Bristol City Council – Housing & Landlord Services

HomeChoice Bristol: Housing Allocations Scheme

June 2025

History of most recent policy changes		
Section	**Changes Made**	**Date of change**
5.4(h)	Care Leaver – Clarification of existing policy	17/02/2025
5.4(n)	Added 5.5(j) Armed forces personnel (additional preference) to band 1	17/02/2025
5.5(d)	New category added in Band 2 – Homeless at Home	17/02/2025
5.5(f)	Key Ring Scheme – Removed as no longer applies	17/02/2025
5.5(g)	Under-occupying a property in high demand – Removed as covered under 5.4(c)	17/02/2025
6.4(a)	Local Lettings Policies – added We Can Make, Knowle West	17/02/2025
7.3	BHP tenants going to prison - future rehousing requests – Clarification of wording	18/06/2025
5.5(d)	Band 2 – Homeless at Home – Clarification of wording	18/06/2025
6.4(a)	Local Lettings Policies – Added Knowle West Regeneration Area	18/06/2025

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1. Policy statement and context

1.1 Introduction

All English local housing authorities are required by law to have a scheme for the allocation of social rented housing. There are many laws and regulations which govern the rules and administration of housing allocation schemes and this document will frequently use terms which may be unfamiliar to many people. However, an extensive glossary is provided in Appendix 1 to help explain these terms in more detail.

This policy document sets out Bristol City Council's approach to allocating social housing. The allocations policy was originally agreed by Cabinet on 1st April 2014. Parts of the policy have been updated periodically to reflect changes in law or local policy, however, this March 2023 update represents the first substantial rewrite of the policy since 2014. The most recent changes take into account public feedback from the consultation on the existing scheme which took place between 15th July and 7th October 2022. A number of changes relating to this policy will be made over the next 18 months. This version, dated July 2024, represents the **initial public consultation related** changes being introduced.

Our housing allocation scheme is called **HomeChoice Bristol (HCB)** and is run by Bristol City Council in partnership with a range of 'Registered Providers' (Housing Associations) operating in the Bristol area. This policy explains who is eligible to be included on HomeChoiceBristol and which groups of people do not qualify to be included on HCB. It also describes our banding system, which is how we assess and prioritise the allocation of social housing based on housing need.

For the purposes of this policy the Registered Provider landlords included in the partnership will be referred to as the Bristol Housing Partnership (BHP). The landlords that are part of this allocations scheme are listed in Appendix 2.

1.2 Policy aims

This updated policy is the outcome of a review into our existing allocations scheme which started in 2019 but which was paused during the Covid pandemic and recommenced in 2021. The main aims of this policy are to:

- comply with the council's statutory duties in Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 as amended,
- make best use of the available affordable housing stock,
- be clear, transparent and balanced and ensure reasonable preference is accorded,
- create mixed, balanced and sustainable communities,
- assess applications according to the applicant's needs, ensuring that no application will be treated less favourably on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation, in accordance with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED),
- provide a high-quality service for all those in need of advice and assistance,

- ensure that vacant Council/Housing Association properties are relet as soon as possible,
- reduce the cost of homelessness and to reduce the use of emergency and temporary accommodation for homeless applicants,
- offer people the opportunity to express preferences about the housing accommodation to be allocated to them, by allowing them to bid for properties that match their needs.

1.3 Housing supply and demand

The demand for social homes in Bristol is substantially greater than the number of homes available and it is unrealistic for most people to think they will get social housing. There are rising numbers of people becoming homeless and the increasingly unaffordable cost of housing in Bristol is creating more demand for social housing and increasing the pressure on HomeChoice Bristol. At the time of writing, there are over 19,500 households on the housing register in Bristol, and only around 1,500 homes are let each year. There are also more than 1,100 households currently living in temporary accommodation.

Many people, particularly those in lower bands, will need to consider other housing options. The HomeChoice Bristol web site at www.homechoicebristol.co.uk has some helpful information about other housing options.

1.4 Type of allocation scheme

There are two main approaches to allocating social housing, a choice-based lettings scheme or a managed list approach. Under a choice-based lettings scheme an applicant can bid for properties that they are interested in. Generally, accommodation is offered to the bidder who has the highest priority under the allocation scheme and matches the lettings criteria for that property.

The alternative to choice-based lettings is using a managed list. In this model the council takes responsibility for managing the allocation of property to people on the housing register. People do not have the opportunity to independently bid for property and rely on the council to choose for them.

Bristol has operated a choice-based lettings scheme since 2008, although even under this approach around 30% of properties were allocated through means of a 'direct offer', where we match a property to an applicant and offer it to them rather than waiting for them to bid. This was done to speed up the highest need cases by matching them to properties that met their bedroom need (see Appendix 3).

One of the key outcomes of the allocations review is the decision to move over to a **'managed choice' approach**. This is essentially a combination of choice-based letting and a managed list. This means that people will be able to continue to be able to bid for properties, but we will also be intervening more often to match people to a suitable property and make a direct offer, with *up to* 50% of allocations being made by Direct Offer as a result of this policy change.

We believe this will enable us to move people in critical situations into suitable accommodation faster, for example, people fleeing domestic violence or hate crime, properties that are severely overcrowded and those at risk of homelessness or already homeless.

Going forward, we will use our discretion to prioritise cases for direct offers, based on trends and ongoing demands on the HomeChoice Bristol service.

1.5 Equality and diversity

We want to ensure that no potential or current applicant is treated less favourably on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. This revised policy has been subject to an equalities impact assessment (EqIA) which has shown that there are no disproportionate disadvantages arising for applicants with protected characteristics.

The council's Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) is met by this scheme ensuring that all applicants have equality of access to social homes let via HomeChoice Bristol.

