

## Tees Valley Lettings Partnership

# Common Allocation Policy



Tees Valley Homefinder

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# Glossary of Terms

## **Adapted properties**

Homes which have been designed or adapted to meet the needs of people with physical or sensory disabilities eg level access shower (las), wet room, widened doorways or changes to access the property

## **Advocate**

Someone who an applicant has given permission to act on their behalf to deal with their application eg a support worker or family member, etc

## **Affordability**

At the point of a tenancy being offered, an affordability check will be carried out to confirm the applicant is able to afford and sustain the tenancy.

## **Applicant**

A person who applies for housing on the lettings scheme

## **Autobid**

An automated process built into the digital letting platform in which Tees Valley Homefinder operates which, when activated, will bid for properties that fit the applicant's identified needs on behalf of the applicant

## **Band**

The system used for giving priority for housing

## **Common Allocation Policy**

A single set of rules covering the way we give priority for housing, shared by all the Partner organisations

## **Eligibility (Adverts)**

Set criteria used to determine who can or cannot bid for an advertised property based on the characteristics of their household.

## **Eligibility (Applicant)**

Rules governing who can or cannot be accepted on to the Tees Valley Common Allocation Policy.

## **Older Persons Accommodation**

Specific types of homes which are made available only to applicants meeting assessed needs for such eg adapted or accessible homes, sheltered and extra care homes which may carry an age restriction.

## **Family Type Accommodation**

Properties which are advertised as suitable for households comprising one or two parents with one or more children of any age, or an applicant who is expecting a child

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### **Habitual residency**

Your main home is in the Common Travel Area and you do not have plans to live anywhere else. The Common Travel Area means the UK, Republic of Ireland, Channel Islands or Isle of Man as defined in Appendix 2 of [Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England](#)

### **Housing Register**

A single list of all the applicants who have registered and been accepted on to this scheme

### **Interpreter**

A person or organisation who can provide a translation service for non-English speaking applicants or, a sign language service for applicants with a hearing impairment.

### **Local connection**

Connections to a Local Authority area because of residency, employment or close family.

### **Live application**

An application will become 'Live' once all checks/evidence have been approved and a Band award has been made. It is only at this stage an applicant can begin to 'bid' on properties

### **Local Lettings Plan**

A set of criteria in addition to the Common Allocation Policy that will determine eligibility for certain properties, for example new-build developments or to create more sustainable areas. A quota may also be set giving preference to specific Bands.

### **Nomination agreement**

This details how the Local Authority and Registered Providers will co-operate and work in Partnership to address housing need and prevent homelessness

### **Non-qualifying person**

Someone who is not allowed to register with the scheme due to their behaviour or the behaviour of a member of their household

### **Quota Banding**

Some Partnership RPs may use a quota system, which means that a percentage of their properties may give preference to Band 2, 3 or 4 first. This will be made clear within the property advert.

### **the Partnership**

The Tees Valley Lettings Partnership

### **Priority Date**

The date when an applicant was given a priority band.

### **Reasonable Offer**

An Offer of a property that meets the applicants identified needs, such as number of bedrooms, property type, relevant adaptations deemed suitable for their needs, etc

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### **Reasonable preference**

The phrase used in the Housing Act to describe applicants who should be given priority in a Local Authority's Common Allocation Policy, eg ex-service personnel

### **Registered Provider Partner**

A Registered Provider (RP) that advertises the majority of their vacant homes through this lettings scheme and the Local Authority (Council) area.

### **Registered Providers (RPs)**

A housing association or housing company registered with the Regulator of Social Housing

### **Registration date**

The date the application is received by one of the Partners

### **Renewals**

An annual renewal of an application that an applicant will need to complete on the anniversary of their registration date their application to remain live.

### **Shortlist**

Produced at the end of the advertising period and ranks applicants 'bids' in order of priority. This may not always be in order of Band 1 to 4 as it is dependent on whether the advert has specified a Band preference.

### **Tees Valley HomeFinder**

The IT system used by the Partnership for registering applications and advertising properties.

### **Unreasonable Refusal**

A refusal of an 'Offer' would be considered unreasonable if an offer was deemed to be appropriate and suitable for the applicant and his/her family's needs. Unacceptable or 'unreasonable' reasons for refusal include such things as internal decoration, inadequate outside space, etc

# The Lettings Partnership

This policy has been developed by the Tees Valley Lettings Partnership (referred to as the Partnership throughout this document), and is made up of 3 Local Authorities and 2 Registered Provider Partners (RPs) who manage housing stock across the local authority areas:

- Middlesbrough Council
- Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
- Stockton on Tees Borough Council
- Beyond Housing
- North Star

Beyond Housing and North Star will aim to advertise and let the majority of their available general need homes via this scheme. The contact details for all these organisations are listed in Appendix 1

There are additional RPs who are not Partners in the Partnership. These are known as 'Nomination RPs' who will advertise and seek to let at least 50% of their available homes in the Partnership local authority areas via this scheme. The Nomination RPs are listed in Appendix 3

## Aims and objectives

By working together, we will strive to

- Provide a consistent approach to allocating available homes of both Partner and Nomination RP properties
- Improve access to safe and secure homes across the Partnership local authority areas
- Provide help for applicants to address barriers to housing and to tackle and prevent homelessness
- Provide more choice in housing to residents in the Partnership local authority areas and help to create sustainable, mixed communities where people choose to live, and
- Ensure that anyone applying for a home is provided with a first-class housing service and a choice of housing which best suits their long-term housing needs

The shared aims and objectives of this policy are

- To meet our legal responsibilities as set out in the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002, Localism Act 2011 and Homelessness reduction Act 2017)
- To assist local authorities in preventing and reducing homelessness
- To let homes of Partner and Nomination RPs in a fair and transparent way by empowering applicants and supporting them to make informed choices about where they want to live.
- To provide bespoke services for people who may find it difficult to apply for housing and offer help in maintaining a successful tenancy
- To improve local and sub regional mobility across the Partnership local authority areas and to encourage balanced and sustainable communities, and
- To make efficient use of the social housing stock in meeting housing needs.

