

Reading Borough Council Allocations Scheme 2021

Contents

PART 1 – Overview of Reading Borough Councils Allocation's Scheme

1. Introduction
2. Scheme Aims
3. Management of Information and Decision Making
4. Statement of Fair Processing
5. Statement of the Scope of Applicants' Choice
6. Staff Applying for Social Housing
7. Elected Members Involvement
8. Legislation
9. Fraud
10. Equality and Diversity
11. Property Types
 - 11.1 Tenancy Types
 - 11.2 Family Intervention Tenancy (FIT)

PART 2 – Allocations Scheme in Detail

12. Registers
 - 12.1 Housing Register
 - 12.2 Adapted Register
13. Adapted Register
14. Application Process
15. Annual Re-Registration
16. Change of Circumstance
17. Eligibility Assessment
 - 17.1. EEA Nationals
 - 17.2. Restricted People
18. Qualifying and Non-Qualifying Criteria
 - 18.1 Qualifying
 - 18.2. Non-Qualifying
19. Household Members
 - 19.1. Joint Tenancies
20. Size of Property Required
 - 20.1. Smaller Accommodation than Needed
21. Priority Criteria
 - 21.1. Reasonable Preference
 - 21.2. Additional Preference
 - 21.2.1. Exceptional Strategic Lettings
22. Effective Date
23. No Priority for Housing
24. Management Transfers
25. Medical and Welfare Assessments
26. Vulnerable Customer and Specifically Identified Groups
 - 26.1. Quota Queues
 - 26.1.1. Social Care Group Quota Queues
 - 26.1.2. Right to Move Quota Queue
 - 26.1.3. Key Worker Quota Queue

- 26.1.4. Refugee Quota Queue
- 26.1.5. Housing First Quota Queue
- 26.2 Vulnerable Groups
 - 26.2.1. Travelling Families
 - 26.2.2. Fostering, Adoption and Special Guardianship Orders

PART 3 – Choice Based Lettings – Homechoice at Reading

- 27. Adverts
- 28. Bidding
 - 28.1 Bids Overlooked
- 29. Shortlisting
- 30. Viewings
- 31. Offers
- 32. Homelessness
- 33. Direct Offer Policy
- 34. Right to Request a Review
 - 34.1. Suitability of Accommodation
- 35. Refusals and Sanctions
 - 35.1. Procedure for Refusal
 - 35.2. Sanctions

PART 4 – Our Communities

- 36. Estate Management
- 37. Pre-Tenancy Training
- 38. Local Lettings Policies
- 39. Allocations Plan
- 40. Decants and Regeneration Scheme

PART 5 – Alternative and Out of Area Housing Options

- 41. Reciprocal Arrangements
- 42. Rent Guarantee Scheme
- 43. Mutual Exchanges
- 44. Assisted Purchase of Properties
- 45. Applications to move out of Reading
- 46. Homefinder UK

Appendix 1 – Key Worker Definition

PART 1 – Overview of Reading Borough Councils Allocations Scheme

1. Introduction

The purpose of this scheme is to issue guidance relating to the allocation of social housing within the Borough of Reading. Section 166A of the Housing Act 1996 places a duty on every local housing authority to prepare and maintain a set of rules which it has adopted, determining the authority's priorities and procedure to be followed in allocating housing accommodation.

Reading Borough Council owns homes across Reading and has nomination rights to Registered Providers' (Housing Association) homes. In acting as a good landlord and as an enabling Local Authority, the Council is committed to managing and letting social housing in a fair and transparent way to assist households with a need for accommodation. Allocations of vacant social housing within Reading are allocated through our Choice Based Lettings process, known as Homechoice at Reading.

This scheme has been developed in partnership with Registered Providers (RPs) and other stakeholders.

The scheme sets out those applicants who Reading Borough Council has decided are a qualifying class of person who can join the Housing Register and those applicants who are considered a non-qualifying class of person who will not be able to access the Housing Register.

The scheme also sets out the criteria against which qualifying applicants are considered in relation to reasonable preference and additional preference categories. It also identifies reasons when individual applicants, who may have a reasonable or additional preference, could be considered to have No Priority for Housing depending on their circumstances.

The full scheme will be made available to inspect at the Civic Offices or on the Council website at [Register for housing - Reading Borough Council](#). A summary of the scheme can also be provided on request.

Consultation will be carried out when any major changes to the content of the scheme are proposed, to ensure that those affected have input. This will include consultation with Registered Providers.

2. Scheme Aims

The main aims of Reading Borough Council's Allocations Scheme are:

- To let social housing to households with the greatest need for accommodation, while:
 - letting homes in a transparent, applicant-friendly and fair way, ensuring that existing and new applicants are treated equally.
 - ensuring that the housing needs of vulnerable applicants and those in priority need are given reasonable preference.
 - promoting opportunities for those with a disability to access suitable accommodation
 - promoting mobility for Reading Borough Council tenants
 - attracting key workers and supporting the recruitment of staff to essential services
- To produce a scheme that:
 - meets the statutory and legal requirements for allocating social housing

- is easy to understand, applicant focussed and is part of the delivery of an excellent Housing service.
- maximises the use of all social housing provided locally.
- minimises the void turnaround time of void properties.
- encourages partnership working with other housing providers.
- To promote, create and establish balanced and sustainable communities, while
 - making sure that the use of Choice Based Lettings (CBL) allows applicants to exercise greater control over their choice of housing, increasing the likelihood that tenancies will be sustained.
 - protecting our communities and our property from wilful damage and activity.

In order to help achieve these aims the Council will maintain a Housing Register. This is a list of people registered for housing who are prioritised according to their level of housing need and the local priorities.

3. Management of Information and Decision Making

Information provided by an applicant will be processed in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulations (UK GDPR) previously known as The Data Protection Act 2018.

The information will be used to assess entitlement in an application for housing, develop our business and provide statistical information.

Information held may also be shared with other housing and/or care providers or agencies to enable the assessment of entitlement to housing.

An applicant can request a copy of personal information held by The Council, by submitting a Subject Access Request (SAR). (See RBC Privacy Notice link below).

The Assistant Director of Neighbourhoods and Communities is the lead officer with delegated authority to allocate housing accommodation under Part VI of the Housing Act 1996.

When considering exceptional circumstances, decisions will be made by the Housing Needs Manager. following a request from either an applicant or a member of staff. These decisions will be recorded, and reasons provided as to why the decisions have been reached.

4. Statement of Fair Processing

In line with the Data Protection Act 2018, we will process applicants' information for the purpose of assessing housing need, collecting statistical information and to improve our business. We may also use this information to detect and prevent fraud. Personal information will be stored electronically, and this will comply with our Data Protection policies.

Full details of our Fair Processing Notice can be found on the Council website at

www.reading.gov.uk/council/data-protection/housing-needs-data-privacy-notice/

5. Statement of the Scope of Applicants' Choice

In Reading, the demand for Council and Registered Provider accommodation outstrips the level of supply. This means that the Council is not in a position to offer such accommodation to everyone on the Housing Register who expresses an interest and so, broadly speaking, offers of accommodation will be made to those applicants who have the highest priority for housing under the Allocations

Scheme. Whilst one of the primary aims of the Scheme is to house those with the greatest housing need, Reading Borough Council's Allocations Scheme promotes choice by allowing an applicant to express their interest in properties that are advertised.

6. Staff Applying for Social Housing

Reading Borough Council staff applying for housing, particularly those working in the Housing Service, will need to make it known to a senior member of staff that they intend to apply for social housing and must complete the Declaration of Interest part of the form. This will ensure that the application process is transparent and confidential.

7. Elected Members' Involvement

Allocation of Housing (Procedure) Regulations 1997 (SI 1997/483) prevent an elected member from being part of a decision-making body at the time an allocation decision is made, when either:

- The accommodation concerned is situated in their division or electoral ward, or
- The person subject to the decision has their sole or main residence there.

This does not prevent an elected member from representing their constituents in front of the decision-making body or from participating in the decision-making body's deliberations prior to its decision. The regulations also do not prevent elected members' involvement in policy decisions that affect the generality of housing accommodation in their division or electoral ward rather than individual allocations; for example, a decision that certain types of properties should be prioritised for older people.

8. Legislation

Reading Borough Council's Allocations Scheme sets out how social rented housing is allocated to those registered on the Housing Register. Section 159 of the Housing Act 1996 (Part VI) defines an allocation of social housing as:

- Selecting a person to be a secure or introductory tenant of housing accommodation held by this authority;
- Nominating a person to be a secure or introductory tenant of housing accommodation held by another person; or
- Nominating a person to be an assured tenant of housing accommodation held by a Private Registered Provider of social housing or a Registered Social Landlord.

The following are not allocations:

- Transfers of accommodation, unless made at the tenant's own request
- Family Intervention Tenancies as defined in section 297 of the Housing & Regeneration Act 2008
- Temporary Accommodation offers
- Successions
- Assignments
- Property Adjustment Orders
- Allocation to supported accommodation, including extra care housing

Any change to an existing tenancy, such as changes to those named on a tenancy agreement, will involve Reading Borough Council offering a new allocation and tenancy agreement, as per the Name

Change Policy. This will be carried out outside of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme however the Qualification Criteria will be applied to any new named tenant. Any changes to a current tenancy agreement must be agreed by Reading Borough Council.

This document makes reference to the legal requirements and policies that must be adhered to. We have had regard to legislation including (but not limited to) the following:

- Housing Act 1996, Part VI and VII as amended
- Localism Act 2011
- Homelessness Act 2002
- Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Children Act 1989
- Children Act 2004
- Equalities Act 2010
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act 2013

The scheme has regard to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) guidance and regulations, and other related guidance the most recent and relevant being:

- Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England (June 2012), as amended
- Providing social housing for local people Code of Guidance (December 2013)
- Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Right to Move) (England) Regulations 2015 (SI2015/967)
- The Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012 (SI 2012/1869)
- The Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility)(England) Regulations 2006
- Homelessness Codes of Guidance for Local Authorities 2018 as amended
- Technical housing standards – nationally described space standard – March 2015

The scheme has been developed with regard to Reading Borough Council's own Strategy and Policy, including, but not limited to:

- Homelessness Strategy
- Tenancy Strategy
- Tenancy Policy
- Housing Strategy
- Housing Adaptations Policy

The above are subject to periodic reviews.

9. Fraud

S.171 of the Housing Act 1996 makes it an offence for anyone, in connection with the exercise by a housing authority of its functions under Part VI:

- To knowingly or recklessly give false information

- To knowingly or recklessly withhold relevant information which the housing authority has reasonably required the applicant to give in connection with the exercise of those functions.

The circumstances in which an offence is committed could include providing false information:

- On an application form for social housing
- In response to a request for further information in support of the application
- During a review proceeding, see section 34

This may include any applicant who fails to notify the Council of any relevant change in their circumstances which may affect their application.