1.6 Access to the allocations policy

A copy of the HomeChoice Bristol allocation scheme can be found at www.homechoicebristol.co.uk and can also be requested free of charge at the Bristol City Council Citizen Service Point at 100 Temple Street, Bristol, BS1 6AG

Queries on the policies and practices detailed in this scheme, or any aspect of the provision of the rehousing service, can be directed to: Rehousing Service, (100 TS), PO Box 3399, Bristol BS1 9NE.

1.7 Use of discretion

Bristol City Council will always have due regard to this Policy when allocating social housing. However, we also recognise that there may be exceptional circumstances or unforeseen situations, such as an emergency not expressly covered in this Policy or an unanticipated example of an aspect of this Policy raising an issue under the Equality Act 2010. In cases where the normal application of the allocations scheme would not be sufficient to address the issue, the Council retains its discretion to consider the individual circumstances of an applicant and will potentially waive (not apply) the stated criteria of this policy in order to best address the situation.

2. Legal framework

2.1 Legislative context

Bristol City Council's allocation scheme complies with the requirements of Parts VI and VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended), and also has had regard to the following:

External

- Asylum and Immigration Act, 2004
- Children's Act, 1989 & 2004
- Children Leaving Care Act, 2002
- Data Protection Act, 2018
- Domestic Abuse Act, 2021
- Equalities Act, 2010
- Family Law Act, 1996
- Localism Act, 2011
- Homelessness Act, 2002
- Homelessness Reduction Act, 2017
- Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities, 2018
- Housing Act, 1996 & 2004
- Immigration (European Economic Area) Regulations 2006, SI 1006/1003 as amended
- Providing social housing for local people: December 2013 statutory guidance on social allocations for local authorities in England
- The Housing Act 1996 (Additional Preference for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012 (SI 2012/2989)
- The Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England 2012
- The Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (England) Regulations 2006, SI 2006/1294 as amended
- The Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Right to Move) (England) Regulations, 2015
- The Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Armed forces) (England) Regulations 2012
- Welfare Reform Act, 2012

Internal

- Bristol City Council Corporate Strategy, 2022-27
- Bristol City Council Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, 2019-24
- Bristol City Council, Housing and Landlord Services, Tenancy Policy, 2023
- Bristol City Council, Housing and Landlord Services, Priority Move-on Scheme Policy
- Bristol City Council, Housing and Landlord Services, Sensitive Lets Policy
- Bristol City Council, Housing and Landlord Services, Anti-Social Behaviour Policy, 2022
- Bristol City Council, Housing and Landlord Services, Domestic Abuse Policy, 2022

3. Registration and application

3.1 The housing register

At the heart of HomeChoice Bristol (HCB) is the housing register, sometimes referred to as 'the housing list' or 'the waiting list'. The housing register is basically a list of all people who have applied (and are both eligible and qualified – see section 4) to be made an offer of social housing through HomeChoice Bristol.

However, it should be stressed that housing allocations are based on an assessment of an individual's 'housing need' (see section 5) and simply being on the housing register for a long time does not guarantee that someone will be successful in bidding for a property or be made a direct offer.

The housing accommodation available to the Council consists of the following:

- Housing accommodation owned by the Council,
- Housing accommodation owned by partner Registered Providers (Housing Associations).
- Some Private Rented Sector (PRS) accommodation (ie. for the discharge of homelessness duties etc)

An applicant can be offered the following types of tenancies:

- Introductory tenancy
- Secure tenancy
- Starter tenancy
- Assured tenancy
- Fixed Term tenancy
- Flexible tenancy
- Assured shorthold tenancy

All tenancies can be offered on either a social rent or affordable rent basis.

3.2 Registration

Applicants can register online to be included on HCB. By registering for HCB, applicants agree that:

- The information provided on the form is true to the best of their knowledge. Providing false or misleading information may lead to a prosecution for criminal offences, eviction from any allocated social housing and/or exclusion from HCB.
- They will notify the Council as soon as possible of any changes in circumstances that may affect their housing application.
- The information provided on the application, or given by others with the applicant's consent, will be placed on the HomeChoice Bristol register with the understanding that any landlord or supported housing provider who takes part in the register, either now or in the

future, may see this information.

- That the Council has permission to contact individuals or agencies referred to on the application form in order to verify any information provided.
- The information provided will be recorded on a computer system and is covered by the provisions of the Data Protection Act. Applicants have the 'right of subject access' which allows them to be supplied with a copy of any personal data held and, where appropriate, have it corrected or deleted.
- That the Council has a duty to protect the public funds we administer. The information provided on the form may be used for the prevention and detection of fraud. The Council may also share this information with other bodies responsible for auditing or administering public funds for these purposes. For more information on fraud prevention and detection www.bristol.gov.uk/nfi.
- The Council can check against any records to identify if the Council or any other landlord has previously had any cause to take action against the applicant for antisocial behaviour or any other breaches of tenancy.
- In the event of an offer of social housing, the landlord will likely require further documentation and failure to provide this within the specified time will result in the offer being withdrawn.
- If an email contact address is provided, the Council may use this to contact the applicant about their application. Read our privacy notice to find out more about what we do with personal data at www.bristol.gov.uk/privacy.

3.3 Household members

An applicant to HCB can only include members of their immediate family who normally live with them (or who would live with them if it were possible for them to do so) or other people who have an extenuating (justifiable) need to live with them. What is meant by 'immediate family' is defined in more detail in Appendix 4.

3.4 Council staff responsibilities

Any council employee who knows an applicant personally will not be involved in the assessment of the application, in the allocation of property to that applicant, or in a nomination. The employee is required to notify their line manager of the situation.

3.5 Assessment

Once an applicant has registered their household and completed and submitted their HCB application form, the application will be checked and the applicant informed as to whether they are eligible and qualify to be included on HCB (see section 4).

If the applicant qualifies and is eligible, the Council will contact the applicant to tell them:

- Their application reference number.
- The band their application has been assessed into (see section 5).