## Relevant legislation

Our policy has been written to meet the legal requirements for the allocation of housing as set out in the [Housing Act 1996](#) Part V1 as amended by the Homeless Act (2002), the [Localism Act 2011](#) and the [Homelessness Reduction Act 2017](#)

This policy also has regard to the following

- [Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities - Guidance - GOV.UK](#)
- [Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England](#)
- [Providing social housing for local people - GOV.UK](#)
- [Right to Move and social housing allocations - GOV.UK](#)
- [Children Act 1989](#) and [Children Act 2004](#)
- [Children \(Leaving Care\) Act 2000](#)
- [Public sector equality duty - GOV.UK](#)
- [The Allocation of Housing and Homelessness \(Eligibility\) \(England\) and Persons subject to Immigration Control \(Housing Authority Accommodation and Homelessness\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2022](#)
- [Improving access to social housing for victims of domestic abuse - GOV.UK](#)
- [The Housing Act 1996 \(Additional Preference for Armed Forces\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#)

This policy will be regularly reviewed and revised in the light of any relevant legislative changes or regulations issued by the Secretary of State and changes to the Codes of Guidance.

We will ensure that our policy meets our legal obligations, in addition, we will ensure that our policy is compatible with local, sub-regional and regional housing strategies, together with existing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategies

The Housing Register (referred to as the 'Register' throughout this document) is a single list of all the applicants who have registered and been accepted on to this scheme.

## Information sharing, confidentiality and data protection

All information received relating to an applicant's housing circumstances will be treated as confidential in accordance with [Data protection: The Data Protection Act - GOV.UK](#) Data Information will only be shared in accordance with our Information Sharing Protocol.

In dealing with an application for housing, we may need to contact other relevant agencies or organisations for further information (eg medical professionals, probation services, former or current landlords, etc). This information may be shared with other Partners as part of the registration process.

Where an applicant has difficulty directly communicating themselves, they can name an advocate (or interpreter) to communicate on their behalf.

## Equality and fairness

We will ensure that our policies and practices do not discriminate, in line with the [Equality Act 2010](#)

We will take measures to ensure that people with disabilities have equal access to housing opportunities.

## **Advice and information**

A copy of this policy is available from any of the Partner offices or can be downloaded from the [Tees Valley Homefinder](#) website

Information about the scheme will be provided in a range of formats and languages to applicants upon request.

Applicants who do not have internet access can visit or call their local housing office and/or local authority for assistance or use the self-services access points (where available)

# Joining the Register

Referred to as 'the Register' throughout this document, this is a single list of all the applicants who have registered and been accepted on to this scheme

Anyone over the age of 16 years can apply to join the register, providing they are 'eligible' (as below).

## Persons who are eligible

- UK nationals who are habitually resident and are 16 years of age or older
- Non-UK nationals with a Right to Remain and access to public funds
- Have a Local Connection in line with Homelessness Legislation ie connection to one of the Partnership local authority areas

## Local connection

Applicants will be counted as having a local connection to Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland or Stockton local authority Partnership areas if they fit into one or more of the following categories:

- Live in the local authority area and have lived there for 6 out of the past 12 months or 3 out of the past 5 years
- They have close family connections with someone who has been resident in the local authority area for a minimum of 5 years. A close family connection is defined as a parent, adult child, grandparent, grandchild, sibling, legal guardian; or
- Their regular place of work is located within the local authority area.

\* Exclusions would apply to accommodation that an individual may have been directed to reside such as Approved Premises, Prison and Bail Hostels. It also would not include Care Homes and Hospitals.

### Exceptions

Applicants leaving the Armed Forces, divorced or separated spouses or civil partners of Service personnel who need to move out of accommodation provided by the Ministry of Defence will also be exempted from local connection requirements. A local connection will be applied across all 3 Partnership local authority areas for these applicants.

Victims of domestic abuse will not need to have a local connection in line with statutory guidance [Improving access to social housing for victims of domestic abuse - GOV.UK](#)

Applicants eligible under the current Homes for Ukraine scheme<sup>1</sup> will have a local connection to the local authority of the host family that they were placed with.

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<sup>1</sup> [Ukraine Family Scheme, Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme \(Homes for Ukraine\) and Ukraine Extension Scheme visa data - GOV.UK](#)

## EEA applicants

The Partnership follows UK Government Guidance in relation to applications from EEA citizens and applicants subject to Immigration Control. A copy of this guidance can be viewed by accessing the following website: [Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England](#)

## Persons who are not eligible

Applicants need to meet the requirements of section 160Z of the [Housing Act 1996](#) which deals with the Immigration status of people who have come to the UK from abroad. For example, we cannot allow people to join the Register who fall into one of the 'ineligible' groups as below:

- People who have no access to public funds eg failed asylum seekers
- People who are subject to immigration control unless they have been granted refugee status, exceptional or indefinite leave to remain or are subject of a sponsorship undertaking
- Some EEA nationals that are not eligible for social housing
- EU nationals required to leave the UK by the UK Government
- An EEA national who has entered the UK as a job seeker or a family member of a job seeker
- An EEA national with an initial right to reside in the first 3 months of residence, or
- An EEA national with a derivative right to reside to the basis of being a non-EEA national who is the primary carer of a British Citizen child or dependant adult where such child or dependent adult would be unable to live in the UK or another EEA state if their carer left the UK (a 'Zambrano carer')

## Non-qualifying for 'unacceptable behaviour' reasons

An applicant, or member of their household, will not qualify/be denied access to the Register if they have been found responsible for unacceptable behaviour, and will be excluded from the Register for 12 months.

