

**NORTH SOMERSET COUNCIL
DECISION**

DECISION OF: COUNCILLOR DON DAVIES LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

**WITH ADVICE FROM: DIRECTOR OF PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES
DIRECTORATE: PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES**



DECISION NO: PC34 (2020/21 Scheme)

SUBJECT: HOMECHOICE POLICY AMENDMENTS

KEY DECISION: YES

REASON: Affects more than two wards

BACKGROUND:

A review of the HomeChoice North Somerset policy took place early in 2020 with a view to implementing agreed changes in conjunction with the planned introduction of a new IT system for the management of the HomeChoice choice-based lettings scheme. The introduction of this IT system was delayed due to the impact of the Coronavirus, and the decision was taken (PC120 - 2019-20 scheme refers) to continue with the implementation of some of the proposed changes where it was technically and financially viable to do so using the outgoing IT system (i.e. the changes could be facilitated without incurring a financial cost). With a planned mid-November go-live date for the new IT system, the changes that were not implemented in May 2020 (to local connection criteria) are now proposed for introduction.

Additionally, since the last round of policy changes came into force, new guidance has been published by the Government with the aim of improving access to social housing for members of the Armed Forces. A further review of the policy was subsequently undertaken with a view to responding to this guidance, and as a result further changes are included in this proposal.

Some other small changes to the policy also proposed to improve clarity and consistency of wording and reflect current practice.

It is proposed that the implementation and publication of the proposed policy changes are aligned with the implementation of the new IT system as they will require specific configurations to be made to the new IT system.

A summary of the proposed minor amendments and additions, with a short commentary on each proposal, can be found in the table at Appendix A, and a copy of the draft revised policy can be found at Appendix B.

DECISION:

To approve the revised Homechoice North Somerset – Lettings and Assessment Policy as set out in Appendix B, for publication and implementation in-line with the implementation of the new HomeChoice IT system.

REASONS:

To update the current Homechoice North Somerset – Lettings and Allocations Policy to take account of statutory guidance and where appropriate, reflecting best practice and the policies of other Local Authorities particularly those within the West of England partnership.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED:

For the Homechoice policy to remain in its current form – this would mean that parts of the policy would not be in line with statutory guidance or best practice and the opportunity for an approach that is more consistent with neighbouring local authorities, would be lost.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

None.

Costs

The revisions to the policy will be incorporated into the configuration of a new system.

Funding

NA.

LEGAL POWERS AND IMPLICATIONS

The council has a legal duty to allocate (or nominate to) accommodation in accordance with Part 6 Housing Act 1996 and there is a range of statutory guidance. The proposed amendments meet the requirements of the act and guidance.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

CONSULTATION

As the proposed amendments and additions are minor only limited consultation has taken place and the resulting feedback has been incorporated into the proposed amendments. We have consulted on the 3 proposed changes to local connection criteria with our Registered Provider partners. The Adult Services and Housing Policy and Scrutiny Panel have also been consulted on all the main changes and are supportive. The councillor and council officer who undertake the roles of armed forces champion and armed forces co-ordinator respectively have been consulted in relation to the armed forces proposals and are supportive of these proposed changes.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Monitoring of the changes will be undertaken to ensure that applicants have appropriate banding to reflect their needs.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

Have you undertaken an Equality Impact Assessment? Yes, see Appendix C.

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

The changes proposed in relation to members and former members of the Armed Forces are in line with the Council’s commitment to the Armed Forces

APPENDICES

Appendix A Table of proposed amendments to North Somerset Homechoice – Lettings and Assessment Policy.
Appendix B Revised North Somerset Homechoice – Lettings and Assessment Policy.
Appendix C Equalities Impact Assessment.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

North Somerset Homechoice – Lettings and Assessment Policy
Allocation of Accommodation: Guidance for local authorities in England 2012;
Providing Social Housing for Local People: Statutory guidance on social housing for local authorities in England 2013;
Right to Move: Statutory guidance on social housing for local housing authorities in England 2015;
Improving Access to Social Housing for Armed Forces Members Statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England 2020
Executive Member decision PC120 (2019-20 scheme) –HomeChoice Policy Amendments

SIGNATORIES:

DECISION MAKER(S):



Signed: .

Title: Leader of the Council

Date: 8 October 2020

WITH ADVICE FROM:



Signed:

Title: Director of People and Communities

Date: 6.10.20

Subject (Policy Ref)	Current	Proposed
Local Connection Criteria (2.2.1)	<p>Local Connection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have, by choice, lived in North Somerset for the three consecutive years preceding the date the application is made or reviewed 	<p>Have, by choice, lived in North Somerset for the two consecutive years preceding the date the application is made or reviewed</p>
Commentary	<p>Proposal to amend the minimum previous residence requirement from three years prior to application, to two years; in line with the code of guidance and with two of our neighbouring authorities.</p>	
Qualifying Group – Armed Forces Personnel (2.2.2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are a member of the Armed Forces or former Service personnel, where the application is made within five years of discharge; or - Are a bereaved spouse or civil partner of a member of the Armed Forces leaving Services Family Accommodation following the death (as a result of service) of their spouse or partner; or - Are a serving or former member of the Reserve Forces who needs to move because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service 	<p>Addition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are a divorced or separated spouse/civil partner of a serving member of the Armed Forces and need to move out of accommodation, as a direct result of the relationship breakdown and where no settled accommodation has been obtained since that breakdown
Commentary	<p>Proposal to include families who are requiring rehousing as a result of becoming domestically estranged from a serving member of the Armed Forces.</p>	
Sufficient Financial Resources (2.3.2.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Single applicants with combined savings and annual income of more than £30,000, couples without dependents with combined savings and annual income of more than £35,000 or applicants with dependents with combined savings and annual income of more than £40,000 will be excluded from joining the Housing Register unless they fall into one of the homelessness qualifying groups defined in paragraph 2.2.3 or are in receipt of income related benefits. For the purposes of this section, this 	<p>Addition</p> <p>...For the purposes of this section, this exclusion will not apply to those applicants wishing to apply for a Gypsy and Traveller Pitch.</p> <p>Current or former Armed Forces members, or their families, who have in the last five years received a lump monetary sum as a direct result of having sustained serious injury/illness/disability or having been bereaved as a direct result of service, will have this sum disregarded from any income assessment for these purposes.</p>