- The number bedrooms their household has been assessed as needing (see Appendix 3)

3.6 Bidding

Once an application has been assessed, applicants can start bidding for properties. Bidding allows an applicant to show their interest in an available property alongside other people on the housing register. The band the applicant is in and the date they were assessed into the band will determine how successful they are.

There are three ways to bid for property:

- Online at the HomeChoice website at www.homechoicebristol.co.uk. . Assistance can be provided to those who would find it difficult to apply online.
- By phone on 0845 270 1382 (the line is open 24 hours a day and available in English, Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Farsi, Gujarati, Hindi, Kurdish, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Somali, and Urdu)
- At our Citizen Service Point at 100 Temple Street

Applicants have three bids each week to place on advertised properties. Applicants are advised to always think carefully about the bids they are placing and take note of any additional criteria required for any property they are interested in. For further instructions on how to place a bid, applicants can refer to our How to bid online user guide.

Most BHP properties[1] will be advertised to all bands and allocated via HomeChoice Bristol. A list of applicants bidding on a property will be automatically generated and the property will be allocated to the household whose application is in the highest band with the oldest 'effective date' (ie. the date placed in the band).

3.7 Evidence

If an applicant is offered a property, the landlord will ask for certain documents and information so that they can verify the applicant's circumstances. The landlord will expect the applicant to provide the information within the deadline they have given. If the applicant cannot provide the information within that time, they must contact the landlord and explain this to them.

The sort of documents applicants will be expected to provide will include:

- Proof of identification for the main and joint applicant and all household members,
- Proof of address for the main and joint applicant and all household members,
- Proof of pregnancy (if applicable),
- Most landlords will also ask for proof of income.

3.8 Changes in circumstances

An applicant must notify the Council of changes to his/her circumstances as soon as possible and

[1] A small percentage of both Bristol City Council and Registered Provider properties are advertised as landlord own lets. See section 6.2a of this document.

must renew his/her/their application annually.

On renewal, applicants may be required to provide proof of their continued eligibility on HCB. Applications will be reassessed at every change in circumstances. This includes a move to a new address. If a household moves to an address outside of the Bristol city boundary, their application will be reassessed, which may result in non-qualification for HomeChoice Bristol.

Proof of household details will be sought for all applicants who are likely to be assessed as being overcrowded in their current accommodation, as part of the assessment and in the event of receiving an offer of accommodation. This includes ID for all household members, proof of address for all adults on the application and proof of receipt of child benefit for all children on the application.

3.9 Right of review

An applicant has the right to request a review of the Council's decision:

a. that they have been determined as not eligible for assistance,
b. that they do not qualify to be included on HCB (*see below),
c. as to which band they are in,
d. that they have been suspended from bidding,
e. that they have been overlooked for a property they have bid on,
f. that as a household owed a homelessness duty under Section 193(2) of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) they will only be offered temporary accommodation due to having a Bristol Housing Partnership debt,
g. that the application has been suspended from bidding until such time that the applicant is able to sustain a tenancy.

*There will be no separate right of review for a decision to exclude an applicant from HomeChoice Bristol as a result of a homelessness duty being discharged.

Anyone wishing to seek a review must do so in writing within 21 days of being notified of the relevant decision. Their review request must give reasons as to why the decision is considered to be wrong. An officer more senior than the one who made the original decision will consider the review.

4. Who can join HomeChoice Bristol?

4.1 Eligibility

The first assessment the Council makes when an application is received is whether the applicant is eligible for social housing. Access to housing for foreign nationals is governed by laws relating to housing and immigration. Persons from abroad can apply to be rehoused, but their eligibility must be verified (checked) before they can be allowed to join the housing register.

There are some **people who will not be eligible**, by law, to join the housing register. These are:

- Certain people who are subject to Immigration Control under the 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act
- Certain people from abroad who are not subject to immigration control but who are not habitually resident in the UK, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man or the Republic of Ireland

The Regulations setting out which classes of persons from abroad are eligible or ineligible for an allocation are the Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (England) Regulations 2006 (SI2006 No.1294) (the Eligibility regulations). If the Council decide that a person is **not** eligible for an allocation of housing, they will notify that person of their decision in writing and the grounds for it.

An allocation cannot be made to two or more persons jointly if one of them is not eligible for an allocation of housing.

4.2 Qualification

The second assessment the council makes is whether an applicant qualifies to go on the housing register. Some applicants may be eligible for an allocation of housing accommodation but subsequently not qualify (excluded) to be included on HCB. Others may be eligible and do qualify to be included but are subsequently suspended from bidding.

The following are persons who **do not** qualify to be included HCB:

a) Applicants under 16 years of age at the date they apply

b) Applicants not currently living within the Bristol City boundary

In order to qualify to be included on HCB an applicant must be able to show the following:

- That they have been living within the Bristol City boundary continuously for the last two years immediately prior to the date of registration on HCB.

Or

- That they have close family currently living in Bristol who have lived in Bristol continuously for the last two years immediately prior to the date of the applicant's registration on HCB, and they need to live near that person to provide or receive care. For the purposes of this

policy, close family is intended as immediate family, ie parents, dependent and non-dependent adult children and siblings (see Appendix 4). The applicant must be able to show that they have a relationship with that person and they need to live near that family member for care.

Or

- That their normal place of work is in Bristol and it is not considered practicable to commute from their current residence. HomeChoice Bristol considers a number of factors including, but not exclusively, the distance and the time taken to travel between the applicant's main place of work and their residence and availability of transport. Where the distance between the applicant's residence and their main place of work is considered to be a reasonable commutable distance the applicant will not qualify.

For the purposes of this policy, voluntary, temporary, casual or short-term employment will not count. Employment must not be marginal.