Any applicant found guilty of such an offence will be liable to a fine, which could currently be as much as, up to or exceeding, £5000 (level 5 on the standard scale).

Ground 5 in Schedule 2 of the Housing Act 1985 (as amended by s.146 of the 1996 Act) enables the council to take possession proceedings against the tenant to recover possession of the property if the local authority were induced to grant the tenancy by a false statement made knowingly or recklessly by the tenant or someone acting on their instigation.

The Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act 2013 identifies tenant fraud as a criminal matter and local authorities have the power to prosecute those who unlawfully sublet their social housing.

All applications received will be assessed by our internal Corporate Investigations Team prior to being added to the Housing Register to determine if there are any fraudulent activity concerns.

10. Equality and Diversity

Reading Borough Council promotes equal opportunities and, in doing so, has developed an equalities plan to underpin equality and diversity in all services that we provide. In line with the provisions of the Equality Act 2010, Reading Borough Council will:

- Have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between people of different groups.
- Promote equality between different groups and have due regard to the needs of these groups.

Our aim is to continue to maintain equality and ensure that we let our homes in a non-discriminatory way based on meeting housing need. We also anticipate that the transparency of this scheme will ensure that customers are not treated less favourably on the grounds of gender, marital status, pregnancy and maternity, race, disability, sexual orientation, age, faith or gender reassignment.

11. Property Types

Reading Borough Council has its own stock of accommodation along with nomination rights to accommodation owned and managed in the borough by Registered Providers. Some of Reading Borough Council's properties in the Whitley area are managed by Affinity Housing through a Private Finance Initiative Agreement. Affinity Housing have the responsibility to carry out the day to day management of these properties.

There are a number of different property types that will be allocated to via the scheme. These are:

General needs accommodation – accommodation let through the main Housing Register for either Waiting List Applicants or Transfer Applicants, this includes adapted homes that are let through the Adapted Register.

Sheltered accommodation – sites predominately consisting of 1-bedroom properties with access to communal facilities. This accommodation has a provision of low-level support and is available to applicants 55 years of age and over. Some sites may be subject to an independent Local Lettings Policy, see section 38. Assessments will be carried out prior to any move into this accommodation to ascertain individual needs and to consider the application against the Local Lettings criteria if applicable.

Key worker accommodation – Key worker housing is affordable housing; a proportion of this accommodation will be exclusively advertised for Key Workers. This accommodation may be let on a fixed term basis depending on the individual scheme and landlord.

11.1 Tenancy Type

For the purposes of this section a “secure tenant” includes a person with a flexible tenancy granted under s.107A of the Housing Act 1985 (inserted by s.154 of the Localism Act 2011). The term “assured tenant” includes a person with an assured short-hold tenancy, including an Affordable Rent Property (Affordable Rent, which is assessed at no more than 80% of the local market rent, is not subject to the national rent regime but is subject to other rent controls, including service charges).

When allocating accommodation to applicants from the Housing Register, Reading Borough Council will always offer an introductory tenancy (a minimum of 12 months) to those who have not previously been a permanent Reading Borough Council tenant, or a secure tenancy to those who are transferring within our stock.

After the introduction of the Localism Act 2011, many Registered Providers introduced fixed term/flexible tenancies which are for a certain period of time, normally between 2 – 7 years. These tenancies are also allocated via the Housing Register and, as above, are subject to an introductory period.

Social housing providers are able to offer properties at a different rent level, known as Affordable Rent. This will typically be 80% of market rent. Applicants need to consider when they are bidding for accommodation, if this will be affordable for them.

More detail on Reading Borough Council’s expectations on how Registered Providers manage flexible tenancies and Affordable Rent is available in Reading Borough Council’s Tenancy Strategy at

[Strategies, plans and policies - Reading Borough Council](#)

For applicants currently in a secure or assured tenancy who are considering bidding for accommodation with an Affordable Rent or flexible tenancy, it is important to understand the implications on any future tenancy. Please see the following guide:

Current Tenancy Type	The Current Tenancy Start Date	Rent on New Property	Tenancy Entitled to
Secure/Assured	Before 1/4/ 2012	Social Rent	Secure/Assured

Secure/Assured	Before 1/4/2012	Affordable Rent	Assured/Secure or Fixed Term (if this is what is being offered)
Secure/Assured	After 1/4/2012	Social Rent	Assured/Secure or Fixed Term (if this is what is being offered)
Secure/Assured	After 1/4/2012	Affordable Rent	Assured/Secure or Fixed Term (if this is what is being offered)

11.2. Family Intervention Tenancy (FIT)

This is a non-secure tenancy within Reading Borough Council or Registered Provider accommodation which may be offered to those with complex needs. Those families considered for a FIT will be assessed and agreed in partnership with Social Care and other appropriate agencies. The FIT will generally be for a fixed period of time with conditions attached, such as, engagement with relevant agencies and support. They have limited security of tenure, and as such they will be terminable on notice with no need to prove any ground for termination or possession. The aim is to allow households to be supported in order to achieve independence. On the successful completion of a FIT a direct offer may be made to the property being occupied, see section 32.

PART 2 - Allocations Scheme in Detail

Reading Borough Council has 2 registers, the Housing Register and the Adapted Register. This section sets out how to make an application and details the assessments that the application will be subject to in order to determine access to the appropriate register and the correct priority.

All accommodation allocated through the Allocations Scheme is considered to be general needs accommodation. Any applicant offered accommodation ought to be able to live independently and have the ability to understand and adhere to a tenancy agreement. Consideration will be given to support that can be put in place to help an applicant manage a tenancy agreement, however the principle remains that the applicant themselves ought to be able to understand their obligations under the tenancy agreement.

12. Registers

12.1. Housing Register

There are 2 main groups of applicants on the Housing Register.

Transfer Applicants

Transfer applicants comprise of Reading Borough Council and Registered Provider tenants who register with the Council for alternative social housing.

Waiting List Applicants

Waiting list applicants comprise of first-time applicants, homeless applicants owed duties in accordance with the Housing Act 1996 (Part VII) as amended, or those who are not existing Council or Registered Provider tenants. This group could include people living in the private rented sector or with friends and/or family.

Reading Borough Council may decide to only make properties available for particular groups for the purpose of meeting its statutory obligations, or local priorities.

12.2. Adapted Register

The Adapted Register is for those who require major adaptations in their homes to manage a long-term disability. Properties that are adapted or can be adapted will be available for this group.

13. Adapted Register

Applicants requiring adaptations, outside of, what is considered to be, minor work, will be held on a separate register known as the Adapted Register. Properties that are adapted or lend themselves to adaptations will be available for this group only. This register is required in order to make the process of finding suitable accommodation easier and more transparent for those who require adapted homes.

Certain Reading Borough Council and Registered Provider properties have been specially designed or adapted for use by applicants with a disability. Likewise, certain properties lend themselves to adaptations whereas others do not.

Reading Borough Council will hold a separate register for those who require an adapted home. The assessment carried out to determine if an applicant should be included on the Adapted Register will include information and advice from our Senior Specialist Housing Occupational Therapist (OT) and OT's employed within Adult Social Care and Brighter Futures for Children.

Any property made available to applicants on the Adapted Register will be suitable for those applicants on a long-term basis. Adaptations that will be considered for the Adapted Register applicants include the following (this is not an exhaustive list):

- Ground floor wet rooms and bedrooms
- Adapted kitchens
- Through floor lifts
- Ceiling track hoisting
- Widened doors
- Turning Circles
- External ramps
- Any adaptation to the main fabric of the building

Applicants who have been identified as requiring any major adaptation will be included on the Adapted Register.

The needs of this group will be reviewed on a regular basis by the Senior Specialist Housing OT and other services involved to determine which properties within our existing stock, or any future developments could accommodate their requirements. Assessments of vacant properties will be made to ascertain if they could be adapted to meet the needs of this group, in conjunction with any available Disabled Facilities Grant. If adaptations can be carried out within a reasonable timescale (which will be determined on the need and the length of potential wait for grants to be available), these properties will also be advertised for the adapted list applicants.

Priority awarded to this group will be in line with the Banding Scheme, see section 21.

Reading Borough Council Housing will remain the decision makers in terms of what is considered suitable on a long-term basis for applicants, and if immediate solutions are required within the current home this will be assessed and arranged by the relevant OT Teams.

14. Application Process

Applications are assessed based on the information provided by applicants about their current housing situation. Therefore, it is important to note that should an applicant move during the process, any priority awarded will need to be reassessed as it will no longer apply. This includes any of the priority set out in section 21, 24 and 25.

An application to join a Housing Register can be made by:

- Submitting a completed and signed Housing Registration Form and
- Providing photo identification or a passport photograph for the applicant and their partner, if applicable, and
- Providing a copy of the rent account if the applicant is a tenant of a Registered Provider and
- Providing equity information for any previously owned home

Once the Homechoice Registration Form has been processed the application is assessed against the qualification and eligibility criteria to ensure that the applicant is eligible and qualifies to register for social housing, see sections 17 and 18.

Once eligibility and qualification criteria are satisfied, Reading Borough Council will assess the application for priority based on housing need, see section 21.

The applicant will receive an acknowledgement letter providing the following information:

- Confirmation of whether qualifying criteria have been satisfied
- Personal Identification number (PIN) – a unique reference number
- Details of the initial band in which their registration has been placed
- Confirmation of the date of application
- Details of the size of property for which the applicant has been registered
- Details of how to obtain further information about the Allocations Scheme
- A Homechoice at Reading user guide

Assessments of applications to the Housing Register will be subject to a thorough investigation of all the circumstances. As part of the investigation Reading Borough Council may carry out home visits, contact third party agencies (including voluntary sector partners) and will collect evidence where appropriate.

Any decision not to place someone on to the Housing Register (due to ineligibility or non-qualification), to amend an application on the register, or to remove someone from the register, will be notified to the applicant in writing. Reasons for the decision will be provided and the applicant will be informed of their right to request a review of the decision made within 21 days, see section 34.

15. Annual Re-registration

All housing register applications will be required to re-register annually, to ensure that the information held is up to date and that the priority awarded to an application remains correct. All applicants will be contacted annually and will be asked to confirm the information held is still relevant. Failure to respond to the request to re-register within 28 days of the request may result in the application being

removed from the register. A request for a review of the decision to remove an application can be made, see section 34.

16. Change of Circumstances

All applicants are required to notify the Voids and Lettings Team immediately of any change to their circumstances which may affect their priority for re-housing, for example a change of address, someone joining or leaving their household, the acquisition of property, etc. This may also affect their eligibility or qualification to join the Housing Register.

When an applicant's change of circumstances has been assessed, this may result in a change in the applicant's priority. The applicant will be notified in writing of any change in their priority for re-housing. The applicant's new level of priority will run from the date upon which they informed the Voids and Lettings Team of the change of circumstances, and not from the date of the original application. See Effective Date information in section 22.