At the end of the non-qualification period, the applicant will need to submit a new application which will be assessed by the relevant Partner. If the applicant has rectified the behaviour that originally led to the non-qualification decision, they will be permitted onto the housing register. If the applicant has not demonstrated improvement in their behaviour, their application will not be accepted for a further 12 months.

Some examples of unacceptable behaviour are listed below:

- Convictions for some drug related offences, which would be considered a threat to the community \*
- Convictions for violent offences which would be considered a threat to the community\*
- Convictions for sex offences which would be considered a threat to the community\*
- Any other conviction which we would consider would pose a threat to the community\*
- Perpetrator of domestic abuse-
- Perpetrator of abuse, violence, or threats towards a member of staff
- History of anti-social behaviour
- Outstanding housing debt of more than £1,500.00 which include rent arrears, court costs, rechargeable repairs

- An eviction from accommodation as a result of a breach of the tenancy agreement or licence, and
- Providing false or misleading information

*\*Spent convictions will not be considered during an assessment as per [Guidance on the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 and the Exceptions Order 1975](#)*

Each case will be considered on an individual basis and exceptional circumstances will be considered. Before we decide whether to make an applicant non-qualifying, we will suspend the application while we gather evidence such as references from current or previous landlords, rent statements, photographic evidence of damage, information from Policy/Probation or carry out any other investigation required to make our decision.

When an applicant is made non-qualifying, they will be informed via letter or email of the reasons for this decision, the period of non-qualification and what they can do to rectify the situation. Applicants can request a review of this decision within 21 days of the date of notification. (See Right to Review a Decision on page 14)

During the period of non-qualification, further applications will not be accepted unless the applicant provides evidence to suggest that the reasons for the non-qualification decision are no longer valid.

## **Suspended Applicants**

Applicants who are responsible of less serious behaviour may have their application suspended for a specified time period. This means that applicants will still be allowed to register but would not be able to apply for a home until they have provided evidence of their modified behaviour.

If an applicant is to be suspended, the applicant will be informed of the reasons for the decision, the period of suspension and what can be done to rectify the situation. See Appendix 5 for some examples of suspension reasons. Applicants can request a review of this decision within 21 days of the date of notification (See Right to Review a Decision on page 14)

## **Cases of Serious Anti-Social Behaviour**

Due to the impact of anti-social behaviour and the impact this has on communities, applicants will be excluded from joining the register for 36 months when the applicant or any member of the household who has been served notice, evicted or has been subject to a property closure due to anti-social behaviour.

If the applicant has rectified the behaviour that originally led to the non-qualification decision, they will be permitted onto the housing register. If the applicant has not demonstrated improvement in their behaviour, their application will not be accepted for a further 12 months.

## **Joint applications**

Joint applications will be accepted provided all applicants are eligible, aged 16 years or over and intend to occupy the property together as their only or main home. The joint application will be assessed and placed in a Priority Band using the details of the household member with the greatest housing need.

## **Multiple applications**

Multiple applications are not allowed. A person can only be on the Register with one 'Live' account.

## **Re-applying for housing**

If an applicant has been housed via the scheme and then wishes to move to an alternative property, they would need to register a new application which will be assessed based on their new circumstances.

Applicants who already rent from one of the Partners (a current tenant) can register to move and will have their housing application considered by the relevant Partner landlord and may be subject to checks in line with their Tenancy Management Policies.

## **Applications from employees/members and their close relatives**

Applications can be accepted from employees, board/elected members and their close relatives of the Partnership, provided they meet the eligibility criteria set out within this document. Applicants must tell us about any such relationship at the time of registration. To ensure fairness, checks will be completed before any offer is made to people in this category.

## **Giving false information or deliberately withholding information**

*It is a criminal offence for anyone applying for housing from a housing authority to knowingly or recklessly give false information which is relevant to their housing application (Section 171 of the Housing Act 1996).*

*Anyone found guilty of such an offence may be fined up to £5,000 and could lose the tenancy if they have been rehoused as a result of providing false information or deliberately withholding information eg withholding criminal convictions, falsifying documents, etc*