Applications will be reassessed at every change in circumstances. This includes a move to a new address. If a household moves to an address outside of the Bristol city boundary, their application will be reassessed, which may result in non-qualification for HomeChoice Bristol

Exceptions to this qualification criterion include:

- Those applicants who meet the criteria as set out in The Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Armed forces) (England) Regulations 2012 for whom a residency requirement cannot be applied.
- Looked after children or relevant adults who are the responsibility of Bristol City Council.
- Those people fleeing harassment or violence where the Police, Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVA) or Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) or other relevant evidence support a move to Bristol for the person's safety.
- Those people covered by the provisions of s199(6) – (7) of the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Asylum and Immigration Act 2004.
- Existing Bristol Housing Partnership (BHP) tenants.
- Existing social housing tenants who need to move to Bristol because their main place of work is in Bristol or to take up an offer of work and failure to do so would cause hardship.

c) Applicants with a high income

Where the main and joint applicants (this also includes partners of the main and joint applicants included on the application) combined have a gross annual income in excess of £40,000 per year (not including means tested benefits) they will not qualify to be included on HCB. This qualification criteria do not apply to existing BHP tenants.

d) Applicants with savings

Where the main and joint applicant (this also includes partners of the main and joint applicants included on the application) combined have in excess of £40,000 in savings they will not qualify to

be included on HCB. For the purposes of this policy savings are also taken to mean accessible equity within a property. This qualification criteria do not apply to existing BHP tenants.

e) Applicants who own their own home

Applicants and household members who own their own home in the UK or abroad will not qualify to be included on HCB if that home is affordable to them and it meets their needs in terms of their health and/or disability.

f) Prisoners still serving a sentence

Prisoners still serving a sentence will not qualify to be included on HCB until released from prison. Exceptions can be applied if referred via police or the probation service.

g) Serious unacceptable behaviour

Applicants and household members whose behaviour in their current or a previous tenancy is considered to be unacceptable will not qualify to be included on HCB for a period of 3 years from the date of the most recent incident.

For the purposes of this policy, unacceptable behaviour is intended to include any breach of tenancy conditions including Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and non-payment of rent where legal action has been taken by the Police or any Council department or any landlord. This would include:

i) Breach of tenancy conditions - ASB

- Injunctions,
- Criminal Behaviour Orders,
- Community Protection Notices,
- Restraining orders,
- Closure orders,
- Any type of Possession order,
- Noise abatement orders,
- Eviction,
- Damage to current or former property or unauthorised alterations where repair costs are in excess of £1000.

ii) Breach of tenancy conditions - non-payment of rent

- Any type of possession order where the tenant has failed to adhere to the terms of the order,
- Eviction.

h) People who knowingly provide false or misleading information

Applicants who are found to have knowingly omitted information that would exclude them or have given false information to gain qualification or improve their priority on the Housing Register will be excluded from on HCB for three years from the date they actually qualify on the register. For example, an applicant who states they have been living in Bristol for two years when in fact they have only lived here for one year will be excluded from the register. Once they meet the qualification criteria they will be excluded for an additional three years before they are able to qualify.

i) Applicants not currently residing in the United Kingdom

Applicants who are not currently residing in the United Kingdom will not qualify on HCB until they are living in the United Kingdom. They will then only be included if eligible to be included and not excluded from the Housing Register for any other reason mentioned in paragraphs (a) to (h).

j) Applicants not bidding

Applicants in Bands 1 and 2 will be given six months from the date of assessment in Band 1 or 2 to place a bid for properties advertised through HCB.

Applicants in Bands 3 and 4 will be given 12 months from the registration date to place a bid for properties advertised through HCB.

Applicants who do not place any bids will be excluded from HCB for a period of six months unless there is a material change in their circumstances. After six months they will be able to submit a new application which will be assessed and placed into the appropriate band. See 7.1 of this policy for further information.

It should be noted that exceptions may be considered depending on the availability of suitable accommodation and personal circumstances of the applicant.

k) Statutorily homeless households who refuse a suitable final offer of accommodation

Applicants towards whom the main homelessness duty under Section 193(2) of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended), or the homelessness relief duty under Section 189B(2) of the same Act, or the duty to secure accommodation under Section 193C(4) of the same Act, comes to an end as a result of the refusal of a suitable final offer of accommodation will be excluded from HomeChoice Bristol for six months from the date of the refusal. After that time a new application can be submitted. However, in most cases, the new application will be placed in Band 4 as such households will be classed as having deliberately failed to improve their circumstances (see section 7.4 below).

4.3 Suspension from bidding

The following are groups of people who are eligible for an allocation of housing and qualify for

consideration on the register but will be suspended from bidding for properties advertised through HCB.

a) Applicants with Bristol Housing Partnership debt

Applicants or household members with a Bristol Housing Partnership debt from a former or current tenancy/licence of £500 or more will be suspended from bidding and will be required to sign and keep to a written agreement to repay the debt. Applicants will be suspended from bidding for six months and will only be allowed to bid once the repayment agreement has been maintained for six months and the debt is reduced to under £500.

Once the applicant has been allowed to bid, if the debt is still outstanding the applicant will be expected to continue to make repayments. If the repayments cease or the debt increases, the applicant may be suspended from bidding for another six-month period.

Bristol Housing Partnership debts (ie. housing related debt) include:

I. Current or former tenant/licensee rent/charge arrears in respect of a dwelling or garage;
II. Current or former tenant/licensee defects charges;
III. Current or former tenant/licensee heating (or any other metered) charges;
IV. Court costs in respect of possession proceedings anti-social behaviour or any proceedings relating to the applicant's occupation of his/her home or former home;
V. Charges arising from occupation of temporary accommodation in any Bristol Housing Partnership hostel for homeless households;
VI. Council housing revenue account debt;
VII. Charges arising from the occupation of emergency accommodation provided by Bristol City Council under homelessness legislation.

Tenants affected by the under-occupation charge

The suspension from bidding policy may be waived for those tenants who have accrued arrears (rental debt) as a result of the under-occupation charge as long as:

- They are downsizing to a property where they will not be impacted by the under occupation charge or where the impact will be lessened.
- They are engaging with their landlord to resolve the matter ie responding to contact from their landlord, accepting referrals for support or services and making payments towards the arrears.