A change of circumstance may be considered at any stage of the application process, from initial application to receiving a formal offer and may be identified by an officer, for example at a home visit or as late as at a viewing.

Where the Council has been made aware of a change of circumstances but has not received updated information regarding the change, such as a completed Homechoice Registration Form, the applicant's band will be reduced until such time as the Homechoice Registration Form has been received and processed, see section 23. This may lead to any successful bid being disregarded, and potentially the removal of any formal offer of accommodation.

17. Eligibility Assessment

Reading Borough Council's Allocation Scheme is framed according to relevant legislation and good practice.

All applicants are eligible to apply for housing, except;

- people from abroad who are subject to immigration control within the meaning of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 unless prescribed as eligible by regulations of the Secretary of State, and
- people from abroad who are not subject to immigration control within the meaning of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 if prescribed as ineligible by regulations of the Secretary of State (Housing Act 1996 as amended).

Further provisions concerning eligibility are set out with regard to allocations in s.160ZA of the Act.

17.1. EEA Nationals

The following EEA Nationals and their families are not considered to be subject to immigration control:

- Those who have acquired leave equivalent to limited leave to enter and remain in the UK (known as pre-settled status) if they are exercising a right to reside that makes them eligible under the EU rules;
- Those that were frontier working in the UK prior to 31 December 2020 and continuously to date; or
- Those and their family members who applied to the EU settlement scheme before 30 June 2021 but have not yet obtained settled or pre-settled status (known as temporary protection)

and were exercising an EU right to reside immediately before 31 December 2020 and have a right to reside under retained EU law

Eligibility can change with a change of immigration status; therefore, eligibility for an allocation of housing will be kept under review. However, the applicant is responsible for informing the Council of any change in immigration status.

Decisions on eligibility based on an applicant's immigration status will be made by a Voids and Lettings Officers, who will take into account information from the Home Office or Border Agency, (or other appropriate government department), and apply relevant Legislation and statutory instruments.

The registration of applicants on the Housing Register is not an acceptance by the Council that they are considered eligible for an allocation of accommodation.

The Homechoice Registration Form includes an eligibility declaration confirming that applicants agree that Reading Borough Council neither agrees nor disagrees that they are eligible for assistance at the point of application. The Council may make a decision on eligibility at the stage of application or when verifying an application once a successful bid has been made. If the applicant is not accepted on to the Housing Register, they will be advised of this in writing and given information on how to request a review of this decision, see section 34.

Applicants will be asked to provide documentary evidence to prove eligibility for themselves and for all members of their household, at the point that they make a successful bid for accommodation.

If an applicant makes a successful bid for accommodation and is unable to provide documentation to prove eligibility for themselves and their household, s/he will not be allocated the accommodation and will be removed from the Housing Register.

If the proof of eligibility document shows that their eligibility for services was granted after their application date, then their application date will be amended to the date that they became eligible which may result in an allocation not being made on that occasion.

Eligibility for an allocation of accommodation will only be confirmed at the point that Reading Borough Council has checked all relevant documentation, if required, and is satisfied as to the applicant and their household's eligibility.

Each case will be considered individually, taking account of all relevant circumstances. Applicants who successfully bid for accommodation but are deemed ineligible for an allocation of accommodation will be notified in writing of this decision. Applicants will have the right to request a review of this decision within 21 days of the decision date, see section 34.

17.2. Restricted People and Section 193 Housing Act 1996 (As Amended)

A Restricted Case is a case where the local authority would not be satisfied that the applicant has a priority need for accommodation without having had regard to a Restricted Person.

A Restricted Person means a person who is not eligible for assistance under Part VII Housing Act 1996 (as amended) and is subject to immigration control and either:

- (i) does not have Leave to Enter or Remain in the UK or
- (ii) does have Leave but is subject to a condition of No Recourse to Public Funds.

In a Restricted Case the local authority should, so far as reasonably practical, bring the Section 193(2) duty owed to an applicant to an end by arranging for an offer of an assured short-hold tenancy to be made to the applicant by a private landlord (a private accommodation offer).

The acceptance of the main Homeless duty will not convey Reasonable Preference for an allocation of social housing in such a case and the restricted person(s) will not form part of the applicant's household for the purpose of an allocation.

18. Qualifying and Non-Qualifying Criteria

18.1. Qualifying

The Localism Act 2011 introduced powers for Local Authorities to determine who will be allowed to register for accommodation locally. Applicants that satisfy any qualification criteria are known as Qualifying Persons. The following qualifying criteria apply.

- *Those who have been resident in the borough for 3 consecutive years or more at the date of their application and are still resident in the Reading borough area at the point a successful bid is made are considered to be Qualifying Persons on Reading Borough Council's Housing Register.*

Applicants who have not been resident in the borough for 3 consecutive years or more may also be considered as Qualifying Persons provided they satisfy one or more of the following criteria:

Applicants who have:

- Worked in the borough for 3 consecutive years in permanent employment, at the date of their application and are still in permanent employment in the borough at the point a successful bid is made, regardless of number of hours per week. Location of work is determined by an applicant's 'main place of work'. If work placement is split across boroughs, the main place of work must be in the Reading borough area. If an employer's head office is in the Reading borough area, but the location of work is outside the Reading borough area, the actual location where the work is carried out will be considered as the main place of work.
- Immediate family members who have lived in the borough for 3 years continuously at the date of their application and are still residing in the borough - immediate relatives, being mother, father, sister, brother, children over 18. Other special relations, such as relatives who have acted as guardians, may also be considered.
- Carers' responsibilities for a resident in the Reading borough area - when there is an identified need for formal care for a person residing in the borough. The person receiving the care would normally be eligible for a care package from Reading Borough Council and this arrangement must be accepted by the relevant Social Care authority.
- Defined as a key worker and have permanent employment within the borough see Appendix 1.
- Fled a violent relationship and are in a refuge or other Safe Accommodation in Reading.
- Fled a violent relationship from outside of Reading and were previously a social housing tenant.
- Served in the Armed Forces, are in housing need, as defined by Reasonable Preference, see section 21, and meet one of the following criteria:
 - former members of the Armed Forces within 5 years of discharge
 - serving members of the 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
- serving or former members of the Reserve Forces who need to move because of serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service
- Been accepted as Homeless under Part VII of the 1996 Housing Act, as amended by Homelessness Act 2002 by Reading Borough Council, and the duty still exists. Reading Borough Council will automatically include any person who is owed a duty by the Council under section 193 of Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 on the Housing Register
- Been placed outside of the borough by any department of Reading Borough Council in situations such as Child in Need, homelessness or residential care where the statutory duty still applies. Applicants will be considered as resident in the borough during the time of placement.
- Social Housing tenants who have mutually exchanged to a Reading Borough Council or RP home within the borough and who had previously lived outside of the borough.
- Social Housing tenants seeking to transfer from another local authority district in England in order to be closer to work in the Reading borough area, or to take up the offer of work in the Reading borough area and not doing so would result in hardship. Reading Borough Council must be satisfied that there is a need to move rather than a wish and in making this assessment the Council will consider the personal circumstances of each applicant on their own merit.
 - This work or offer of work must be:
 - Regular work for a minimum of 16 hours per week, this includes apprenticeships but does not include voluntary work;
 - A minimum of a 12-month contract at the point of application
 - Where the main place of work is in the Reading borough area
 - Unreasonable to access by transport taking into account, the nature of the transport, distance, time and affordability.
- Any other exceptional circumstances, for example (but not limited to), intimidated witnesses including Protected Persons as specified in Section 82 and schedule 5 of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005.

18.2. Non-Qualifying

The following classes of people are considered to be Non-Qualifying Persons and therefore will not be included on the Housing Register:

- Those applicants who are under 16 years of age.
- Those who do not meet the residence criteria as set out in the section above.
- Those who have been evicted from a social rented tenancy, or a private rented tenancy following service of Section 8 notice (Housing Act 1988), for rent arrears. Any such applicants cannot apply for a period of 3 years from the date of their eviction.
- People who have been evicted from a social rented tenancy, or a private rented tenancy following the service of a Section 8 notice, for serious, threatening or violent behaviours which have not been addressed to the council's satisfaction. Any such applicant cannot apply for a minimum period of 5 years; however, the council reserve the right to increase this to up to 10 years from the date of their eviction to the Council's reasonable satisfaction. Each application will be considered reasonably on consideration of all the relevant facts and if it is decided to extend this period for any length then the Council will notify the applicant explaining the reasons.

- People whose unacceptable behaviour would make them unsuitable to be a tenant at the time their application is considered, and that a Possession Order for their property would likely be granted by the courts for such behaviour. This will also include the behaviour of other members of the household. Any such applicant will be excluded while their behaviour continues to make them unsuitable to be a tenant. They are able to submit a new application after 1 year, but the Council reserves the right to continue to treat them as a non-qualifying person.
- Applicants who have refused 3 suitable properties within a 6-month period. Any such applicant cannot apply for a period of 1 year from the date of the last refusal, see section 35.
- Introductory tenants requesting a transfer whilst they have an introductory tenancy. If there is an urgent need to move, then the Council may in some circumstances agree to the transfer. In these circumstances a further introductory tenancy will be offered for the remaining tenancy period.
- Owner-occupiers, whether the property that they own is in the UK or abroad, unless one of the following apply:
 - The applicant, or a member of their household, requires major adaptations that are not possible in their owned accommodation; or
 - The applicant and partner are over the age of 55 and there is a need for Sheltered accommodation that they are unable to secure by purchasing a property of this type; or
 - The property owned by the applicant is in negative equity and their property is unaffordable for them.

Each case will be considered individually. The personal circumstances of each application will be taken into consideration and an assessment will be made regarding their financial ability to secure their own accommodation, including private rented accommodation. If accommodation is awarded to the applicant via Homechoice, Reading Borough Council will expect their owned property to be sold within 1 year of the allocation and evidence of this will be required.
- Applicants who have received a formal offer of a Part VI Allocation.

In exceptional circumstances, the Council may choose not to apply the above criteria when considering an individual application.

An applicant will need to reapply at the end of the period in which they are considered to be a non-qualifying person, or if their situation changes. Once an application is received the council will assess if any non-qualifying period should continue.

An applicant can request a review of any qualification decision, see section 34.

19. Household Members

It is for the Council to decide who can be considered as part of the household, this will be done by considering whether a person is normally resident as a member of the family. When the Council considers requests for housing, it is likely that the following circumstances will be considered:

- Partners who are living in a permanent relationship.
- Dependent children, including children coming out of Social Services care or children who have been adopted/fostered. When an application includes children where there is shared parental responsibility, they will be considered as part of the household if the applicant has

the main parental responsibility of the child/children and their address is considered the child's or children's main and principal home. This may be demonstrated and will be assessed on factors such as, receipt of benefit, address used to register for doctors, schools, etc. and frequency of residence.

- Where a person moved in with the applicant at the start of their current tenancy and continues to reside with the applicant, it will be reasonable to expect that they should reside with the applicant.

