

## **NORTH SOMERSET COUNCIL**

**DECISION OF COUNCILLOR AP REES  
EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING, HIGHWAYS,  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING  
WITH ADVICE FROM THE  
DIRECTOR, PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES**



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### **DECISION NO: P&C 57**

#### **SUBJECT: AMENDMENTS TO THE HOMECHOICE POLICY**

##### **Background:**

The HomeChoice North Somerset Lettings and Assessment Policy is the vehicle that the Council and its partners use to allocate social housing in the district. The policy was reviewed in 2012 following the enactment of the Localism Act 2012 and was agreed by the Executive in April 2013.

In the light of the operation of the policy to date a number of small revisions are now proposed as summarised below and set out in appendix 1.

##### **3.4.7 Page 14 Band B: Supported Housing 'Move-On'**

The current policy awards Band B to applicants living in a Supporting People funded supported housing project in North Somerset and seeking to 'move-on' into independent accommodation. This does not apply where the placement is to receive treatment or rehabilitation of any kind for any kind of dependency. It also only applies to applicants who met the HomeChoice local connection criteria as set out in paragraph 2.2.1 of the policy at the time of their acceptance into the project. In order to qualify for the award of Band B the Project Manager (of the supported housing project) must confirm in writing that the applicant is ready for such a move and has acquired reasonable skills to sustain a tenancy or has the necessary support in place to do so.

The council's Adults' Support and Safeguarding service provides services for a wide range of people living in care settings outside of Supporting People funded supported housing for example: older people; people with learning disabilities living in residential care homes. A key focus of the Adults' Support and Safeguarding Service is to support service users to live independently including enabling service users to move from residential care to independent living. Currently such service users would not receive a Band B award under the Homechoice policy on the basis of needing to move-on as they do not live in Supporting People funded schemes. It is proposed to extend this section of the HomeChoice policy so that service users seeking to 'move-on' into independent accommodation from residential or nursing care settings would receive a Band B award. This would not apply where the placement is to receive treatment or rehabilitation of any kind for any kind of dependency. It would also only apply to applicants who met the HomeChoice local connection criteria as set out in paragraph 2.2.1 of the policy at the time of their move into their current accommodation. In order to qualify for the award the Adults' Support and Safeguarding team leader responsible for that service user would need to confirm in writing that the applicant is ready to live independently and has the necessary care and support in place to do so.

## 4.1 Page 19 Bedroom Entitlement

The current policy allows some applicants to bid for properties one bedroom larger than in some circumstances they may receive Housing Benefit for, to help prevent future overcrowding as families grow after obtaining a social housing tenancy. For example, a household with two children of opposite sexes under 10 can bid for either a 2 or 3-bedroom house, but would be subject to the Housing Benefit under occupancy charge if allocated a 3 bedroomed home, which would result in the Housing Benefit payable being reduced by 14%.

In the light of the financial impact of some tenants receiving less Housing Benefit than the rent due, two Registered Providers (who account for 85% of the social housing stock in North Somerset) have amended their own lettings policies to not accept households who under-occupy. The difference between two Registered Providers policies and the HomeChoice policy is causing considerable confusion for some applicants and means that they are allowed to bid for a property but which the Registered Provider cannot allocate to them (this information is made clear in the advert for the property).

Following consultation with partner Registered Providers it is proposed to amend the HomeChoice bedroom entitlement policy to align with the Housing Benefit bedroom calculation, namely one bedroom for:

- each adult couple;
- each other person over 16;
- two children of the same sex under 16;
- two children under 10, regardless of their sex;
- a disabled child who cannot share a bedroom with another child because of their disability;
- any other single child left;
- an overnight carer for a disabled person.

Any applicants needing more than 4 bedrooms will be entitled to bid for 4-bedroom or 5-bedroom properties.