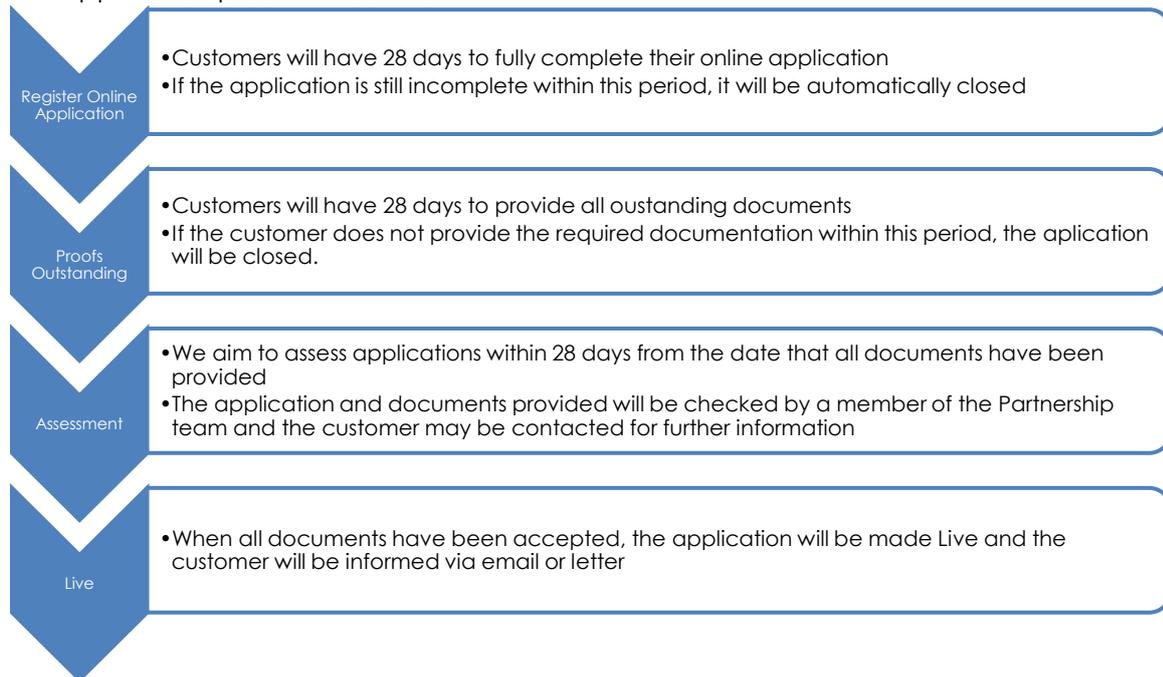
*The Partnership will consider taking further action against a professional/voluntary organisation that provides false information or deliberately withholds information on behalf of an applicant they are representing.*

*Applicants who have yet to be rehoused and are found to have given false information will be made non-qualifying for 12 months and will need to submit a new application after this time*

## How to apply

Applications can be registered online by accessing the digital letting platform called [Tees Valley Homefinder](#) or by contacting one of the Partners for an appointment. Contact details can be found at Appendix 1

The application process is as follows...



Once the applicant has received notification that their application is **Live**, they will be able to apply for advertised homes for rent. Our adverts will include good quality information about the property features to allow applicants to make informed choices about which homes they would like to live in. The information on the [Tees Valley Homefinder](#) lettings platform will also include links to other useful information.

### Changes in circumstances

*It is the responsibility of the applicant (or their advocate) to tell us about any change in applicant/household circumstances. Failure to do so could affect any future housing offer made to you*

The following are examples of a change in circumstances that could affect your application or affect how Landlords can contact you. Note: You may be asked to confirm if there are any change of circumstances at the point of offer.

- Change of address
- Change of work location – where used for local connection
- Change of family address – where used for local connection
- Immigration status
- Adding/removal of household member from application
- Conviction status

- Change of email address/contact telephone number

## Keeping the Partnership's Housing Register up to date

To assist the Partnership with keeping the housing register up to date, applicants will be asked to renew their application each year via the Tees Valley Homefinder site to confirm they wish to remain on the register.

Failure to respond to this review will result in the closure of their application. If closed for this reason, the applicant has 28 days in which to request their application is reinstated.<sup>2</sup>

## Closing applications

Applications will be closed in the following circumstances:

- Notification that the sole applicant is now deceased
- No response to housing register annual renewal/loss of contact
- Failure to provide requested documents
- Failure to complete application after 28 days (including provision of documents)
- Applicant is assessed as non-qualifying
- Applicant is classed as not Eligible
- Loss of contact with applicant
- Closed at request of applicant
- Applicant advises that they no longer require housing

## Deliberate worsening of circumstances

Any applicant who deliberately worsens their housing circumstances will have any Priority band removed and will be placed into Band 4 for a period of 6 months

Examples of deliberate worsening of circumstances may include (*this list is not exhaustive*):

- Giving up a tenancy/secure housing for no good reason
- Moving from a property that has been adapted for the needs of someone in the household to a property that does not have the required adaptations, or
- Moving into a property that is too small or large to meet the needs of the household.

The applicant can ask for a re-assessment of their Band after 6 months but would be responsible for providing evidence to support their current housing needs.

## Right to Review a Decision

Applicants have the following rights, if they ask, about decisions made about their housing application on the following

- Their Band award
- Reason for being overlooked for a property
- Reason for suspension
- Reason for non-qualification
- Eligibility for a property

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<sup>2</sup> **Note:** The email address relating to TV Homefinder may be from Housing Jigsaw ie @housingjigsaw.co.uk. Recommendation to check the Junk mailbox also.

Applicants should request a review in writing within 21 days of being notified of a decision. The review will be carried out by the Partner organisation that received the original application in line with their review procedure and a determination will be made within 56 days.

Applicants may also be entitled to a further review by the relevant local authority, and they will be informed where this is the case.

The applicant must provide supporting evidence to demonstrate, to the Partner organisation, why they believe the decision is not valid.

Contact details can be seen in Appendix 1

# Assessing Housing Need

## Legal background

### Reasonable Preference

To ensure applicants with the highest level of housing need are given preference, we have considered the categories of people that must be given 'reasonable preference' by local authorities, as set out in S166A of the Housing Act 1996 and the Homelessness Act 2002. These are:

- People who are statutorily homeless
- People who the local authority owe certain homeless duties to
- People who live in insanitary or overcrowded homes
- People who need to move for medical or welfare reasons, and
- People who need to move to avoid hardship

### Additional Preference

#### HM Armed Forces Personnel

Armed Forces who have urgent housing needs. Additional preference means they may receive the highest Priority band award – ie Band 1<sup>+</sup>

We have taken into account Government guidance from [The Housing Act 1996 \(Additional Preference for Armed Forces\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#) Statutory Instrument No. 2989 that came into force of 30/11/2012 and the updated [Guidance: Improving access to social housing for members of the Armed Forces - GOV.UK](#) This allows us to give an additional preference to people who have served in the Armed Forces.