Statutorily homeless applicants with debt

An applicant who is owed a homelessness duty under Section 193(2) or Section 193C(4) of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) and has a Bristol Housing Partnership debt over £500 will be offered temporary accommodation only, until a written agreement has been made to repay the debt and regular payments have been made over six months and the debt has been reduced to

under £500. Exceptional circumstances may lead to this requirement being waived, and these will be considered by the Homelessness Prevention Team Manager, in consultation with the Landlord or Rent Management Service. There is a right of review against this decision (see section 3.9 above).

Debts owing to Bristol City Council as a result of being found a private rented sector tenancy by the authority

An applicant who has been housed in private rented accommodation with the help of Bristol City Council will be suspended from bidding if they are found to be in breach of their tenancy conditions, which would lead to a financial loss to the Council.

Bankruptcy orders, Debt Relief Orders (DROs)

Any debts owed to the Bristol Housing Partnership at the time of bankruptcy, will be disregarded when considering a rehousing request.

Applicants with debts owing to the Bristol Housing Partnership, which accrued after the date of bankruptcy or debt relief order, will be subject to the qualification policy. The applicant will be required to sign and keep to a written agreement to repay the debt. The applicant will be suspended from bidding for six months and will only be allowed to bid once the repayment agreement has been maintained for six months and the debt is reduced to under £500, whichever is sooner.

Administration orders

Provided that after 3 months from the date the administration order is issued:

- The court confirm that payments on the order/s are being made as ordered and
- No further debt/s to the Bristol Housing Partnership have been incurred.
- The applicant should not be penalised for any previous debts when considering a rehousing request.

Applicants with debts owing to the Bristol Housing Partnership, which accrued after the date of administration order, will be subject to the qualification policy. The applicant will be required to sign and keep to a written agreement to repay the debt. The applicant will be suspended from bidding for six months and will only be allowed to bid once the repayment agreement has been maintained for six months and the debt is reduced to under £500.

b) Anti-social behaviour

- Applicants will be suspended from bidding where there has been a serious breach of the tenancy conditions including antisocial behaviour where a legal notice has been served. This will include Notice of seeking Possession (NoSP), Notice of Proceeding for Possession (NoPP), Tenancy demotion, Noise Abatement Notice or any other notice served.

- In these cases applicants will be suspended from bidding for 12 months from the date of the Notice or for the duration of the Notice whichever is longer regardless of whether they remain in the property where the notice has been served.
- Where formal action (eg. Possession action) is started following service of Notice, applicants will not be able to bid until the conclusion of the action. In other cases of unacceptable behaviour where an Acceptable Behaviour Agreement is in place applicants will only be able to bid for properties if the terms of the agreement have not been breached.
- Where the applicant's behaviour was such that a notice would have been served but the tenancy came to an end before it was served applicants will be suspended from bidding.

c) People who have refused two suitable offers

Applicants who refuse **two** suitable offers of accommodation (see Appendix 5 for detail on 'suitable offers') will be suspended from bidding for one year from the date of the last offer. After that time their application will be unsuspended and reassessed based on the circumstances they are experiencing at that time.

d) Homeless households who refuse a suitable final offer

The law relating to homeless households is slightly different. A local authority's duty to re-house someone ends after the refusal of **one** suitable offer of accommodation. Applicants who refuse a suitable final offer of accommodation made in order to discharge any of the following homelessness duties under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended): the Section 193(2) main homelessness duty, the Section 189B(2) homelessness relief duty, and the duty to secure accommodation under Section 193C(4): will be excluded immediately from the Housing register.

4.4 Exceptional circumstances

In exceptional circumstances where the applicant has an urgent need to move the Council may waive the qualification and suspension criteria.

If the Council decides that an applicant does not qualify for an allocation of housing they will notify that person of their decision in writing and the grounds for it.

Applicants have a right to a review of a decision that they are either ineligible for an allocation of housing or that they do not qualify for an allocation (see section 3.9 above).

5. How we prioritise the allocation of housing

5.1 Assessment of housing need

The law states that certain categories of applicants for social housing must be given what is called 'reasonable preference' on allocation schemes. In brief, these are:

- those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- households living in overcrowded or unsanitary conditions,
- those who need to move for health related or welfare reasons, including care leavers, people with high level support needs or a disability
- those who need to move due to hardship

We can also give 'additional preference' to households in one of the reasonable preference groups listed above. For example, by law we must give additional preference (priority) to applicants who are current or previous members of the armed forces and who are in housing need.

Going forward, we will create an Annual Lettings Plan that projects what we will set aside for needs arising from specific categories where we have additional responsibility e.g. supported care cases and care leavers.

An applicant to HomeChoice Bristol (HCB) will be placed into one of four bands according to their housing need. Applicants with the greatest housing need will be placed in band 1.

Applicants in bands 3 and 4 realistically stand little chance of being rehoused through HCB and are advised to look at other housing options.

The following officers within the Council's HCB Team make these decisions (unless otherwise stated):

Bands 1 & 2	HCB Team Leaders and HCB Advisors/Housing Advisors
Bands 3 & 4	HCB Advisors
Health issues	Health and Housing Team
Homelessness applications	Housing Advisors

Applicants are considered in band order (band 1 being the highest and band 4 the lowest) and then in date order within the agreed band. The date of the application will either be the date the application was assessed into that band or backdated by six months if the applicant **has two** composite (housing) need. If the applicant has **three or more** composite housing needs, the date of the application will be backdated by 12 months. The date for applications in band 4 will be the date the applicant applied for rehousing.

The effective date (ie. the date an application was assessed into a band) for an applicant who made an application for homelessness assistance under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) prior to 3rd April 2018 and who falls within one of the homelessness banding categories

that existed prior to that date (either 5.5(c) or 5.6(d)(iv) below) will be the date on which the relevant homelessness decision giving rise to a placement in that band was made, unless a backdate has been agreed.

