Bidding doesn't involve any money (except the cost of postage, a text message or telephone call). If you bid online it's completely free.
- 24.2** You can bid for up to **THREE** properties in each advertising cycle.
- 24.3** Bidding for a property is simple. Make a note of the **Property Reference Number** (at the top of each advert) for the properties you are interested in.

Online – Log on to the website at www.home-search.org.uk and follow the “How to Express Your Interest” instructions

By Telephone – call 0300 011 0311 (available 24 hours a day). The automated service will then ask you to key in your application number, your memorable date and the reference number of the property you want to bid for. Calls are charged at no more than the UK national rate, even if calling from a mobile phone. Free minutes as part of a calls package can also be used with this number.

By Text - You need to send your registration number, followed by your memorable date, followed by the property reference number. For example, “73513 29/04/2010 12642”. The number to text is **07537 402595**. You can save this in your phone to make it easier for you to bid in future. You must send your bid in exactly this format. If you send it differently (e. g. “I want to bid for 100 Main Street – from Joe Bloggs”) the computer system will not recognise it.

By Post – If you wish to bid by post you must write to us by 12pm on Tuesday, providing your name, your reference number and address of the property(ies) you wish to bid for.

In Person – You can also bid in person at the Gedling Customer Contact Centre at the Civic Centre.

By Proxy – You can have someone to place bids on your behalf if you wish. This could be a family member, support worker, social worker or someone else. This may be useful if you do not have a computer, or if you will struggle to use the methods above. Please let us know if you want someone to bid on your behalf.

24.4 **If you do not express your interest**

If you do not bid for suitable properties, especially if you are in Band 1 or 2, we may contact you to see if you require any help. If you are in Bands 1 or 2, and have not been bidding for suitable properties that come up, we may review your priority on the housing register (see section 18)

24.5 **Automatic Bidding**

This is where we make bids on your behalf. Automatic bids will be placed on accommodation that best suit your situation, based on available properties and the general housing circumstances of the area.

Automatic bidding may be used in circumstances such as:

- If you are accepted as homeless and have been placed in Band 1 (after a total of 6 weeks on Band 2))
- If you are not homeless but in Band 1 or Band 2 and have not placed a bid in the 12 weeks since you were awarded this band.
- If you are vulnerable and ask Homesearch to make bids on your behalf

If you think you may need extra help to use Homesearch, or if you need this information in a different format (for example, another language), please contact us.

25. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

25.1 Shortlisting

Once the advertising cycle closes, Homesearch creates a shortlist of applicants who have bid for a property. The shortlist sorts all the bids by:

- Priority band (i. e. Band 1, then Band 2, then Band 3)
- The date you were placed in the band (effective date)

25.2 The landlord will normally offer the property to the applicant from the highest band who has been registered for the longest time. If you are made an offer and refuse it, the property will then be offered to the next person on the shortlist, unless a period of 4 weeks has passed in which case the property may be re-advertised or let on a direct let.

25.3 However, there are some exceptions to this general rule, such as where local lettings policies apply, or where the landlord will not allow any under-occupation of the property, or where you have rent arrears and the landlord has decided that he does not wish to let to anyone with rent arrears. If it is because the landlord does not want under occupation, then he may offer the property to the highest-placed applicant whose household will make the most efficient use of the property within the band they are placed. For instance, this means that on a shortlist for a three bedroom house, a family with one child, or two young children, may be bypassed in favour of a lower-placed but larger family within that band that needs all three bedrooms. This is at the discretion of the landlord. Full details will be advertised with the property.

25.4 Offers

If you have been successful with your bid, the landlord that owns the property will contact you with details of the potential offer. Any offer will be followed up in writing. Each landlord may have a different process that they follow when offering a property.

25.5 All landlords participating in the Homesearch scheme reserve the right to:

- Give preference to applicants who specifically need the services or facilities that are part of the property
- Carry out checks on the information you provided as part of your application
- Withdraw an offer if you have provided inaccurate information
- Withdraw an offer if the property becomes unavailable for letting

- Carry out a property inspection (if you are a current council or RP tenant)
- Not make an offer to anyone who has rent arrears which are not being paid under an arrangement.