This additional preference will be awarded to members of the HM Armed Forces community (serving or has formerly served in the regular reserve forces; a bereaved spouse/civil partner) who are identified as having an urgent need for housing within 5 years of discharge.

## The Priority Bands

The scheme has 4 bands. All eligible applicants will have their circumstances assessed and will be placed in the relevant band, according to their 'evidenced' level of housing need.

### Band 1<sup>+</sup>

#### **Decants: People living within the Partnership local authority areas who are losing their home due to demolition or regeneration**

This includes tenants of council, registered providers or private landlords and owner occupiers living within the boundary of a defined regeneration area who are required to move home, provided they have lived there, as their sole or main home, for at least 12 months. Proof of residency will be requested. Affected residents will be contacted directly by their landlord

Applicants will be awarded Band 1<sup>+</sup> priority for the local authority area where they live.

### **People leaving HM Armed Forces community**

Applicants leaving the HM Armed Forces (as defined above) with an urgent need for housing would be provided with the highest priority banding (Band 1<sup>+</sup>). These applicants will be assessed by the Local Authority Homelessness Teams before this priority will be awarded.

Evidence of discharge papers dated within the last 5 years and risk of homelessness will be required.

## **Band 1 – Urgent Housing Need**

### **Applicants owed a Main Duty and is in Temporary Accommodation**

Applicants assessed by a Partner Local Authority in accordance with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the Housing Act 1996, you are owed a main duty or a relief duty *and* are owed an emergency accommodation duty due to being in a priority need category.

### **People at risk of Domestic Abuse**

Victims of domestic abuse (DA) who have lost/or are at risk of losing their accommodation due to violence or the threat of violence.

NOTE: When looking at safety, moves within the same or neighbouring postcode would not be considered as this may not sufficiently reduce the risk of DA.

People in this category may receive a direct offer of housing

### **Care Leavers who are Ready for Independent Living**

As defined by the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 where a child is confirmed by the relevant Local Authority as ready for independent living, has an ongoing support plan in place and in need of urgent rehousing.

Referrals will only be accepted from the allocated Social Worker or Care Leavers Team

### **Emergency Medical**

This banding will only be awarded to applicants with an emergency housing need due to medical problems which are exacerbated by their current housing situation eg people discharged from hospital or care home where their housing is deemed unsuitable and cannot be made suitable through adaptations

Each case will be assessed individually, and applicants will be referred to the relevant Local Authority Team for assessment by a Social Worker or secondary Mental Health Service before and band award is made under this category. The assessment does not review the applicant's health but how their accommodation affects their health or welfare ie **the impact of the property will be assessed and not the prognosis of the illness.**

### **Child Protection**

Households where the current accommodation has been identified within a formal Child Protection Plan as a significant contributory factor or serious risk to the wellbeing of a child/children within the household and all other avenues to rectify have been exhausted.

Referrals will only be accepted from the allocated Social Worker.

## **Band 2 – High Housing Need**

### **People who need to move on urgent medical grounds**

People who have been assessed by one of the Partnership as requiring alternative accommodation due to their medical condition (physical or mental health) and/or disability is having a significantly detrimental effect on their ability to live in their current home.

The applicant would need to complete a medical referral form, which will be provided upon request, and provide supporting documentation or assessment from relevant healthcare professionals before any band award would be considered (*Note: a letter from a GP is not considered sufficient*). The information you provide may be reviewed by an Occupational Therapist before any Band award is made under this category.

Applicants who live outside the Partnership local authority areas and have a local connection will be required to provide an Occupational Therapy assessment from their own Local Authority before being considered for a Medical Banding. This must include the name and contact details of the Occupational Therapist.

### **People assessed as ready for Independent Living**

People who need to move as part of an agreed plan to re-integrate into the community eg people leaving supported and temporary housing projects.

People with learning disabilities who are required to move to receive support or where their current housing is having a detrimental effect on their quality of life or ability to live independently.

Applicants will need to provide confirmation that they are ready for independent living from the accommodation provider before this banding can be awarded.

This priority will not be awarded for applicants living with family or friends.

### **A household with a Child in Need**

As defined in the Children's Act 1989, where a formal referral has been made by Social Services with the aim of safeguarding the welfare of the child or children and accommodation has been highlighted as a key factor and all other options have been exhausted.

### **Care Leaver - seeking accommodation**

A child leaving care of the local authority under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

This priority only applies to a Care Leavers first social housing tenancy, who do not qualify for Band 1 status.

### **Adoptive/Foster Carer/Special Guardianship**

Applicants who need to move due to their current accommodation being unsuitable or who need to move to a different location to safeguard or promote the well-being of the child/ren they have adopted/foster are planning to adopt/foster/in foster care or, have guardianship where a family court order places a child or young person in long-term care with someone other than their parent(s) (Adoption and Children Act 2002).

Evidence to confirm their adoptive/foster/guardianship status and ongoing support will be required from the local authority's Adoption/Fostering Service

### **People living in unacceptable housing conditions**

People who are living in Private rented accommodation or in Owner Occupation but are unable to maintain their home to a safe standard will be referred to the relevant Partnership local authority team to carry out a property inspection. This banding will be awarded where the assessment has concluded that the property contains unacceptable hazards (defined as Category 1 Hazards) and it has a duty to take action.

Tenants who are in Social Rented homes must first pursue issues relating to property conditions with their landlords to have the issues rectified. These tenants will only be considered under this category if they have exhausted the official complaints procedure with their landlord and there is no other action that can be taken to rectify the adverse property conditions.

Applicants who are awarded a banding in this category must engage with the Local Authority Team and allow access for agreed repairs to be completed by their landlord (and/or the appointed contactors) or risk the removal of this banding.