Partner Registered Providers would retain the discretion to advertise properties outside of these criteria and permit under occupation where necessary (for example, should they wish to allow applicants with a 1-bedroom need to bid for a harder-to-let 2-bedroom flat or sheltered housing). Where this occurs, partner landlords may continue to prioritise applicants with a larger minimum bedroom entitlement within the same band. This decision would be made by the landlord at the point of advertising the property

**Decision:** To agree the amendments to the HomeChoice Policy as set out in Appendix 1.

**Reasons:** As set out above.

**Other Alternatives Considered:** Not changing the policy would mean that the aims of the changes could not be achieved.

**Financial Implications:** Enabling service users to move from Residential or Nursing accommodation may reduce the cost to the council of providing care in the future

**Implications for Future Years:** None

Reviewed: .....  
Mark Hughes, Head of Housing and Directorate Governance

Dated: .....

Signed: .....  
Councillor Ap Rees  
Executive Member for Planning, Highways, Transport, Economic Development and  
Housing

Dated: .....

Confirmation of advice given:

Signed: .....  
Sheila Smith, Director, People and Communities  
Dated:.....

# **Appendix 1 - Proposed amendments to the HomeChoice Policy**

## **Current Policy**

### **3 ASSESSMENT OF HOUSING NEED**

#### **3.4 Band B**

##### **3.4.7 Supported Housing 'Move-On'**

Applicants who live within a Supporting People funded Supported Housing project in North Somerset and are seeking to 'move-on' into independent accommodation. This does not apply to applicants whose placement is to receive treatment or rehabilitation of any kind for any kind of dependency. This only applies to applicants who met the local connection criteria in paragraph 2.2.1 at the time of the original referral and acceptance into the supported housing project.

The Project Manager must confirm in writing that the applicant is ready for such a move and has acquired reasonable skills to sustain a tenancy or has the necessary support in place to do so. The case will then be considered by the HomeChoice Manager as to whether the applicant meets all the criteria to move into Band B.

### **4 BEDROOM ENTITLEMENT**

#### **4.1 Policy**

- 4.1.1 Applicants will be able to bid for selected properties, which match the needs of their household.
- 4.1.2 Overleaf are some typical examples of family types together with the size of accommodation they would generally be eligible for. There may be discretion over the size of some properties where a live in carer requires a separate bedroom.
- 4.1.3 Children are considered to be resident where they stay with the applicant for more than four nights per week or seven nights each fortnight. This is subject to satisfactory evidence being submitted to support access/residency right.
- 4.1.4 Non-dependent visiting children will not be considered part of the household for bedroom entitlement calculations.
- 4.1.5 For applicants who are pregnant, the unborn child will be classed as a child for the purposes of property size eligibility only. Where a household already has another child (other children), the unborn child will be classed

as the same sex as the youngest child. Unborn children do **not** count towards whether an applicant is lacking in bedrooms.

- 4.1.6 Houses with their own gardens will be restricted to applicants with resident children under 16, and some upper floor properties will be restricted to applicants without children under 10. This decision will be made by the landlord at the point of advertising the property.
- 4.1.7 Where applicants are allowed to bid for a property that is larger than their minimum bedroom entitlement, partner landlords may prioritise applicants with a larger minimum bedroom entitlement within the same band. This decision will be made by the landlord at the point of advertising the property.

Household composition	Assessed property size and type						
	Min Bed	Max Bed	Bedsit	Flat	Maisonette	Bungalow	House
Single applicant	1	1	✓	✓		✓	
Childless couple	1	2	✓	✓		✓	
Childless siblings or friends	2	2		✓	✓		
Applicants requiring sheltered accommodation	1	2	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Household with non dependant visiting children.	1	2		✓	✓		
Household with one child 16 years of age or over	2	2		✓	✓		
Household with 2 children all 16 years of age or over	2	3		✓	✓		
Household with 3 children all 16 years of age or over	3	3		✓	✓		
Household with 1 child under 16 years of age	2	2		✓	✓	✓	✓
Household with 2 children of the same sex, with one or more child under the age of 16	2	3		✓	✓	✓	✓
Household with 2 children of different sexes under 10 years of age	2	3		✓	✓	✓	✓
Household with 2 children of different sexes, with one or more child between 10 and 16 years of age	3	3		✓	✓	✓	✓
Household with 3 children, with one or more child under the age of 16	3	4		✓	✓	✓	✓
Household with 4 children, with one or more child under the age of 16.	3	4			✓	✓	✓
Household with 5 or more children, with one or more child under the age of 16	4	5					✓