25.6 Viewing

Each landlord may have a different process for viewings, but you should have the opportunity to view the property before deciding whether you wish to accept an offer.

25.7 Refusing Offers

Generally, there is no obligation to accept an offer of accommodation, and refusing an offer will not affect your application. However, if you refuse or do not respond to three offers, we will review your priority and may suspend your Homesearch application pending a review.

Different rules apply to applicants who have applied as homeless to the Council and had a main duty accepted. See section 10.14 for more details.

26. GLOSSARY

Adapted properties

Property that has been adapted for an applicant with disabilities: for example a stair lift, through floor lift or level access shower.

Allocation policy

The document setting out the rules that determine how the Council and Registered Providers allocate social housing properties.

Autobid

A feature in the Homesearch system that checks for any properties an applicant is eligible to bid for and automatically places bids on them just before the letting cycle closes each week.

Bid (also known as expressing an interest).

The way to let us know you are interested in an advertised property, which can be done via the website, by telephone, text message, post or in person.

Band

The category of need an applicant will be placed on based on their current housing situation.

Category 1 Hazard

The meaning of Category 1 Hazards is set out in section 2 of the Housing Act 2004. Properties are assessed against prescribed hazards and an assessment of the level of risk associated with the hazards found is undertaken. If the risk is serious enough, this would be classed as a Category 1.

Choice Based Lettings

A way of allocating housing through an advertising scheme, rather than by direct nominations.

Direct let

When a property is offered to a household without it having been advertised.

Effective date

The date an application is placed in a priority band, used as the date when short listing.

Eligibility

The term used to describe who is able to apply for housing and what type of property they are eligible to bid for.

Expressing an interest (also known as bidding)

The way to let us know you are interested in an advertised property, which can be done via the website, by telephone, text message, post or in person.

Nomination

The term used when a local housing authority provides the name and details of an applicant from its housing register to a landlord for an offer of housing.

Qualification

We have to assess who qualifies for social housing in Gedling. If you do not qualify, your application will not be accepted.

Registered Provider of Social Housing (RP)

A housing association or other organisation registered by with the Homes and Communities Agency to provide social housing. Previously known as a Registered Social Landlord or RSL.

Retirement Housing

Retirement housing (also known as sheltered housing) is a group of flats or bungalows where all residents are older people.

ALTERNATIVE FORMAT OR LANGUAGE REQUIRED?

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format such as large print, Braille, audio tape or translated into a different language, please contact us:

Gedling Borough Council
Civic Centre
Arnot Hill Park
Arnold
Nottingham
NG5 6LU

Tel: 0115 901 3681

Email: housingneeds@gedling.gov.uk

www.home-search.org.uk

Background papers

EQUALITY IMPACT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Policy/Service/Procedure to be assessed	Social Housing Allocations Policy	
Assessment completed by:	Michael Gillie, Housing Strategy & Development Officer	
Aims/objectives of the Policy/Service/Procedure: To set out who is eligible and who qualifies for social housing in Gedling, who is to be given preference, and how properties will be allocated, as required by Part VI, Housing Act 1996, and by statutory guidance.		
Key Performance Indicator	Current Performance	Target
N/A		
Who are the customers and stakeholders of this service?		
People who want to apply for social housing Housing associations who want to let social housing properties		
Detail below what information you already have about the impact this policy/service/procedure has on the following Protected Characteristics including results from consultation, complaints, census:		
RACE (Black and minority ethnic people)	People from ethnic minorities (i.e. any group other than White British) make up 17.6% of the housing register (as at 5/12/12), compared to only 9.7% of the population of the Borough (2011 Census). People from ethnic minorities are slightly more likely than White British people to engage with the Choice Based Lettings system by bidding than White British people, but slightly less likely to have secured housing as a result. This is largely because more White British applicants are in the higher priority bands, which is where most of the lettings are made.	
SEX AND GENDER REASSIGNMENT (Men/women and trans)	One applicant on the housing register is transgender. They have never placed a bid. No people who have been housed through Homesearch are transgender.	
DISABILITY (Disabled people)	Almost exactly a third of applicants on the current housing register have some type of disability, which is far above the prevalence rate in the general population. This reflects the fact that disabled people may be in more need of assistance to meet their housing needs. Currently active disabled applicants are slightly less likely than the average to have placed bids, particularly those with physical disabilities, visual and hearing impairments. However conversely, disabled people have had slightly more positive outcomes, with a greater proportion of	