Anyone who does not meet the above criteria will not normally be taken into account when considering the accommodation to be offered, with the exception of the following:

- Dependent relatives - where a relative of a tenant has had to join the tenant to receive care and there are no other housing options for the family (examples of housing options in these circumstances include where the relative owns their own property or occupies a property large enough to accommodate the family). Here, a relative means partners, parents, grandparents, children, grandchildren, siblings, uncles, aunts, nephews and nieces including step relations and half relations. A need for the care that is provided will need to be demonstrated to the council's satisfaction.
- Carers – in certain circumstances applicants requiring a carer will be registered for an additional bedroom. This could be where the applicant requires personal care both during the day and at night which could only be provided by a live-in carer, which does not include waking night care. It would normally be expected that the person requiring the care be in receipt of Carer's Allowance and Disability Allowance/Personal Independent Payment (PIP) with the highest care component. The carer must be recognised or employed by or working on behalf of Adult Social Care. It would normally be expected that the carer be a named individual unless care is provided on a rota arrangement made by Adult Social Care or agents on their behalf.
- When a member of an applicant's household is in prison, this person may be included in the household 24 weeks before their confirmed release date from prison as long as they were resident in the household prior to their imprisonment.
- Children who are living with their parents and are studying at university during term times or serving in the armed forces. In these circumstances their parental home will be considered as their principal home.

Where an eligible applicant has members of their household who are subject to immigration control or where their terms of entry into the UK prohibit them from a reliance on public funds then they will not be considered to be part of the applicant's household for the purposes of the Allocations Scheme. However, they will be recognised as living with the applicant as part of their household and their needs will be considered.

19.1. Joint Tenancies

Joint tenancies will be created in the following circumstances:

- Where household members have long term commitments to the home, for example, when adults share accommodation as partners, a joint tenancy should be granted. Applicants will be made aware of this option and will also be made aware of the legal and financial implications and obligations of joint tenancies including the implications for succession rights of partners and children. Where a joint tenancy is refused by the Council the applicant/s must be given reasons why.

In the creation of a joint tenancy, both tenants must be present to sign the tenancy agreement. In exceptional circumstances only the absent tenant may be able to sign retrospectively; however, the circumstances surrounding the creation of the joint tenancy will need to be assessed to ensure it was valid. This assessment will take in to account historic correspondence from each tenant and the reason why both applicants were not able to attend the sign up.

In accordance with s.160ZA (1) (b) of the Housing Act 1996 as amended, a housing authority shall not grant a joint tenancy to two or more people if one of them is a person from abroad who is ineligible. In these situations, a sole tenancy will be granted to the eligible applicant.

20. Size of property required

The Council's Bedroom Standard is as follows:

- Applicant and partner - 1 bedroom (a single applicant may be offered a self-contained studio flat or a one-bedroom property)
- Each child or adult requiring a separate bedroom for medical reasons (medical evidence is required) - 1 bedroom
- Each adult, or couple, 18 years or over - 1 bedroom
- Up to 2 children of either sex under 10 years - 1 bedroom
- Up to 2 children of opposite sex over and at least 1 child is over 10 years - 2 bedrooms
- Up to 2 children of the same sex under 18 years - 1 bedroom
- A carer (or group of carers) providing overnight care - 1 bedroom

For applicants who are pregnant, the Council will consider their bedroom need to include the unborn child once they reach 30 weeks gestation. For example, an applicant (and partner) who is pregnant can be considered for a two-bedroom property but only three months before the expected date of delivery. Evidence of the expected due date, such as MATB1 form must be provided for this to apply.

20.1. Smaller Accommodation than needed

Due to the overall demand on larger sized accommodation, in certain circumstances, applicants may be considered for smaller sized accommodation than that specified under the Council's bedroom standard, as long as this does not result in statutory overcrowding or cause children of different sexes to share a room, where the Bedroom Standard would offer separate rooms.

For example, if a household has been awarded with a 4 bedroom need due to a child being over 18 and there is another child of the same sex under 18 in the household, on request, Reading Borough Council will consider allowing them to share to reduce the number of bedrooms that is required, unless this it is not reasonable to do so, for example medical advice, etc.

We will only allow a maximum of 2 children per room.

Accommodation smaller than required will not be considered as standard, but it may be considered by the Council where there are particular problems in re-housing a household, or upon request by the applicant.

21. Priority Criteria

Each application on the Housing Register will either be placed in a band or will be considered to have No Priority for Housing. This section will detail how Reading Borough Council determines the priority of applicants on the Housing Register and how the band is awarded as a result. Priority is awarded against 2 criteria, as follows:

- Reasonable Preference
- Additional Preference

The priority bands are for the purposes of assessing and prioritising the housing needs of households. The bands reflect a scale of need, with the highest priority being in Band 1 and the lowest priority cases being awarded No Priority for Housing. All the housing needs of a household within an application will be taken into consideration when determining the priority band, therefore as a household's circumstances change the priority band may be reassessed.

The examples outlined within the housing bands do not represent an exhaustive list. Each case will be assessed on its own merits and placed into the priority band accordingly in line with the principles of each band.

Priority Band	
Band 1	<p><i>Circumstances that would result in a threat to life:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management transfers – those considered to be at risk and approved for a Management Transfer • A medical condition or welfare concern impacted by the accommodation which would result in risk to life • An applicant requires adaptations, but the current property is not adaptable and the lack of adaptations would result in a threat to life or injury • Witness protection <p><i>Circumstances that require an urgent move to facilitate other time limited legal obligations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A move from a Reading Borough Council property to facilitate renovations and/or demolition • Successful suitability review/legal challenge – Part VI offer • Hospital and Residential delayed discharges • Reciprocal arrangements with other Local Authorities resulting in accommodation available out of the area for residents of Reading fleeing the area as a result of domestic abuse
Band 2	<p><i>Circumstance where a home is significantly no longer suitable/accessible and/or there is a recognised need for this accommodation to become available:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading Borough Council and internal RP tenants residing in accommodation larger than they require, including those who have been awarded a discretionary succession • Reading Borough Council tenants wishing to move from bungalows –

	<p>regardless of any need or size requirements, who will accept another type of accommodation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two existing Reading Borough Council tenants who wish to become one household and neither property is suitable for the household • Reading Borough Council tenants residing in adapted homes, and the household no longer require adaptations • Category 1 Hazard for Space - severe overcrowding in Council stock • To facilitate a move from supported accommodation within Reading Borough Council where the resulting vacancy will be made available to meet demand within the borough • A medical condition or welfare concern impacted by the accommodation which pose a significant risk • Where accommodation is not suitable to facilitate adoption, fostering or a Special Guardianship order (to prevent children from entering care), and prior to the order being approved housing is deemed inappropriate and no other option is available or suitable
Band 3	<p><i>Legislative direction to provide a higher priority than reasonable preference</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Category 1 Hazard for Space - severe overcrowding in other housing which could be resolved with a move to other private rented/RP accommodation • Statutory homeless households • A medical condition or welfare concern impacted by the accommodation which pose an identified risk • Qualifying forces personnel and bereaved spouses/partners, as defined in section 18.1, who also meet one or more of the reasonable preference criteria • Those who meet the Right to Move criteria <p><i>To facilitate a move to any sheltered accommodation within Reading Borough Council</i></p>
Band 4	<p><i>Circumstances that meet the definition of reasonable preference – see section 21.1</i></p>

	<i>To facilitate a move for council tenants who do not meet any reasonable preference categories</i>
No Priority For Housing (NPFH)	<i>None of the reasonable preference categories apply or any other listed above</i> <i>Demoted applicants for the period as set out in section 23</i>

The Band awarded will be based on the situation that attracts the highest priority.

21.1. Reasonable Preference Categories

Section 166A (3) of The Housing Act 1996 (as inserted by the Localism Act 2011) states that a Local Authority's Allocations Scheme shall be framed so as to ensure reasonable preference is given to:

- Applicants who are homeless within the meaning of Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (including those who are Intentionally Homeless and those not in a priority need)
- Applicants who are owed a duty by any Local Authority under section 190(2)¹, 193(2)² or 195(2) of the 1996 Housing Act (or under section 65(2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985) or who are occupying accommodation secured by any housing authority under section 192(3).
- Applicants occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions. Housing conditions will be considered unsatisfactory where a household lacks kitchen, bathroom, toilet facilities or heating.
- Applicants who need to move on medical or welfare grounds (including grounds related to disability).
- Applicants who need to move to a particular locality in the district of an authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or others). This includes applicants who need to move under the Right to Move Guidance, and those who need to move to give/receive essential support.

Priority will be awarded for medical and welfare issues depending on the nature of the concern and the impact the accommodation is having on a medical condition or the applicant's welfare. This will be awarded in line with the principles of the bands.

21.2. Additional Preference

In addition, section 166A (3) of the 1996 Housing Act (as inserted by the Localism Act 2011) gives housing authorities power to frame their Allocations Scheme to give additional preference to particular descriptions of people who fall within the statutory reasonable preference categories. Assessing the need for additional preference will require evidence from relevant professionals involved, such as Police, Social Care, medical professionals, etc. Applicants who may be given additional priority will include but are not limited to:

¹ Applicants who are threatened with homelessness and in priority need as defined by the Housing Act 1996 Part VII as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002

² Applicants who are intentionally homeless and are either occupying temporary accommodation for a short period or entitled to advice and assistance as defined by the Housing Act 1996 (Part VII). Applicants who are in priority need and are unintentionally homeless as defined by the Housing Act 1996 (Part VII) as amended.

- People at risk of serious violence or threats of serious violence that is likely to be carried out, this includes domestic abuse, racial harassment and hate crimes including agreed Management Transfers, see section 23.
- Witnesses of crime, or victims of crime who would be at risk of intimidation amounting to violence or threats of violence if they remain in their current homes.
- Those who need to move due to an urgent medical reason.
- Prescribed members of the armed forces as follows, as defined by section 18.1.
- Those who need to move due to an urgent welfare issue.
- Those who satisfy the Exceptional Strategic Lettings criteria as set out in section 21.2.1, in order to make best use of housing stock.

Additional Preference categories will be assessed, and a band will be awarded in line with the principles of the bands.

21.2.1 Exceptional Strategic Lettings

Additional Preference categories include circumstances where Reading Borough Council needs to best manage the housing stock, known as Exceptional Strategic Lettings. There are some circumstances where Reading Borough Council needs to take steps to manage our stock in the best interests of our current tenants and of those waiting for accommodation. In such circumstances, in order to make best use of the housing stock, the Council will award overriding priority.