The effective date for any applicant who makes an application for homelessness assistance on or after 3rd April 2018 and who falls within any of the Band 3 homelessness categories (see section 5.6(d) below) will be the earlier of:

- The date on which the s195(2) homelessness prevention duty was accepted on the current homelessness application, if a prevention duty was accepted; or
- The date on which the s189B(2) homelessness relief duty was accepted on the current homelessness application, if no prevention duty was accepted.

The effective date for any applicant who makes an application for homelessness assistance on or after 3rd April 2018 and who is placed in Band 2 following the acceptance of the s193(2) main homelessness duty (see section 5.5(c) below) will be the date on which the homelessness relief duty was accepted on the current homelessness application, regardless of whether the prevention duty had been accepted previously.

If an applicant would fall within any of the homelessness banding categories but is excluded from HCB, once any exclusion is lifted, the effective date of any applicable homelessness band will be the date on which the exclusion is lifted.

5.2 Composite needs

From 15 January 2024, If the applicant has **three or more** composite housing needs, the date of the application will be backdated by 12 months.

a) If an applicant falls into more than one band category, which relates to a housing need (indicated by ***HN***), then they will be placed in the higher of the 2 bands and their application will be backdated by six months (giving the application an earlier effective date, resulting in greater priority), unless they have **three or more** qualifying housing needs, in which case they will be backdated by 12 months.

b) If an applicant falls into more than one category in the *same* band, which relates to a housing need (indicated by ***HN***), then their application will be backdated by six months (giving the application an earlier effective date, resulting in greater priority), unless they have **three or more** qualifying housing needs, in which case they will be backdated by 12 months

c) If an applicant's household has more than one person who falls into a category which relates to a housing need (indicated by ***HN***) then his/her application will be backdated by six months (giving the application an earlier effective date, resulting in greater priority), unless they have **three or more** qualifying housing needs, in which case they will be backdated by 12 months

5.2.1 Exceptions

Composite need will not be awarded in the following situations:

a) where an applicant is awarded band 3, for one bedroom short, and there is subsequently found to be the existence of a category 1 crowding and space hazard (as assessed by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System HHSRS) for overcrowding the composite need policy would not apply. This is because the applicant still only has one housing need (1 bedroom short). The applicant will be placed in the higher of the two bands but their application will not be back dated.

b) where an applicant has temporarily moved out of their permanent residence. For example, where an applicant moves to temporary/emergency accommodation but retains rights to occupy their permanent residence, any other housing need arising as a result of the temporary move will not be taken into consideration. See section 5.3 for further information.

c) other than in exceptional circumstances, where an applicant falls within any of the homelessness banding categories below (5.5(c) and 5.6(d)).

5.3 Assessment from primary residence

All applications will be assessed from the applicant's primary residence (ie. the accommodation the household would normally occupy). If an applicant is unable to occupy their home due to domestic abuse or threats of violence the application will still be assessed from the accommodation the applicant has rights to occupy. A move into temporary/emergency accommodation will not result in their housing application being reassessed. However, if the household moves temporarily into overcrowded accommodation with family or friends in order to escape the harassment the application will be treated as having composite need for overcrowding and backdated six months.

This excludes situations where an applicant moves into accommodation owned and/or managed by a registered provider or where the applicant holds a licence agreement. Please note, in these circumstances harassment will be treated as the primary reason for needing to be rehoused regardless of how overcrowded the household is.

5.4 Band 1

Band 1 will be awarded for the following:

a) Major repairs

A tenant needs to be moved by the Council or a partner housing association within three months due to redevelopment or major repairs.

b) Foster carers

This priority will be awarded following a referral from the Council's children's services to those foster carers and adopters who have been assessed and approved and who require an extra bedroom to able to start or continue to provide foster care to a Bristol City Council looked after or former looked after child.

It will also be awarded to special guardians, holders of a residence order and family and friend carers who have been formally approved by Bristol City Council's Childrens services to provide long term care of a child(ren) because the parents are unable to provide care and there is a potential for the child(ren) to become a Bristol City Council Council looked after child and there is a need to move to larger accommodation in order to accommodate the child(ren). The award will be given following a referral from the Council's Children's Services.

c) Under-occupation of a property of a type that is in acutely short supply

The Council needs to make the most effective use of the limited social housing stock that it has available. The lack of larger properties with 3 or more bedrooms presents problems when trying to accommodate larger families with high levels of need, because these properties only become available occasionally and are mainly in a limited range of areas.

The purpose of this priority category is to incentivise existing Bristol Housing Partnership (BHP) tenants who are under-occupying properties to move to properties with fewer bedrooms. From 22 January 2024, Band 1 priority will be awarded to an applicant who meets any of the following criteria, and who wishes to move to a property with fewer bedrooms than they currently have:

(i) A BHP tenant who is under-occupying a property with 3 or more bedrooms;

(ii) A BHP tenant who is under-occupying a house or bungalow, regardless of the number of bedrooms that it contains;

(iii) A BHP tenant who is under-occupying a property which has level access. For these purposes, a level-access property is defined as one where the journey from the street to the inside of the property can be made without the need to climb any steps, even if this involves the use of a lift. However, the HomeChoice Bristol Team Leaders and Housing Supply Manager have discretion to award this priority in other situations where appropriate, for example, if an occupational therapist has confirmed that the access can be made effectively level through the use of ramps.

In all these situations, the Band 1 priority award is contingent upon vacant possession of the tenant's original home being given once the offer of an alternative property has been made. If it becomes apparent that this condition will not be met, the priority may be removed, and any offer of alternative accommodation rescinded.

d) Merging households

From 15 January 2024, this priority is awarded where two or more tenants of Bristol Housing Partnership properties wish to move with their household members into a single property as one household, and where the HomeChoice Bristol Team has agreed to this request following consideration of the household composition provisions of the Allocation Scheme.