## **Proposed Policy**

### **3 ASSESSMENT OF HOUSING NEED**

#### **3.4 Band B**

##### **3.4.7 Supported Housing 'Move-On'**

i. Applicants who live within a Supporting People funded Supported Housing project in North Somerset and are seeking to 'move-on' into independent accommodation. This does not apply to applicants whose placement is to receive treatment or rehabilitation of any kind for any kind of dependency. This only applies to applicants who met the local connection criteria in paragraph 2.2.1 at the time of the original referral and acceptance into the supported housing project.

The Project Manager must confirm in writing that the applicant is ready for such a move and has acquired reasonable skills to sustain a tenancy or has the necessary support in place to do so. The case will then be considered by the HomeChoice Manager as to whether the applicant meets all the criteria to move into Band B.

ii. Applicants who live in residential or nursing care settings and are seeking to 'move-on' into independent accommodation. This does not apply to applicants whose placement is to receive treatment or rehabilitation of any kind for any kind of dependency. This only applies to applicants who met the local connection criteria as set out in paragraph 2.2.1 at the time of their move into their current accommodation.

The Adults' Support and Safeguarding team leader responsible for that service user must confirm in writing that the applicant is ready to live independently and has the necessary care and support in place to do so. The case will then be considered by the HomeChoice Manager as to whether the applicant meets all the criteria to move into Band B.

### **4 BEDROOM ENTITLEMENT**

#### **4.1 Policy**

4.1.1 Applicants will be able to bid for selected properties, which match the needs of their household in line with the Housing Benefit Regulations<sup>1</sup>, namely one bedroom for:

- each adult couple;
- each other person over 16;
- two resident children of the same sex under 16;
- two resident children under 10, regardless of their sex;
- a disabled child who cannot share a bedroom with another child because of their disability;

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<sup>1</sup> The Housing Benefit Regulations 2006, SI No. 213, Reg B13(5)-(9)

- any other single resident child left;
- an overnight carer for a disabled person.

- 4.1.2 Applicants calculated as needing more than 4 bedrooms will be entitled to bid for 4-bedroom or 5-bedroom properties.
- 4.1.3 Children are considered to be resident where they stay with the applicant for more than four nights per week or seven nights each fortnight. This is subject to satisfactory evidence being submitted to support access/residency right.
- 4.1.4 Non-dependent visiting children will not be considered part of the household for bedroom entitlement calculations.
- 4.1.5 For applicants who are pregnant, the unborn child will be classed as a child for the purposes of property size eligibility only. Where a household already has another child (other children), the unborn child will be classed as the same sex as the youngest child. Unborn children do **not** count towards whether an applicant is lacking in bedrooms.
- 4.1.6 Houses with their own gardens will be restricted to applicants with resident children under 16, and some upper floor properties will be restricted to applicants without children under 10. This decision will be made by the landlord at the point of advertising the property.
- 4.1.7 Partner landlords may, at their discretion, advertise properties outside of these criteria and permit under occupation where necessary (for example, to allow applicants with a 1-bedroom need to bid for a harder-to-let 2-bedroom flat or sheltered housing). This decision will be made by the landlord at the point of advertising the property.
- 4.1.8 Where applicants are allowed to bid for a property that is larger than their minimum bedroom entitlement, partner landlords may prioritise applicants with a larger minimum bedroom entitlement within the same band. This decision will be made by the landlord at the point of advertising the property.