The following situations will attract an increased level of priority:

- Succession to a property larger than the council considers is reasonably required for the applicant and legal action, be that the service of a possession notice and/or the issue of possession proceedings, has commenced, or can be commenced, to recover the property
- Tenants of Reading Borough Council whose homes are being demolished
- Tenants of Reading Borough Council whose properties require major renovation, where a decant to a temporary home while the works are carried out is not a reasonable option
- Tenants of a social housing property living in accommodation larger than they need within Reading Borough Council's area – in some situation the Tenant Incentive Scheme will apply, please request further information
- Tenants occupying accommodation with major adaptations that they no longer required or occupying accommodation that is in high demand as assessed by Reading Borough Council
- Any other exceptional circumstances

Under occupiers in social housing will not be awarded priority where there are other people living in the property, who are not included on the application, and there is a likelihood that they would be made homeless as a result of an offer of smaller accommodation.

22. Effective Date

Reading Borough Council will apply an effective date to all applications. This will generally be the date that the application is received or the date where it has been assessed there is a significant change in the applicant's circumstances. This date will be used to help prioritise bids when the properties are being shortlisted and bids are received from multiple applicants who are in the same band. If an applicant's priority changes, and is increased, the effective date will change to the date that the decision was made for the increase in priority. If an applicant's priority changes, and is decreased, the effective date will revert back to the date that the application was received.

23. No Priority for Housing

Applicants who do not meet the criteria set out in section 21 regarding reasonable or additional preference will be considered to have No Priority for Housing.

There will be situations where an applicant will have No Priority for Housing even though their application might otherwise attract reasonable and/or additional preference. The following is a list of such applicants:

- Applicants who have financial resources available to meet their housing costs (section 166A (5) of the 1996 Housing Act) for example: assets, savings or a level of disposable income that could be reasonably applied to securing alternative accommodation in either the owner-occupied, low cost home ownership or private rented sector. Each case will be considered individually, taking into account all relevant financial and personal circumstances of both the applicant and of the housing market.
- Applicants who have deliberately worsened their living conditions in an attempt to increase their opportunities for re-housing. For example, where an applicant occupies a property, which is suitable for their needs, and relinquishes it for less suitable housing. Such applicants will be placed in the No Priority for Housing band and this could be for a period of up to 12 months.
- Applicants who have had a change of circumstance and have not informed the Council. Such applicants will be placed in the No Priority for Housing band until a new Homechoice Registration Form has been received, at which point, following the assessment, priority will be awarded to reflect the new situation. It is the applicant's responsibility to notify the Voids and Lettings Team of any change in circumstances as soon as possible.
- Applicants who are subject to possession proceedings by either the Council or a Registered Provider, due to breach of tenancy or licence which includes rent arrears and anti-social behaviour (section 166A (5) of the 1996 Housing Act).
- Applicants who are applying to buy their Council property or being considered for other housing options such as Shared Ownership/Homebuy. Such applicants may not be considered for an allocation of accommodation. However, each case will be considered individually, taking account of all relevant circumstances
- Council or Registered Provider tenants where the property and/or garden of their existing home is not in a tenable condition. Such applicants will be placed in the No Priority for Housing band until the condition of either the property or the garden has improved (depending on the circumstances of each case).
- Council tenants who have made unauthorised alterations to their property and have either not carried out remedial works or have not paid necessary recharge amounts.
- Applicants who have a current or a proven history of rents arrears and/or anti-social behaviour. In such cases the Council may stipulate certain conditions, which must be met. This could be making and adhering to an agreement to clear rent arrears or adhering to a Behaviour Agreement. Any debt must be legally recoverable for this to apply.
- Applicants who are found to be intentionally homeless within the homelessness legislation. Such applicants will be placed in the No Priority for Housing band for a period of 12 months.
- Applicants who have refused a direct offer of accommodation will be placed in the No Priority for Housing band for a period of 12 months, see section 32.
- Homeless households who have refused a final offer of accommodation will be placed in the No Priority for Housing band for a period of 12 months.

- Applicants who have received major adaptations to their home via the Disabled Facilities Grant will be placed in the No Priority for Housing band for a period of 5 years. If during this time the property becomes unsuitable for the applicant due to medical need this will be assessed on a case by case basis.

Any successful bid(s) made by an applicant in one of the above groups may be disregarded.

The above groups may however be given priority for re-housing in exceptional circumstances such as serious medical or welfare needs. Each case will be decided on its merits.

24. Management Transfers

The Council may decide that a tenant of Reading Borough Council or a Registered Provider (where the resulting vacancy will be made available to Reading Borough Council) be awarded overriding priority for a move either on a permanent basis, or a temporary basis if the tenant requests this whilst waiting for Reading Borough Council to take possession proceedings against the perpetrators of the anti-social behaviour. This would normally be on an emergency basis, for example, where violence or domestic abuse occurs which poses a serious threat to their life or the life of their family and the tenant is considered to be high risk, or where the risk or likelihood of violence is ongoing and the normal actions of an injunction or other legal action cannot be taken or would be unlikely to afford sufficient protection.

Reading Borough Council will consider the following situations for overriding priority (Band 1):

- Tenants of Reading Borough Council or a Registered Provider who are at risk, as set out above
- Reading Borough Council tenancies where the tenant has left the accommodation leaving other family members in situ
- Potential new tenancy following the death of a tenant in cases where there are no succession rights

Additionally, in exceptional circumstances, the Council may decide to transfer a tenant whose application for a transfer does not attract sufficient priority for a move under the Choice Based Lettings scheme, where his/her behavioural problems, or those of someone within the household, are unavoidably causing severe disruption to neighbours or to the household itself. In such cases the Council retains the right to make a direct offer of accommodation, see section 32. This situation could occur where a member of the household has anti-social behaviour issues and, whilst engaging with appropriate services, it is considered that a move would reduce the disruption to neighbours and the household concerned.

Thorough investigations will be undertaken in respect of all the above situations, including liaison with the Police, Social Services and other agencies to establish the degree and severity of the problem(s) being suffered.

Approved Management Transfers will be reviewed every 3 months, and approved Management Transfer applicants will be expected to participate in Homechoice. Management Transfer status will be removed if the circumstances change and an urgent move is no longer required. If the applicant is not bidding, despite suitable properties being available, or has refused offers of suitable accommodation, the refusal sanctions will apply, see section 35. It is considered, as a result of a significant risk being identified, that those accepted for a management transfer will only require 1 offer of accommodation. The property offered will be suitable for the family size in accordance with

bedroom need. The Voids and Lettings Officers will monitor bidding activity and will ensure that bids are made in areas that are safe for the applicant.

There is an expectation that a Management Transfer allows the tenant to retain rights to their property and rights as a tenant if they have no option but to move to an alternative temporary solution, such as a refuge, emergency accommodation or with family or friends, as a result of the risk.

Advice on areas considered safe for the applicant will be given at the time the Management Transfer is accepted. Bids made by applicants to areas where there is deemed to be an on-going risk to the applicant, or a household member will not be considered and will be overlooked. This will be confirmed to the applicant.

There may be situations where it is deemed that an applicant is not safe in any part of the Reading borough, a move within the borough has already been facilitated previously under the same circumstances, and there are no interventions that can support them to remain safe in the borough. In full consultation with the applicant, a Management Transfer may not be agreed. In these situations, the applicant will be referred to the Housing Advice Team to provide alternative options and support to move out of the borough.

Larger sized family units can be difficult to secure. This is because of limited social housing resources. It may be necessary to consider a range of options when considering these needs and this may include private rented accommodation under the Rent Guarantee Scheme (see section 42).

Priority for an allocation may also be given to a person who has occupied a particular property for a long time and who is not the named tenant, but who has a clear need to remain in the property or security of tenure. For example:

- Where the sole tenant has left the property, leaving his or her partner and children in occupation, but the remaining occupier is not a named tenant.
- The remaining partner/close family member following the death of a secure tenant when there is no statutory right to succeed, but the council are satisfied that there would be a duty through homeless legislation to provide accommodation to the individual.
- Spouses, civil partners or cohabiting couples who would have been able to apply to the courts for an order under Schedule 7 Family Law Act 1996.

If the property in question is too big for the remaining occupiers, the Council may offer a tenancy of a smaller property that meets the accommodation needs of the remaining occupiers following a successful bid made via Homechoice. This situation will attract a Band 2 in line with other tenants who are under occupying accommodation. This allows the Council to make best use of the housing stock. Any tenancy offered under this section will be an introductory tenancy in the first instance. Examples of factors that the Council will take into account when making its decision may include, but will not be limited to the following:

- The length of time the applicant has shared the former tenant's home
- The length of time the applicant has been a member of the tenant's family as defined by Section 113 of the Housing Act 1985
- The vulnerability and needs of the applicant
- The circumstances in which the tenancy was granted or, as the case requires, the circumstances in which the applicant and their partner became a tenant under the tenancy
- The housing needs and housing resources of the applicant and any relevant child

- The financial resources of the applicant
- The likely effect of any decision by the Council not to exercise its powers on the health, safety, or well-being of the parties and of any relevant child
- The nature of the parties' relationship
- Whether there are or have been any children who are children of both parties or for whom both parties have or have had parental responsibility
- The length of time that has elapsed since the parties ceased to live together
- The suitability of the parties as tenants

If an applicant's request for a Management Transfer is refused, or their status removed, they will be advised of this decision in writing. Applicants have the right to request a review of this decision, see section 24.3.

25. Medical and Welfare Assessments

Applicants who have a medical condition or welfare concern that is being impacted by their current housing may complete a medical assessment form, which is also included in the Homechoice Registration Form, or provide further information in writing regarding their situation. Reading Borough Council will consider the information provided to determine if any further priority should be given to their application for housing. Information submitted for all members of the applicant's household will be considered.

In order to make assessments, information may be gathered from professionals involved with the applicant and this may include a home visit to clarify the link between an applicant's health or welfare and their housing situation. Assessments will be carried out by Voids and Lettings Officers in line with the principles of the banding structure and will take into account the composite need of the household. In complex situations, that require more technical expertise, deemed appropriate by the Voids and Lettings Team, an assessment will be carried out by the Independent Medical Advisor (IMA), who is a qualified GP. In situations where there is a physical disability advice may also be sought from the Senior Specialised Housing Occupational Therapist.

To be allocated a medical or welfare priority the applicant's illness/disability/situation must be linked to their housing circumstances, for example, difficulty accessing parts of their accommodation because it has not been adapted.

Within the assessment a recommendation will be made on the type of properties that would be considered suitable, generally based on the level of mobility. If an applicant bids for unsuitable accommodation based on these recommendations, the Voids and Lettings Team may disregard the bid. If the applicant wishes to be considered for accommodation that has not been recommended, the application and priority awarded will need to be reassessed.

The Voids and Lettings Team may recommend that an application is reassessed. This may be because improvements have been carried out to the current accommodation e.g. adaptations that should alleviate the medical need, or if an applicant's medical condition deteriorates and they provide further medical evidence. Applicants can request their medical assessment to be reassessed and this may be completed by another medical partner or by the Voids and Lettings Team. There must be a clear change in the circumstances for reassessment to be carried out.