	people housed having a disability than the proportion of the current housing register.	
SEXUAL ORIENTATION (Gay/Lesbian/bisexual People)	2.7% of currently active applicants describe themselves as gay men, gay women or bisexual, but only 1.6% of lettings through the scheme have gone to these groups. This is not a major concern, as the numbers are small and there is no reason the profile of one set of applicants (those already housed) should match the profile of a different set of applicants (those still active). The rates of engagement with the system are notably low for gay women and high for gay men but, again, actual numbers involved are small.	
RELIGION OR BELIEF (People from different faiths)	No significant differences in either use of the system or outcomes (being housed) have been identified for different religious groups. Of the current housing register, most applicants are either Christian (42.5%) or have no religion (38.6%). The largest representation of another religion is the 25 Muslim applicants that make up 1.0% of the register. All other religions comprise less than 1% of the register each. Engagement rates for using the system are not significantly different from one group to another, and people from different religions have been housed roughly in proportion to their presence on the housing register.	
AGE (People of different ages)	People from different age groups are housed through Homesearch roughly in proportion to their presence on the active housing register. However, younger people are considerably more likely to place bids and use the system than older people. A clear gradient runs across the ages, from 64.9% of active applicants aged 16 – 24 having placed bids, compared to only 36% of over 75s.	
How will this policy/service/procedure impact on the following Protected Characteristics?		
	Positive impact	Negative impact
RACE (Different racial groups)	Choice Based Lettings is an improvement on nomination system, as applicants can decide for themselves which property they want to live in, taking into account places of worship, cultural facilities, social networks etc.	
SEX (Men/women)		Proposed that homeless applicants (who are more likely to be women) will be directly allocated a property 6 weeks after being accepted, so they will effectively lose choice after this time. However, they will still be allocated suitable accommodation.
DISABILITY (Disabled people)	Adapted and ground-floor properties will be effectively matched to applicants who need them.	

SEXUAL ORIENTATION (Gay/Lesbian/bi-sexual people)	No impact on this protected characteristic has been identified.	
RELIGION OR BELIEF (People from different faiths)	Choice Based Lettings is an improvement on the nomination system, as applicants can decide for themselves which property they want to live in, taking into account places of worship, cultural facilities, social networks etc.	
GENDER REASSIGNMENT (Trans people)	No impact on this protected characteristic has been identified.	
PREGNANCY AND MATERNITY	Applicants who are pregnant are treated as family applicants, allowing them to bid for family-sized properties before the baby is born. This avoids overcrowding when the baby is born.	
MARRIAGE AND CIVIL PARTNERSHIP	No impact on this protected characteristic has been identified.	
AGE (People of different ages)		<p>Some properties are only available to people over a certain age (generally 55 or 40). This is justified as the properties have been designed with the physical and social needs of older people in mind, and letting them to younger people would undermine their purpose. Some younger people who are disabled can still apply.</p> <p>People over 50 who have no identified housing need still qualify for housing, whereas younger people do not. This is justified by the much greater supply and lower demand for older people's accommodation.</p>

What changes could be made to the policy/service/procedure to address any negative impacts?

None identified as necessary. Negative impacts on some people with protected characteristics (principally age) is justified given the great imbalance between supply and demand for social housing, and the need to make best use of both available properties and staff resources.

What monitoring will be carried out to ensure this policy/service/procedure meets diverse needs?

Review:

- a) housing applicants who qualify for housing;
 - b) qualifying applicants who actively bid for housing;
 - c) applicants who bid successfully and gain social housing;
- against the overall population of Gedling in terms of the protected characteristics.

This analysis to be carried out every year.

What actions will be included in your service plan arising from this assessment?

Action	Outcome	Date?	Who?
Review housing allocations and engagement with Choice Based Lettings against protected characteristics			

Are you satisfied that all aspects of this policy/service/procedure have been thoroughly assessed for all the strands of diversity and that no further investigation is required? **Y**

If no then a fuller impact assessment is required.

Signed..... (manager)

Signed..... (Corporate Equality Representative)