The Band 1 priority award is contingent upon vacant possession of the tenants' original homes being given once the offer of an alternative property has been made. If it becomes apparent that this condition will not be met, the priority may be removed and any offer of alternative accommodation rescinded.

e) Acute overcrowding *(HN)*

The household is acutely overcrowded according to the bedroom standard and have three bedrooms less than they are entitled to as per the bedroom entitlement noted in Appendix 3.

f) Supported Lodgings Provider

The applicant is a provider of the Bristol City Council Supported Lodgings scheme and requires a larger property in order to perform this role**.**

g) Community Supported Accommodation (CSA+)

Those with learning difficulties or mental health issues accepted by Health and Social Care onto their Community Support Accommodation Scheme (CSA+). Community Support Accommodation is for people who are stepping down from:

- A high cost residential or supported living placement or
- A young person moving out of home who would otherwise go into supported accommodation.

To be eligible for CSA+ there must be a cost saving, either in the form of a move from a high-cost placement to a low-cost placement or preventing a move to a higher cost placement, such as a person moving from a family home. Clients must be able to live independently and manage a tenancy with support and be willing to accept that support.

h) Care leaver

This priority will be awarded to a young person who is defined as a care leaver as set out in section 7 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and for whom Bristol is the responsible authority and, who has been assessed by Bristol's Care Leaver Service to be in need of accommodation and also assessed as being able to live independently. This category also includes:

i) Care leavers who have been agreed by Bristol's Care Leaver Service as being ready to move on from External Supported Accommodation.

Helping both care leavers and people with learning difficulties or mental health issues to move into general needs housing with floating support will help improve their quality of life as well as free up capacity for those in greater need of full support.
Care Leaver priority can only be awarded on the initial application. Once an applicant has been housed through HCB it will not be awarded for subsequent applications.

i) Urgent medical need *(HN)*

An applicant and/or member of the household has a serious and/or life threatening physical or mental health problem which is directly linked to their current housing. The priority is to reflect an urgent need to move to a different type of housing or area to enable the person to function independently and safely and/or to carry out normal activities of daily living and/or to reach essential facilities. The applicant's current property cannot be reasonably adapted to meet their needs.

j) Release of adapted property

This priority is awarded where the applicant is a Bristol Housing Partnership tenant occupying a property with major adaptations that are not required by anyone in the household. Consideration will be given to the nature of any adaptations on a case-by-case basis to determine whether the priority should be awarded.

The Band 1 priority award is contingent upon vacant possession of the tenant's original home being given once the offer of an alternative property has been made. If it becomes apparent that this condition will not be met, the priority may be removed, and any offer of alternative accommodation rescinded.

k) Hospital discharge

Band 1 will be awarded to those who have somewhere to live on leaving hospital but it is unsuitable for their medical needs and cannot be made suitable through adaptations due to cost, structural difficulties or the property cannot be adapted within a reasonable amount of time. Where the impact is assessed as being severe the applicant may be awarded band 1.

Those who have nowhere at all to live when they leave hospital may qualify for band 1 if the need to move is urgent and all other reasonable housing options have been explored.

l) Exceptional need to move

The applicant does not come within any of the categories already reflected within the scheme but, in the opinion of the Rehousing Manager, has an exceptional and urgent need to be rehoused within three months. Priority within this category will be agreed by the Housing Supply Manager.

m) Armed forces personnel (additional preference)

Applicants that meet The Housing Act 1996 (Additional Preference for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012 (SI 2012/2989) and one of the reasonable preference categories in band 1 are given additional preference in band 1 and the effective date of their application will be back dated by six months.

n) Armed forces personnel (additional preference)
Applicants that meet The Housing Act 1996 (Additional Preference for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012 (SI 2012/2989) and one of the reasonable preference categories in band 2 are given additional preference in priority by one band.

o) MARAC

This priority will be awarded to victims of domestic violence and abuse where MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) have identified a high level of risk and have an exceptional need for band 1. Band 1 will only be agreed where it has been recommended by MARAC and will only apply for up to six months. This may be extended in exceptional circumstances.

5.5 Band 2

Band 2 will be awarded for the following:

a) Severe overcrowding *(HN)*

The household is severely overcrowded according to the bedroom standard and have 2 bedrooms less than they are entitled to as per the bedroom entitlement in Appendix 3.

b) Harassment *(HN)*

The household urgently needs to move due to domestic abuse, violence or other harassment and is at significant risk of harm. This priority will only be awarded if a move to another property will resolve the immediate danger.

c) Homelessness – main duty accepted

The priority will be awarded to applicants who are owed a full homelessness duty by Bristol City Council under Section 193(2) of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended), except those who are owed this duty because of the inclusion of a 'restricted person' in their household.

An applicant owed a duty under Section 193(2) of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended), and who subsequently refuses a suitable final offer of accommodation made under Section 193(7) or a private sector offer made under Section 193(7AA) of this Act, will no longer be owed a

homelessness duty, and will be excluded from HomeChoice Bristol for six months. The decision to end a homelessness duty will be made by a Housing Advisor. See section 4.2k of this policy for further information.

d) Homelessness - Homeless at Home

From 17th February 2025, this section applies if all the following criteria are met:
i) The applicant has one or more children who live with them, or is a pregnant woman;
ii) The applicant is sharing a home with one or more family members and/or other people who are not part of their household (i.e., people who would not be moving with the applicant if the applicant were rehoused).
iii) The applicant and their household have been assessed as being safe to remain in that accommodation.
iv) The applicant and their household have no ownership or tenancy rights at the accommodation that they are occupying.
v) The arrangement is intended to be short-term and only available while the applicant is actively seeking an offer of social housing, accommodation in the privately rented sector, or accommodation with other friends or family members.
vi) The individual(s) with a property interest in the applicant's current home have agreed for the applicant and the applicant's household to remain at their property for the time being, but there remains a threat of homelessness.
vii) The applicant is owed the homelessness prevention duty and attempts have been made to prevent them from becoming homeless. It is now likely that they will become homeless imminently.
viii) The applicant meets the HomeChoice Bristol eligibility and qualification criteria.