26. Vulnerable Customers and Specifically Identified Groups

It is important to Reading Borough Council that everyone has the same opportunities to access our service and as such we will support vulnerable customers, where necessary, so that they are able to

access the Housing Register and to understand what this means. If an applicant requires additional support this should be made clear to the Voids and Lettings Team so referrals to appropriate support agencies can be made, information can be translated into different languages, additional time can be allowed for those who require it and practical support can be provided if this is required.

Reading Borough Council has implemented a Quota Queue process to further support vulnerable applicants to ensure that there is equal access to the service. Some groups have been detailed below, however this is not an exhaustive list and any situation or need will be assessed. In addition, Reading Borough Council considers its responsibilities as a corporate parent to be a priority.

26.1. Quota Queues

Each year Reading Borough Council will review the needs of those housed. This will inform quotas for different social care groups, meaning that individuals within these groups may be given additional priority. For the properties advertised via the Quota Queue and as part of the allocations plan, an annual assessment will be carried out regarding the property requirements of these groups. The awarding of additional priority to specific groups will be considered in consultation with social care groups or agencies. From time to time, it may also be necessary to restrict adverts to specific groups or to provide a direct offer of accommodation. This could be in circumstances where a specific group of applicants are experiencing acute housing difficulties or where there is a need to intervene to enable community cohesion in neighbourhoods.

26.1.1. Social Care Group Quota Queues

The different social care quota queue groups are:

- Young people leaving care.
- Young Persons. This may include teenage parents and 16/17-year olds.
- Single Homeless People. This may include rough sleepers where there are no specific support needs, and people moving on from the Homelessness Pathway. The Move On Options Panel determines which individuals are included in the quota.
- People with Adult Social Care needs who need to leave supported accommodation to live more independently. This will include those accessing Mental Health Services, Learning and Physical Disabilities Services. The Housing Teams determine which individuals are included in the quota.

To access the Quota Queues, the Voids and Lettings Team will engage with the relevant professionals, such as the Leaving Care Team and Adult Social Care to ensure that the applicant being referred is able to understand a tenancy agreement and manage a home. Without this assurance it is likely that any tenancy created may fail, and while Reading Borough Council will work to prevent this from occurring, applicants will only be placed on the relevant Quota Queues once the Voids and Lettings Team are satisfied that any tenancy that may be created is sustainable and there is still availability on the Quota Queue. If more than the agreed number of applicants are referred to the Quota Queue any further applicants will be considered the following financial year.

Applicants who are moving from supported accommodation, where the move will produce a vacancy for another person who requires that support, will be awarded additional priority, Band 2. This will enable a flow of accommodation for those who require it and will ensure that applicants do not spend more time than necessary in inappropriate accommodation.

26.1.2. Right to Move Quota Queue

Each year Reading Borough Council will review the needs of those social housing tenants who live outside of the borough and need to move to Reading to be nearer to work or to take up an offer of work. 1% of lettings will be offered to this group per year and the Council will manage this quota by restricting adverts to this group.

26.1.3. Key Worker Quota Queue

The Key Worker definition will vary depending on the grant allocated to Registered Providers for developing the scheme. The Council also has its local definition of a Key Worker, defined in Appendix 1.

Reading Borough Council will review the number of applications it receives from Key Workers and then award a percentage of vacant properties to this group each year. This will be in addition to opportunities that may become available specifically for this group in new developments within the borough.

26.1.4. Refugee Resettlement Quota Queue

Local Authorities will be periodically asked to respond to humanitarian crises to support the safeguarding of foreign nationals. Reading Borough Council will commit to support a proportionate number of applicants seeking refuge and utilising any government resettlement scheme. The number of properties required will be reviewed on an annual basis or as and when requests are made by the Home Office. If further resources are required this will be identified through other resources such as the Rent Guarantee Scheme, see section 42.

26.1.5. Housing First Quota Queue

Housing First is a model of accommodation provision for entrenched rough sleepers and former rough sleepers, which provides support to ensure that the tenancy succeeds. Once individuals are identified as appropriate for Housing First a property will be identified and offered as a direct let.

Further quota queue groups may be identified based on housing need.

Even though quota queues are in place, larger sized family units can be difficult to secure. This is because of limited social housing resources. It may be necessary to consider a range of options when considering these needs and this may include private rented accommodation under the Rent Guarantee Scheme, see section 42.

26.2. Vulnerable Groups

26.2.1. Travelling Families

There is a duty for local authorities to complete regular assessments of the accommodation needs of Travelling Families living in their area as they do for the rest of the community. Travelling Families will be assessed within the parameters of the housing scheme and a strategic assessment is carried out within Reading Borough Council's Housing Strategy.

26.2.2. Fostering, Adoption and Special Guardianship Orders

Children's Social Care have a duty under section 22 of the Children Act 1989 to ensure sufficient accommodation is available to meet the needs of Looked After Children, as defined in that Act, in their area. Housing Needs will work together with Children's Social Care to best meet the needs of prospective and approved foster carers, adopters and those under Special Guardianship Orders. The Council will consider the circumstances of each individual to determine whether a move to alternative

accommodation is required to facilitate adoption or fostering of a child to whom the Local Authority has a responsibility. It is deemed appropriate that the relevant teams will liaise with the Voids and Lettings Team prior to any agreement in order to ascertain the likelihood of accommodation being secured.

PART 3 – Choice Based Lettings – Homechoice at Reading

This section sets out how Reading Borough Council advertise and make decisions on who a vacant property is allocated to.

The Council advertises properties and applicants are required to bid for those that they are interested in. The bidder who has been assessed as having the greatest need, see section 21, will be offered the property, provided it is suitable for their needs. When considering the suitability of a property, Reading Borough Council takes into account whether the physical attributes of the property (factors such as size of the property or access to the property) will meet the needs of the applicant (which could include, but are not limited to, the number of household members and mobility limitations).

Should an urgent need arise for accommodation, the Council reserves the right to remove property from the Choice Based Lettings system at any point to satisfy this need.

Please be aware that allocation to properties managed by Registered Providers will be subject to their own procedures.

27. Adverts

All adverts will usually include the following information regarding the property:

- Type of tenancy offered
- Landlord
- Location
- Type (flat, bungalow etc.)
- Size (number of bedrooms)
- Floor level and whether or not it has a lift
- Local amenities
- Type of heating
- Whether it has a garden
- The amount of rent payable
- Whether it is specialist accommodation, such as purpose built for wheelchair users, Sheltered Accommodation or Elderly Designated Stock, i.e. properties that are only available for those over a certain age.
- If the property is subject to a Local Lettings policy, see section 38.

Reading Borough Council properties and Registered Provider properties will be advertised daily on the Council website as and when they become available. A printed copy of the available properties, which will be correct on the day the information is requested, can be obtained from the Civic Offices.

The adverts will be monitored to ensure that Quota Queues are met, see section 26. At times, advertisements may be restricted to particular groups to ensure that all groups are encouraged to participate in Homechoice at Reading. This is to assist in the development of community cohesion and stability within neighbourhoods. In some circumstances, adverts will be limited to specific applicants. This will be to ensure that the Council is making best use of its stock, particularly where there are large sized family units.

Any vacant property that has adaptations in place will first be advertised for the Adapted Register applicants only. It is important to remember that many adaptations are bespoke for current tenants so may not be an exact fit for any future applicant. If the property does not meet the needs of those on the Adapted Register, it will be advertised for the waiting and transfer list applicants.

28. Bidding

Applicants will be encouraged and supported to make bids for vacant properties on line. Applicants can request assistance from the Council for support with the bidding process and can give permission for bids to be made on their behalf by Reading Borough Council staff or anyone that is supporting them. If a bid is placed with the applicant's permission and it is subsequently refused, sanctions may apply, see section 35.

Applicants will have 7 days to place a bid and will be notified of the closing date for bidding on the advert. Applicants will be able to have 3 active bids at any one time. If an applicant is successful for more than 1 property they will be contacted to determine which property they would like to be considered for.

For those applicants who have been given additional priority as they are considered to be homeless or at risk of violence different rules may apply, see section 35.2.

Some Registered Providers will manage the bids placed for accommodation that they advertise in partnership with Reading Borough Council, in line with the Council's Allocations Scheme.

Bids will be evaluated to check whether:

- There have been any changes in circumstances since the date of application (this may result in an applicant's priority changing, and the bid being disregarded); and
- The successful bidder is eligible³ for re-housing.

Where applicants require adaptations, an assessment will be required following any successful bids to ascertain whether the property is suitable for the adaptations required, such as the addition of a level access shower or stairlift, before an offer can be made. If the property does not lend itself to these adaptations any bid will be disregarded. The professional involved, normally an OT, will need to seek landlord permission to make the necessary adaptations. It is not our policy to install level access showers to flats above ground floor. In these situations, we will work with the applicant to find a more appropriate home.

If bidding is unsuccessful, applicants will be notified.

28.1. Bids Overlooked

Applicants may be overlooked for successful bids they have made via Choice Based Lettings if the property is not deemed suitable for their needs, or their needs do not lend themselves to the property. Situations where bids may be overlooked are as follows, this is not an exhaustive list:

- where the property is unsuitable as a result of:

³ Eligible – checks will be made to establish identification, immigration status and address before any offer is made.

- a medical recommendation for a certain type of property and the property where the successful bid has been made does not match the assessment. In these situations, and where medical priority has been awarded the priority may be reassessed.
- a risk posed to the applicant in and around the area in which the property is situated, or the applicant may pose a risk to others in and around that area:
 - where the Council believes, through advice and consultation with other statutory agencies, that a bid for accommodation in a particular property or area could present an unreasonable risk to surrounding residents/tenants or to the applicant.
- Those who make a successful bid and who have had their priority reduced to NPFH as a result of action required to address concerns, as per section 23, and it is considered that the action hasn't been fulfilled
- Applicants who are in rent arrears
- Applicants who are already under offer to another property
- To enable community cohesion in areas where there is a high level of anti-social behaviour, exploitation or other concerns regarding vulnerable residents
- To properties where Local Lettings Policies are in place

29. Shortlisting

Once the advert closes the bids received are collected and sorted into priority order. Those with the highest level of priority will show at the top of the shortlist. Where there are multiple applicants in the same priority band the shortlist will be in order of effective date, with the oldest first.

The Voids and Lettings Team or Sheltered Housing Team will contact each applicant in priority order to arrange a viewing. Some bids may be overlooked, see section 28.1.

30. Viewing

When applicants have been successful in their bid, they will be contacted to view the property.

In order to reduce the amount of time a property is left vacant, an applicant may be expected to view a property with as little as 24 hours' notice. Where possible more notice will be given. Applicants will receive a formal invitation to view a property with a date and time to attend the property, which may be arranged via a telephone call. If the applicant fails to attend the viewing or respond to the invitation Reading Borough Council will overlook the bid for that property.