### **Tenants of North Star and Beyond Housing that are under-occupying their accommodation by 2 or more bedrooms**

Calculation for under-occupancy will be based on the number of people within the household and the criteria set out by the [Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England](#). This band will only be awarded to current tenants of Beyond Housing or North Star

Applicants will only be considered for properties that fit their household's identified need.

### **Applicants Owed a Prevention or Relief Duty but do not qualify for Band 1 category**

Applicants assessed by a Partner Local Authority in accordance with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the Housing Act 1996, and you are owed a prevention duty or relief duty but do not meet the criteria for Band 1.

An example of this would be someone who has been determined as owed a homeless relief duty, but do not have a priority need, in accordance with the above legislation.

### **Acute over-crowding by 2 bedrooms or more**

Overcrowding will be assessed on the number of people within the household and according to the best use of bedrooms and sleeping spaces available as per the [Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England](#)

Applicants will be required to provide evidence of overcrowding before any Band award will be made under this category

## **Band 3 - Medium housing need**

### **People who need to move due to a high medical need**

People who have been assessed by one of the Partnership as having a medical condition (physical or mental health) and/or disability where a move to alternative accommodation would significantly improve their health.

The applicant would need to complete a medical referral form, which will be provided upon request, and provide supporting documentation or assessment from relevant healthcare professionals before any band award would be considered (*Note: a letter from a GP is not considered sufficient*). The information you provide may be reviewed by an Occupational Therapist before any Band award is made under this category.

The relevant Partnership local authority may refer the applicant for assessment by an Occupational Therapist before any Band award is made under this category

Applicants who live outside the Partnership local authority areas and have a local connection will be required to provide an Occupational Therapy assessment from their own Local Authority before being considered for a Medical Banding. This must include the name and contact details of the Occupational Therapist.

### **People living in overcrowded conditions by 1 bed bedroom**

Overcrowding is assessed on the number of people within the household and according to the best use of bedrooms and sleeping spaces available as per the [Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England](#)

### **Tenants of North Star and Beyond Housing that are under-occupying their accommodation by 1 bedroom**

Calculation for under-occupancy will be based on the number of people within the household and the criteria set out by the [Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England](#)

Applicants will only be considered for properties that fit their household's identified need.

This banding will only be awarded to current tenants of Beyond Housing or North Star.

### **People who need to move on hardship grounds**

A hardship award will be considered for applicants;

- Suffering financial hardship eg if their income is insufficient to cover the costs of their current home. A financial assessment will be carried out considering rent, utility costs, service charges and council tax.
- Who need to move for employment or education where failure to relocate is causing or would cause hardship.
- Who need to be nearer to family or friends to give or receive support and it would be unreasonable for them to commute from their existing home.

The relevant Partnership local authority will complete a Hardship Assessment before any Band award is made under this category. Any band awarded may only be given for a move to a specified area.

### **People sharing facilities with persons not of the same household**

People sharing facilities with other people who are not members of the same household, for example:

- People living in houses in multiple occupation (HMO)
- Bed & Breakfast
- Hostel, and
- Applicants who continue to live together following a relationship breakdown

Note: Gypsy and Traveller communities will be considered under this category if they are sharing communal facilities eg showers or WC whilst residing on an authorised site.

Applicants living with family or friends will not be awarded this priority under this category.

### **Intentionally Homeless/No Priority Need**

Applicants assessed by a Partner Local Authority in accordance with the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 and the Housing Act 1996, you have been found to be intentionally homeless or not in priority need at the end of your 56-day relief period.

In such cases, applicants will remain in Band 3 for a maximum of 6 months in acknowledgement of their ongoing housing need if they remain homeless.

### **People leaving the HM Forces community with no urgent housing need**

Applicants leaving the HM Armed Forces community, as defined in the [About the Covenant - Armed Forces Covenant](#) within the last 5 years with no urgent need will be allocated Band 3 Priority on their first social housing tenancy only

Applicants will be required to provide discharge documentation

## **Band 4 – Low Housing Need**

This band will be awarded to the following applicants:

- Applicants whose current home is adequate to meet their basic housing needs in terms of lifestyle, size, design and location, or
- Applicants who have refused a reasonable offer of accommodation or worsened their own circumstances

Applicants may also be placed in this Band to enable the applicant to continue to 'bid' for properties until further assessment is completed.

## Reviewing Applicants in Priority Bands

Applicants who are awarded Band 1, 2 or 3 will be required to actively seek rehousing and housing applications will be monitored to ensure applicants are placing bids on all suitable properties that are advertised on Tees Valley Homefinder.

Applicants will be given up to 6 months to place bids on the Tees Valley Home Finder system on properties that meet the assessed needs of their household. Applicants who do not place bids may be placed on automated bidding after this period time period.

If the applicant is offered a property that meets their assessed need, regardless if this is an autobid, and subsequently refuses a reasonable offer, they will have their priority banding removed and be placed into Band 4 for a minimum period of 6 months after which you will need to apply for a reassessment of your circumstances – unless there is evidence of a significant change in that period.

Customers can request a right to review the decision – see page 13

Applicants must ensure that they are considering as wide an area as possible.

## Senior management discretion

**Stockton and Middlesbrough local authority areas only:** Whilst it is expected that the majority of allocations will be made following the allocations scheme rules according to priority banding, there may be exceptional circumstances where the only way an exceptionally urgent housing need can be resolved is by using senior management discretion. It is important, in fairness to all applicants, that these discretionary powers are used in genuinely exceptional cases.

Within the boroughs of Middlesbrough and Stockton these cases will be reviewed on an individual basis by a senior officer in the Local Authority Housing Service Team and a priority banding may result.