	exclusion will not apply to those applicants wishing to apply for a Gypsy and Traveller Pitch. These figures are subject to annual review	These figures are subject to annual review.
Commentary	Amended to include an exemption from income assessments of any lump sum of money received by households as a result of loss of health or life as a result of Armed Forces service.	
Sufficient Financial Resources (2.3.2)	Single applicants with combined savings and annual income of more than £30,000, couples without dependents with combined savings and annual income of more than £35,000 or applicants with dependents with combined savings and annual income of more than £40,000 will be excluded from joining the Housing Register unless they fall into one of the homelessness qualifying groups defined in paragraph 2.2.3 or are in receipt of income related benefits.	Single person households with combined savings and annual income of more than £30,000, households without dependents with combined savings and annual income of more than £35,000 or households with dependents with combined savings and annual income of more than £40,000 will be excluded from joining the Housing Register unless they fall into one of the homelessness qualifying groups defined in paragraph 2.2.3 or are in receipt of income related benefits.
Commentary	Change of wording to better capture the diverse range of household compositions applying to the register.	
Local Connection Criteria (NA)	Currently, no reference to Family Connection	Addition 2.2.1 Family connections - applicant's immediate family member (parents, siblings, non-dependent children) has lived in North Somerset for the last two consecutive years and applicant has a need to live near this person to give or receive care or support;
Commentary	Proposal to add Family connections to the area as an eligibility criterion at 2.2.1, in line with the Code of Guidance and all our neighbouring authorities	
Local Connection for the purpose of Gypsy and Traveller Pitches (6.2.1)	Have by choice lived in North Somerset area for 2 out of the last 3 consecutive years prior to application, where the time living in NS is aggregated over the 3-year period; or	Have by choice lived in the North Somerset area for a combined total of 12 months during the last 3 years prior to application; or

Commentary	Proposal to amend the amount of residency time required in line with the reduction of main local connection criteria	
Supported Housing 'Move-On' (3.4.8)	i. Applicants who live within a Supporting People funded Supported Housing project in North Somerset and are seeking to 'move-on' into independent accommodation.	i. Applicants who live within a Supported Housing project in North Somerset and are seeking to 'move-on' into independent accommodation.
Commentary	Proposal to amend the criteria for Band B award for supported housing move-on to reflect current practice and the revised funding arrangements for Supported Housing.	
Reasonable Preference Housing Need award	3.4.10 Significant Welfare	3.4.10 Significant Welfare (RPHN)
Commentary	Addition of Reasonable Preference Housing Need award to reflect current practice and the Code of Guidance.	
Overview of the policy and process (1.4.4)	The successful applicant will be the person in the highest band, with the greatest number of higher band Reasonable Preference Housing Needs and with the earliest effective date.	The successful applicant will be the person in the highest band, with the greatest number of higher band Reasonable Preference Housing Needs, with the earliest effective date, as set out in more detail in paragraphs 3.2.3 – 3.2.6.
Commentary	Proposal to amend text to improve clarity	
Selection Procedure (5.5.1)For each property advertised the successful applicant will be the one(s) who is in the highest band, with the most multiple amount of housing need, with the earliest effective date.For each property advertised the successful applicant will be the one(s) who is in the highest band, with the greatest number of higher band Reasonable Preference Housing Needs , with the earliest effective date, as set out in more detail in paragraphs 3.2.3 – 3.2.6.
Commentary	Proposal to amend text to improve clarity and consistency of wording	

<p>Offer (6.3.3)</p>	<p>Except in exceptional circumstances, the applicant offered or nominated for a pitch will be the one who is in the highest band, with the most multiple housing needs, with the earliest effective date.</p>	<p>Except in exceptional circumstances, the applicant offered or nominated for a pitch will be the one who is in the highest band, with the greatest number of higher band Reasonable Preference Housing Needs, with the earliest effective date, as set out in more detail in paragraphs 3.2.3 – 3.2.6.</p>
<p>Commentary</p>	<p>Proposal to amend text to improve clarity and consistency of wording</p>	
<p>Policy Review (7.6)</p>	<p>.....Any minor changes to the Lettings and Assessment Policy are implemented only after delegated authority has been received from the Executive Member and the majority agreement amongst the partner landlords.</p>	<p>.....Any material changes that directly alter the application of the Lettings and Assessment Policy are implemented only after delegated authority has been received from the Executive Member and the majority agreement amongst the partner landlords.</p>
<p>Commentary</p>	<p>Proposal to amend text to clarify when authority is required from the Executive Member.</p>	