Normally the top 3 applicants that have bid for a property will be offered a viewing and asked to state whether they would accept an offer of the accommodation. An offer will be made to the applicant that has been assessed as having the greatest need, see section 21.

If a viewing is arranged, but subsequently the applicant decides not to view the property, they must notify the Voids and Lettings Team within 24 hours of the viewing being arranged

Applicants will be expected to confirm if they wish to accept the property within 24 hours of the viewing, before being made a formal offer of accommodation. Failure to respond within the time scale may result in the bid being disregarded and the property being offered to the next applicant in priority order.

31. Offers

If several applicants who are in the same priority band place bids for the same property, the applicant who has waited the longest within the band will be offered the accommodation, see section 22. If they have been waiting the same length of time in the priority band the property will be offered to the applicant with the earliest date of registration.

Before a formal offer is made, Reading Borough Council will verify the information provided in the Homechoice Registration Form. For verification purposes, applicants will be required to provide specific information such as, but not limited to:

- Proof of eligibility
- Identification
- Proof of address
- Proof of income
- Proof of capital
- Evidence of rent account

If the successful bid has been made on a Registered Providers property, they may require additional information such as an affordability assessment prior to making an offer.

Applicants are required to supply this information within 24 hours of the viewing. If applicants do not provide this information within the time scales, a formal offer will not be made, and their bid may be disregarded.

Reading Borough Council will also consider if the applicant is part of any mandatory group which may need to complete Pre-Tenancy Training, see section 37, prior to a formal offer being made.

If there are any exceptional circumstances that mean that applicants are unable to provide the information requested within 24 hours of the viewing, an extended time can be agreed with the Voids and Lettings Team.

Once all relevant information has been verified a letter will be sent advising the applicant of their offer of accommodation. A date will be arranged for them to sign the Tenancy Agreement which could even be arranged for the same day.

If an applicant refuses the offer or does not provide verification information, the applicant with the next highest level of priority who has viewed the accommodation will be made an offer, for which the verification process will also apply.

Applicants will become non qualifying persons, see section 18.2, from the date that they receive a formal offer of a Part VI Allocation. If they later refuse the property their application will be reinstated from their registration date and their band restored from their effective date.

There may be occasions when Reading Borough Council will have to remove a property from the shortlisting process. This will only happen in exceptional circumstances, for example, where the Council requires a specific property to help satisfy a legal responsibility or for an emergency. Reading Borough Council will aim to avoid removing properties after they have been advertised wherever possible.

32. Homelessness

Applicants owed the main homelessness duty by Reading Borough Council will be expected to actively participate with Homechoice at Reading. Assistance will be given to vulnerable households to help them to bid for accommodation. The Council will distinguish between those applicants who are

participating in Homechoice at Reading and those who are not, and different sanctions will apply to both groups.

Bids from homeless households will be reviewed every 4 weeks to determine whether they are actively bidding or participating in the scheme. Non-participation in the scheme is considered to be where households are:

- not making an application to join the Housing Register
- not bidding
- selectively bidding which reduces the opportunities for rehousing, such as bidding on particular property types and areas
- bidding on unsuitable properties

Those participating in the scheme

Applicants owed the main homelessness duty and who successfully bid for accommodation via Homechoice at Reading will be expected to accept the first property offered to them following their successful bid. If a homeless applicant refuses a reasonable offer of suitable accommodation, then the main homelessness duty will come to an end and no further offer of accommodation will be made to the applicant. The offer will be considered to be the Final Offer under Part VII of the 1996 Housing Act, as amended. If at this time the applicant is in temporary accommodation, they will be issued a Notice to Quit, as the first stage towards gaining possession of the temporary accommodation. The applicant will then be considered to have No Priority for Housing for a period of 1 year, see section 23.

Those not participating in the scheme

If there have been suitable properties advertised and no bids have been placed the applicants will be made a direct offer see section 32. If a direct offer is made, this will be considered to be a Final Offer under Part VII of the 1996 Housing Act, as amended. If the applicant accepts the direct offer the main homelessness duty will end. If the applicant refuses the direct offer the main homelessness duty will end and no further offers of accommodation will be made. If the applicant at this time is in temporary accommodation, they will be given a Notice to Quit, as the first stage towards gaining possession of the temporary accommodation. The applicant will then be considered to have No Priority for Housing for a period of 1 year, see section 23.

33. Direct Offers

A direct offer of accommodation is made when the Council selects a person for a vacant property rather than an applicant participating in Homechoice at Reading by making a bid for the property.

In certain circumstances Reading Borough Council may make a direct offer to applicants. Examples of this are:

- People requiring accommodation on hospital discharge when they have no alternative housing to move to and the discharge is likely to be delayed.
- Applicants that have been accepted for a Management Transfer who are not participating in the scheme despite suitable social housing vacancies arising or who have refused a reasonable offer of accommodation.
- Applicants where the Management Transfer Panel have agreed that they should remain in the property in circumstances where the tenant is no longer residing there. These cases will be assessed to show there is a clear need for the family to remain, if they have resided there

for a significant period as their only and principal home, and if the property is suitable for their needs.

- Homelessness applicants already placed in temporary accommodation by Reading Borough Council in a property that would otherwise be general needs permanent accommodation (permanent accommodation used as temporary accommodation) where this property is considered suitable as permanent accommodation and will be offered as such.
- Homeless applicants who are not participating in Homechoice at Reading, see section 32.
- Where the attributes of a property are uniquely suitable for a specific household who has an urgent need to move.
- The successful completion of a FIT, see section 11.1.
- After a successful review of suitability, the applicant has moved into the property and is not participating in Homechoice to achieve a move
- Reading Borough Council tenants whose behaviour is causing severe disruption to neighbours or to the household itself, see section 24.
- Applicants considered as part of a Quota Queue who are not participating in Homechoice at Reading despite suitable social housing vacancies arising, or who have refused an offer of suitable accommodation. Those on a Quota Queue where a specific area or type of property is required may also result of a direct offer being made.
- Decant and Regeneration schemes where the applicants are subject to notice under Ground 10, schedule 2 of the 1985 Housing Act and have been given the opportunity to participate in Homechoice but have failed to do so
- Any other exceptional or mitigating circumstances.

The Council also reserves the right to make direct offers of accommodation outside the Choice Based Lettings scheme in certain circumstances. Examples include (but are not be limited to) those situations where the Council believes it is necessary to intervene on an estate to promote sustainability of an area or promote community cohesion.

Unless there are exceptional circumstances only one direct offer will be made before sanctions will apply, see section 35. It is also important to note that a suitable property previously refused by the applicant may be offered again as a direct offer.

34. Right to Request a Review

Applicants are able to request a review on the following points:

- The decision not to place an applicant on the Housing Register due to their eligibility
- The decision not to place an applicant on the Housing Register due to the qualification criteria
- Any decision about the facts of the applicant's case which is likely to have been, or has been taken into account, in considering whether to allocate housing accommodation
- The decision to remove an application from the Housing Register
- The suitability of a property which has been offered

Requests for a review should be made in writing and be marked for the attention of the Voids and Lettings Team Leader within 21 days of the date of the original decision. The request can be made verbally, however it is preferred that the applicant requests a review in writing as the applicant should provide information as to why they disagree with the decision.

The Voids and Lettings Team Leader, or an Officer who is senior to the Officer who has made the original decision, will carry out the review and will aim to make the applicant aware of the outcome of the review within 8 weeks from the date the review request was received by the Council.

If a longer period is needed, the applicant will be consulted about this.

Applicants may be able to challenge some review decisions by judicial review via the County Courts. The Authority will recommend that the applicant seeks legal advice before taking these steps, or advice from the voluntary sector, such as the Citizens Advice Bureau.

34.1. *Suitability of accommodation*

If the applicant does not agree that a property offered to them is suitable, they are entitled to request a review of its suitability. Applicants will be advised to move in to the accommodation while the review is being considered.

Following the review, the following outcomes may apply:

If it is deemed that the property is not suitable:

- and if the applicant has moved to the accommodation offered, the applicant will be placed into Band 1 so that they can achieve a move at the earliest opportunity. If the applicant subsequently fails to participate in the scheme a direct offer will be made.
- and the applicant has not moved to the accommodation they will remain in their original priority Band and no sanctions will apply.

If it is deemed that the property is suitable:

- and the applicant has moved to the accommodation, they will be expected to remain in this accommodation.
- and the applicant has not moved into the accommodation, sanctions for the refusal will apply, see 35.

If the applicant is homeless this will remain as the final offer of accommodation, which will result on the ending of the statutory homeless duty and any temporary accommodation provided.

35. Refusal and Sanctions

In circumstances where an applicant refuses a suitable offer of accommodation Reading Borough Council will impose sanctions. This is to ensure that any delay does not have an adverse impact on others with a housing need who may want the same accommodation and to prevent property void time increasing.

Refusal of suitable accommodation will be considered as, amongst other things and not limited to:

- The applicant failing to attend a viewing
- The applicant failing to follow the process, such as completing a Registered Provider application form which, on completion, would have been likely to have led to an offer of accommodation
- Refusing a property without good reason in the view of the Council

35.1. *Procedure for refusal*

If an applicant refuses accommodation as set out in section 35, including a direct offer of accommodation, officers will look at all the circumstances of the case to decide:

- Whether the offer is suitable and reasonable, and
- Whether the reasons given for refusal are reasonable

Applicants who wish to refuse a property must notify the Voids and Lettings Team within 24 hours. This is normally done by completing a Refusal form giving comprehensive reasons for their refusal, however details of why the property is being refused can be considered via other means such as email, conversation, etc. Where requested, the officer carrying out the accompanied viewing of the property will assist applicants in completing the form. This form must be returned to the Voids and Lettings Team within 24 hours of viewing the property.

The Council will notify the applicant in writing if their reason for refusing the property is considered a reasonable or not, within 7 working days.

35.2. Sanctions

Applicants who have refused 3 suitable properties within a 6-month period will be considered as non-qualifying and removed from the Housing Register and cannot reapply for a period of 1 year from the date of the last refusal, see section 18.2.

Certain groups will be limited to fewer refusals, as follows:

- Homeless households will receive 1 suitable offer
- Management Transfer households will receive 1 suitable offer
- Quota Queue applicants will receive 1 suitable offer

Where an applicant from the above groups has refused an offer or direct offer, see section 33, Reading Borough Council reserves the right to reduce the applicant's priority to NPFH for a period of 1 year. When assessing the reasons for refusal, Reading Borough Council will have regard to the applicant's circumstances and the reasons why the offer was made. Each case will be considered on its merits in determining what sanctions will apply.

PART 4 – Our Communities

It is a priority for Reading Borough Council to create and promote sustainable communities. This section sets out how Reading Borough Council will achieve this priority.

36. Estate Management

The Council has a responsibility as a landlord to its estates and their communities. It aims to ensure they are places that people want to live, and that they are free from anti-social behaviour, crime and exploitation.