*Note: Within the borough of Redcar and Cleveland there is a quota system in operation which ensures that a proportion of lettings are made available to applicants within each band. The category of Management Discretion is therefore not applicable within Redcar and Cleveland.*

# How the Tees Valley Homefinder system works

## Advertising properties

Available properties will be advertised daily on the scheme's interactive lettings platform.

Adverts will be clearly labelled to show the property features, local neighbourhood information and the types of households that can apply. A photograph will usually be included.

Adverts will clearly state who is eligible to apply for them and eligibility criteria will be either 'Essential' or 'Priority'. The essential criteria must be met for the applicant to be able to place a bid on a property advert.

Eligibility criteria is used to determine who can or cannot bid for an advertised property. We use the following types of eligibility criteria on our property adverts:

- Age – Sometimes properties may be in schemes that have an age criteria that applicants must meet in order to be able to bid. For example, a designated older person accommodation which usually requires applicants to be aged 55+ years
- Bedroom Need – Properties advertised on Tees Valley HomeFinder will be allocated by bedroom need (see Appendix 4 for how we calculate this) as determined by the type and size of an applicant's household.
- Adapted or Ground floor need properties – Properties that have features such as level access showers, ramps etc may be restricted to applicants who have an assessed need for these adaptations.
- Family Type Accommodation – Landlords may specify that the property they are advertising is suitable for families with children

Note: The use of the eligibility criteria is defined by the landlord advertising the property.

Properties are sometimes advertised during an existing tenant's 4 weeks termination period and may be withdrawn if the tenant changes their mind about moving. In this case, the advert will be withdrawn

Where there is more than one property of the same description in the same location, sometimes only one advert will be displayed. The property advert will show that there are X properties of the same type available at the same time eg if there are 2 or more flats available in a block or where there are several new build properties on the same development.

## Shortlisting and selection

At the end of the advertising period, a shortlist of applicants will be produced. An applicant's final queue position will only be known when the advert closes.

Applications will usually be placed in Band order (ranked 1-4). If there are two or more applicants with the same Band, the date they entered the Band (their priority date) will be used as a tiebreaker.

Some Partnership RPs may use a quota system, which means that a percentage of their properties may give preference to Band 2, 3 or 4 first. This will be made clear within the property advert. This allows for applicants across the range of bands to have a chance of securing accommodation, including those in non-priority bands.

Local Lettings Policies (see below) may also affect the order of the shortlist.

## **Viewing properties and refusing offers**

When an applicant has been selected for an offer, the landlord will contact them to arrange to view the property before deciding to accept it. Sometimes, more than one applicant may be invited to view.

If an applicant who has been given a Priority Band 1, 2 or 3 for housing refuses an offer that meets their identified housing need (ie is appropriate and suitable) and this refusal is deemed unreasonable, they may have their priority removed and be placed in Band 4 for a period of 6 months.

## **Time allowed for accepting an offer**

Applicants will usually be allowed 2 working days to respond to an offer, but individual circumstances will be considered and applicants with specific need will be given more time eg if an assessment for adaptation work is needed or someone with a disability needs more time to consider the offer made.

## **Additional Information**

### **Local lettings policies**

In some cases, a property may be advertised with a Local Lettings Policy (LLP). This means that there may be certain qualities or characteristics that the landlord will be looking for when allocating the property. A quota may also be set giving preference to specific Bands.

An LLP is usually developed between the landlord, local authority and other agencies in order to achieve a specific aim for an area/estate or new build development eg

- Where there is an issue with anti-social behaviour on a estate, and a LPP can be used to ensure that no more households with a history of ASB are housed there until the area stabilises, or
- For new build developments, an LLP can help create a mixed and balanced community on an estate.

Where a property has an LLP in place, we will state this within the advert and make it available for the applicant to read.

### **Making direct offers without advertising**

Alongside applicants applying for advertised properties on the system, there will also be circumstances in which some applicants will receive a direct offer from an RP.

A direct offer may be made in exceptional circumstances, eg

- Applicants being assessed by the local authority as being owed a homelessness duty
- People who need emergency accommodation due to fire, flood or major repairs
- Ex-offender subject to Multi Agency Public protection Agency (MAPPA), where a full support package is in place with other relevant statutory and voluntary agencies to enable them to be returned to the community, and
- People who are at imminent risk of violence or a threat of violence eg victims of domestic abuse, hate crimes or through a witness protection scheme

If an applicant refuses a direct offer of accommodation, they will only be given a second offer in exceptional circumstances

### **Affordability checks**

Applicants may be subject to affordability checks when they are offered a property to ensure that it is affordable for them. If a property is found to be unaffordable, the offer will be withdrawn.

## Appendix 1

# Lettings Partnership Contact Information

Any queries in relation to this policy can be directed to Partner organisation via the contact details as below:



Letting & Nominations Team (for Middlesbrough & Stockton)  
Dunedin House  
Columbia Drive  
Thornaby  
Stockton on Tees  
TS17 6BJ  
01 642 524345  
[tvlp@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:tvlp@stockton.gov.uk)



Letting & Nominations Team (for Middlesbrough & Stockton)  
Dunedin House  
Columbia Drive  
Thornaby  
Stockton on Tees  
TS17 6BJ  
01 642 524345  
[tvlp@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:tvlp@stockton.gov.uk)



Housing Advice & Information Team  
Seaford House  
Kirkleatham Street  
Redcar  
TS10 1SP  
01287 612444  
[Housingclientservices@redcar-cleveland.gov.uk](mailto:Housingclientservices@redcar-cleveland.gov.uk)



PO Box 138  
Blyth  
NE24 9FL  
0345 0655656  
[enquiries@beondhousing.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@beondhousing.co.uk)  
[www.beyondhousing.co.uk](http://www.beyondhousing.co.uk)