There are several mechanisms that the Council will employ to support these aims:

- The ability to overlook applicants
- The ability to remove properties from the scheme
- The ability to make direct offers of property
- The use of Local Lettings Policies
- The ability to advertise properties for particular groups
- The ability to disclose general anti-social behaviour activity in the area to prospective tenants

- Using the qualification criteria to prevent those who are unsuitable to be a tenant from accessing the housing register

There are a number of factors that will be considered:

- The vulnerability of applicants and tenants
- The risk of exploitation
- History of behaviours within a community
- Location of the accommodation
- Risks to and from applicants/tenants
- Consideration of the most appropriate household for properties, such as female/male only, older children, etc.

The Council may always employ a general discretion not to offer the tenancy to the bidder with the highest priority on the Housing Register. The Council will exercise this discretion by taking into account the range of factors listed above and additional circumstances including (when considered appropriate) the demand for and supply of accommodation and the general housing situation within the borough.

37. Pre-Tenancy Training

Reading Borough Council hopes that any accommodation offered does not fail and wishes for our tenants to have the best opportunity possible to remain in their homes and to sustain their tenancy agreement. To support this Reading Borough Council are able to offer pre-tenancy training, which will enable future tenants to understand their responsibilities for their properties and their community.

Reading Borough Council reserve the right to make completing this training mandatory for certain groups and this information can be found at www.xxx.gov.uk.

Any concerns identified as a result of this training will be used to ascertain the right support required to ensure the success of the tenancy.

This training will be available to anyone who wishes to utilise this resource and Reading Borough Council may identify other groups who they will expect to complete this training before an offer of accommodation is made.

38. Local Lettings Policies

Local Lettings policies have been developed to help to balance communities, contribute towards community cohesion and sustainability within neighbourhoods and promote tenancy sustainment. Local Lettings policies may be implemented for a range of reasons, including to create a mix of household sizes, to manage housing management issues, such as anti-social behaviour, or to support the creation of a new community within a new build or regeneration scheme.

A separate written policy for each scheme identified as requiring a Local Letting policy will exist that sets out the reason for the policy and the criteria that apply. Criteria could include, restrictions on applicant age, household size, support needs, tenancy issues, and applicants with a history of criminal convictions or anti-social behaviour.

Local Lettings policies in existing properties, will wherever possible be developed in consultation with current tenants and other stakeholders (including the Lead Councillor and Ward Councillors) unless there are mitigating circumstances that require an urgent response.

Properties will normally be advertised clearly stating that a Local Lettings policy applies and giving an overview of the criteria. People applying for housing on estates where Local Lettings Policies are in place may be subject to the terms of the specific policy, for example the undertaking of Police checks. The policies are reviewed annually with applicants/tenants and in partnership with the Police and local Councillors to ensure they are still relevant and necessary.

39. Allocations Plan

Each year Reading Borough Council will set out its expectations in relation to the proportion of applicants who will be rehoused from certain groups and from each of the individual lists. This is to ensure that there are fair and proportionate allocations across the groups and also that the Council's priorities and financial obligations are supported. The percentage of lets to each group and lists are reviewed on a regular basis and properties may be advertised for particular groups to help Reading Borough Council deliver on the Allocations Plan. The Allocation Plan identifies the number of properties that will be advertised for each Quota Queue each year.

40. Decants and Regeneration Scheme

In order to facilitate major repairs programmes or to accommodate tenants whose properties become uninhabitable (due to such incidents as a fire or flood) the Council operates a Decant Policy. Whilst these major repair works are being carried out the Council has an obligation to re-house (temporarily) those tenants who are affected. In exceptional circumstances, a tenant who has a high priority for a transfer will be moved into permanent alternative accommodation in order to avoid two moves in a short space of time, or where the regeneration scheme will not provide the size of accommodation required. Where a transfer applicant's home is within a regeneration scheme and the applicant has been given the opportunity to participate within the scheme and has failed to do so, the authority will make a direct offer of accommodation, see section 32.

PART 5 – Alternative and Out of Area Housing Options

Reading Borough Council will not always be able to meet the needs of residents of the borough via the Allocations Scheme. With this in mind, this section sets out alternative options for moving to either social housing, private rented housing or accommodation out of the area.

All of the following are not considered as a nomination or allocation and are included for completeness of housing options. Securing of any accommodation via these routes sits outside of the Allocations Scheme.

It is also important to note that any qualification for future accommodation via Reading Borough Council's Allocation Scheme which is based on residency will be broken if an applicant moves out of the area for a period of time.

41. Reciprocal Arrangements

Generally, the Authority will only consider applicants for rehousing who fall within the Allocations Scheme, although there will be times when Reading Borough Council will agree to

assist another local authority or a Registered Provider on a reciprocal basis. This would normally be in an emergency situation.

All reciprocal arrangements are discretionary, and the Council reserves the right to decline a request for a reciprocal transfer. All requests will be agreed in conjunction with the Assistant Housing Needs Manager and priority for a move will be in line with the Allocations Scheme.

In some circumstances, the Council may agree to accept two smaller units of accommodation in exchange for a larger property with the same number of bedrooms. The reciprocal authority or Registered Provider will be required to provide written commitment to the terms of the reciprocal arrangement. We will treat any agreed reciprocal applicant in line with our Management Transfer applicants, see section 24.

When agreeing any reciprocal transfer the Council would expect a replacement transfer within 12 months.

42. Rent Guarantee Scheme (RGS)

Reading Borough Council promotes the RGS as an option for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and who need financial support to access privately rented accommodation. Landlords joining the scheme offer good quality rented properties and let them through the RGS. Each property is checked prior to letting and vulnerable households are supported to enable them to sustain their accommodation. The RGS works by guaranteeing the rent and the deposit to the landlord. The tenant pays their rent directly to the RGS and contributes towards the deposit by making regular payments to Reading Borough Council over a period of up to three years. Once saved, the deposit will be protected for the tenant's future use, although a landlord may make a claim against the guaranteed deposit at the end of a tenancy if there is loss or damage to the property, beyond fair wear and tear. In addition, if a tenant leaves a property owing rent to Reading Borough Council, any saved deposit may be used to pay off arrears.

On occasions, severely overcrowded secure tenants may consider the RGS as an option to alleviate their housing difficulties. This offer will only be aimed at severely overcrowded households requiring 4+ bedrooms where a private sector tenancy is deemed affordable.

43. Mutual Exchanges

Council or Registered Provider tenants can swap their homes providing their landlord has given permission. This is not an allocation, as defined by section 8.

- Eligibility - the scheme is open to all secure Council tenants and Registered Provider tenants subject to the agreement of their landlords.
- Applications - when two eligible tenants agree to exchange properties, they are each required to submit an application form to the Council's Tenant Services. If one of the parties is a tenant from another landlord, then each will be required to submit an application to the other landlord. The housing officer will make a home visit and a decision will be communicated in writing to each party. Applications can be refused on one or more of the grounds set down in Schedule 3 of the Housing Act 1985 and schedule 14 of the Localism Act 2011.

Where applicants are exchanging with a Registered Provider landlord, they are advised to make enquiries regarding the level of security of tenure (type of tenancy agreement) and the type of rent to be paid with the exchanging landlord.

The Homeswapper website at www.homeswapper.co.uk holds a register of tenants looking to exchange their properties.

Rent must be paid up to date before an exchange can take place unless:

- there is a Housing Benefit or Universal Credit claim being processed that will clear the arrears, or
- one or both of the tenants have been approved for a Management Transfer, or
- there is an agreement in place to pay off the outstanding arrears

If one of the tenants has breached the terms of his or her tenancy agreement, consent to the exchange may be given subject to a condition requiring the tenant to remedy the breach.

Exchanges take place on the basis that they are not a liability to the Council.

44. Assisted Purchase of Properties

There are various schemes, supported by the government, to assist households wishing to become home-owners. Examples of these include Shared Ownership, Help to Buy: Equity Loan, New to Buy: ISA schemes and Right to Buy.

These schemes change to reflect the prevailing climate and therefore details of current schemes available should be obtained from the Voids and Lettings Team on 0118 937 2172.

45. Applications to Move Out of Reading

Applicants will need to apply directly to the Local Authority that they wish to move to so that they can apply to be added to their Housing Register. Any such application will be subject to the policies and procedures of the receiving Local Authority.

46. Homefinder UK

Reading Borough Council are able to refer applicants to Homefinder UK, which is a service that advertises social rented properties across England, which the Council in that area find hard to let. This scheme promotes mobility to other areas, providing the opportunity to either retain or gain a social housing tenancy. The majority of accommodation via this scheme is located in the North of England, however property in other areas can become available. Further information can be obtained by contacting the Voids and Lettings Team on 01189 372172.

Appendix 1 – Key Worker Definition

- Lives or works in Reading
- Is employed by the public sector (Reading Borough Council, Royal Berkshire and Battle Hospital NHS Trust, Royal Berkshire Ambulance NHS Trust, Reading Primary Care Trust, Thames Valley Police, Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service, Reading Buses, Schools)
- Is delivering an essential public service
- Is in a post where there are serious recruitment and retention problems

In Reading this includes (but is not limited to) nurses and other NHS staff, teachers in schools, further education and Sixth Form colleges, Police Officers and some civilian staff, Social Care workers (which

can include Housing Officers), Occupational Therapists, Town Planners, Fire-fighters, Bus Drivers and ancillary staff.

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Allocation Scheme – Appendix 1 - Key Worker Definition

A proportion of affordable housing within the Borough is exclusively advertised for Key Workers. This may be scheme specific where the Key Worker definition will vary depending on the grant allocated to Registered Providers for developing the scheme, or it may be a proportion of affordable housing advertised according to local definition.

The Council's Allocation Scheme defines a key worker as someone who:

- Is employed by the public sector or is delivering a public sector duty (Reading Borough Council, Royal Berkshire and Battle Hospital NHS Trust, Royal Berkshire Ambulance NHS Trust, Reading Primary Care Trust, Thames Valley Police, Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service, Reading Buses) and,
- Is delivering an essential public service.
- Is in a post where there are local recruitment and retention problems.
- Is employed to deliver services in Reading.

In Reading this includes (but is not limited to) nurses and other NHS staff, health and care workers carrying out a public services, teachers in schools, further education and Sixth Form colleges, Police Officers and some civilian staff, Social Care workers (which can include Housing Officers), Occupational Therapists, Planners, Fire-fighters, Bus Drivers and ancillary staff.

Allocation Scheme

Priority will be awarded to key workers in line with the overall housing register priority matrix.

In developing the annual Allocations Plan, Reading Borough Council will review the number of applications it receives from key workers and then award a percentage of vacant properties to be made available to this group each year. This quota of properties will be in addition to opportunities that may become available specifically for this group in new developments within the borough.

Certain new developments will offer fixed term tenancies for this group. At the end of the fixed term an assessment will be carried out to determine if this accommodation remains suitable and support will be provided to secure an alternative home if this is required.