Endeavour House  
St Marks Court  
Thornaby  
Stockton on Tees  
TS17 6QN  
[customerservices@northstar.co.uk](mailto:customerservices@northstar.co.uk)  
[www.northstar.co.uk](http://www.northstar.co.uk)

## Appendix 2

# Local Authority Homeless Team Contact Information



Middlesbrough House  
50 Corporation Road  
Middlesbrough  
TS1 2RH  
01642 726800  
[housingsolutions@middlesbrough.gov.uk](mailto:housingsolutions@middlesbrough.gov.uk)



Dunedin House  
Columbia Drive  
Thornaby  
Stockton on Tees  
TS17 6BJ  
01642 528389  
[Housing.Options@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:Housing.Options@stockton.gov.uk)



Housing Advice & Information Team  
Seafield House  
Kirkleatham Street  
Redcar  
TS10 1SP  
01287 612444  
[Housingclientservices@redcar-cleveland.gov.uk](mailto:Housingclientservices@redcar-cleveland.gov.uk)

## Appendix 3

# Non-Partner (Nomination) Registered Providers

Detailed below are Registered Providers with property across the Partnership local authority areas who will advertise and seek to let at least 50% of their available homes using this Lettings scheme

- Anchor-Hanover Group [Anchor - Later Life is for Living](#)
- Believe Housing [housing association in durham and the north east | believe housing](#)
- Bernicia [Homes to rent | Bernicia Homes](#)
- Broadacres Housing Association [Broadacres Housing Association](#)
- Habinteg Housing Association [Home | Habinteg Housing Association](#)
- Hellens Residential [Hellens Residential | Affordable Homes to Buy and Rent](#)
- Home Group [Home Group | Welcome to Home Group](#)
- Karbon Homes [Karbon Homes: Providing a strong foundation for life](#)
- Livin Housing [Home | www.livin.co.uk](#)
- Newalk CIC [New Walk CIC – Social housing for vulnerable people in Teesside](#)
- Places for People [We are Places for People, the UK's leading social enterprise - Places for People](#)
- Railway Housing Association [Railway Housing Association: providing homes for over 100 years](#)

Please note that Appendix 3 will be updated on a regular basis to reflect new Registered Providers who may acquire existing or build new homes across the Partnership local authority areas.

## Appendix 4

# Calculating Bedroom Need

Household bedrooms will be assessed based upon the number of people within the household and according to best use of the bedrooms to reflect the criteria set out under the DWP Bedroom standard

One bedroom will be considered suitable for:

- One adult/adult couple
- Two children of the same sex under the age of 16 years
- Two children under the age of 10 years regardless of sex
- Any other person aged 16 years or over, or
- Any other child that cannot be matched with the above eg who cannot share due to a medical condition/disability

This assessment does not include living room space unless there is a second living room which could be used as a bedroom and doesn't breach health and safety standards. Where a bedroom is being used for another purpose eg a study or toy room, its original function as a bedroom will be used in assessing the level of occupation/overcrowding.

The main householder(s) will be expected to share a bedroom with a child under the age of 12 months old.

Applicants who have more or less bedrooms than they need will be assessed for under occupation or overcrowding (for tenants of Beyond Housing or North Star) as per the banding categories details in this Policy.

As a general rule, singles and couples will only be eligible for 1 bed accommodation on [Tees Valley Homefinder](#).

## Additional Bedrooms

There may be some circumstances where a household is allowed an extra bedroom as detailed below:

- Health reasons which mean that the main and joint applicant are not able to share a room or for an additional room to store essential medical equipment
- Bedroom for an overnight carer, or
- Joint custody or overnight access to a child/children

Where one of the above applies, supporting information will be required and an affordability check may need to be completed to make sure the applicant can afford the additional bedroom (under occupation payment).

Applicants will also be subject to an affordability check to ensure they can afford the additional bedroom(s).

Where applicants qualify for overnight access only to a child/ren they may not be eligible to bid on 'Family Type' accommodation and will need to provide evidence to support this request

## Appendix 5

# Non-Qualifying/Suspended applications

If an applicant is to be suspended, meaning they are still able to Register but will be unable to apply for a home, the applicant will be informed of the reasons for the decision, the period of suspension and what can be done to rectify the situation. Each case will be considered on an individual basis where exceptional circumstances will be considered.

Applicants are expected to try to modify their behaviour before they can apply for available properties. If the applicant is suspended on the basis of non-payment of former arrears or have failed to comply with a regular repayment agreement, the suspension will not be removed. After the initial suspension period, the application will be reviewed.

Convictions that have been 'spent' as defined in the [Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974](#) cannot be taken into account when assessing an application under this scheme.

The table below gives some examples of non-qualification/suspension periods which may be implemented for applicants with housing debt and low level anti-social behaviour (ASB).

*Note: Housing debt includes rent arrears, court costs, recharges due to repairs, damages or clearances of rubbish, etc. During any period of suspension or non-qualification, applicants will be required to put in place a repayment plan and maintain **consecutive** repayments for the period of suspension or non-qualification, or until the outstanding debt has been repaid in full. Any instances of missed payments will result in the required repayment period being recommenced.*

BEHAVIOUR	CONSEQUENCE
Housing debt of £1,500 or more where no effort has been made to repay	Non-qualifying for 12 months
Housing debt of £1,500 or more where the applicant is making repayments	Suspended for 12 months or less if the debt has been repaid in full
Housing debt between £500 and £1,499 where the applicant is making repayments	Suspended for 6 months or less if the debt has been repaid in full
Housing debt of less than £500 where the applicant is making repayments	Suspended for 3 months or less if the debt has been repaid in full
Moderate to low level anti-social behaviour	Suspended for 3 to 6 months