If all of criteria (i) to (viii) above are met, the applicant will qualify for the 'new deal' for the homeless at home. Band 2 priority can be awarded on this basis, and the homelessness application can be progressed into the 'Prevented' state. The applicant accepts the Band 2 priority and agrees to remain at the accommodation with permission from the individual(s) with the property interest.

The effective date in Band 2 will be the date the arrangement was made between the individual(s) with the interest in the home and the applicant for the applicant to remain in the accommodation on the condition of being placed into Band 2 Homeless at Home.

If, after six months from the date of the Band 2 priority award, the applicant and any members of their household remain at the same accommodation or in similar safe accommodation, and it is confirmed by the individual(s) with the interest in the home that the applicant can remain there for the time being and it is still safe for them to do so, the applicant's Band 2 effective date will be backdated by six months.

If, at some time after the Band 2 new deal for the homeless at home priority has been awarded, the arrangement at the applicant's current accommodation breaks down, a new homelessness application can be made, but the applicant's HomeChoice Bristol application will be reassessed. If

the relief duty is accepted towards the applicant, the existing Band 2 award will be replaced by an award of Band 3 homelessness relief duty priority, with effect from the date on which the relief duty was accepted.
If an applicant has maintained an arrangement of the type described in this section for six months, it is their responsibility to contact the Council at the end of the six-month period to request the six-month backdate of their effective date. They will need to provide any evidence that is requested to confirm that the arrangements remain in place for the backdate to be applied.

If, at any time after the homeless at home priority has been awarded, the applicant's household ceases to include children or a pregnant woman, then the homeless at home priority will be removed and the HomeChoice application reassessed.

e) Priority move-on scheme

This priority will be awarded to applicants who qualify under the priority move-on procedure. In order for applicants to qualify they must have occupied:

I. A specific supported housing project for between three and six months
II. **or** occupy a safe house or refuge that has been commissioned by Bristol City Council **and**
III. Be ready to move to independent social housing (in the opinion of their support worker) **and**
IV. be fully assessed on HomeChoice Bristol

This priority will be awarded by the Interim and Supported Accommodation Team (ISAT) Leader or HomeChoice Bristol Team Leader. Applicants awarded this priority will have their application backdated by six months from the date they were agreed onto the Priority Move On Scheme. Applicants accepted onto the PMOS scheme must make bids for all suitable available properties and their bidding will be reviewed after three months. Failure to fully engage in bidding will result in a request for a direct offer to be made on their behalf, which includes privately rented properties offered on a 12-month assured shorthold tenancy basis. Failure to accept one offer of accommodation (whether that offer is made via bidding or direct offer) will result in removal from the priority move-on scheme and re-assessment into band 4. Applicants have a right to a review of the decision to be reassessed into the lowest band.

f) Supported lodgings

The applicant qualifies under the Supported lodgings scheme and is ready to move to independent social housing as confirmed by the Single Point of Access manager or Team Leader.

g) Unsatisfactory housing conditions *(HN)*

This priority will be awarded where an applicant is occupying unsanitary or unsatisfactory housing conditions that are so serious, in terms of the immediate threat posed to health and welfare, as to require rehousing. These are cases where an Environmental Health Officer has provided written

evidence that the property should not be occupied due to one or more category 1 hazards (excluding overcrowding) and where, as a result, an emergency prohibition order or prohibition order has or would be made.

h) Category 1 crowding and space hazard *(HN)*

This priority will be awarded to BHP tenants who are one bedroom short of their entitlement and an assessment of their current housing has confirmed that there is a category one crowding and space hazard.

i) Armed forces personnel (additional preference)

Applicants that meet The Housing Act 1996 (Additional Preference for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012 (SI 2012/2989) and one of the reasonable preference categories in band 3 are given additional preference in priority by one band.

5.6 Band 3

Band 3 will be awarded for the following:

a) Overcrowding *(HN)*

This priority will be awarded to applicants who, according to the bedroom standard, have one bedroom less than they are entitled to.

b) Hardship *(HN)*

This priority will be awarded to those applicants who need to move to a particular locality within the Bristol City boundary, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship to themselves or others. Given that the city is geographically compact an award will only be made in exceptional circumstances.

c) Under-occupying by 1 bedroom

This priority will be awarded to Bristol Housing Partnership tenants who are under-occupying their current accommodation by 1 bedroom. Applicants will be assessed based on the number of bedrooms they are entitled to. Priority will be awarded on the basis that vacant possession is given when the tenant moves out.

d) Homelessness or threat of homelessness

This priority will be awarded in five different scenarios:

I. The applicant is threatened with homelessness and is owed the 'homelessness prevention'

duty by Bristol City Council under Section 195(2) of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended).

II. The applicant is homeless and is owed the 'homelessness relief' duty by Bristol City Council under Section 189B(2) of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended).

III. The applicant is owed the Section 193C(4) duty to secure accommodation following the end of the homelessness relief duty due to a deliberate and unreasonable refusal to take one or more steps set out in the applicant's Personal Housing Plan.

IV. The applicant is homeless within the meaning of Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) but is not owed the homelessness relief duty or the s193(2) main homelessness duty (ie. an applicant who is not in priority need or is intentionally homeless).

V. The applicant is owed the main homelessness duty because of the inclusion of a 'restricted person' in their household.

e) Medical and welfare *(HN)*

An applicant and/or member of their household has a physical or mental health problem that is in part related to their current housing and could be helped by rehousing to a different type of accommodation or area. The property cannot be reasonably adapted and the problem does not meet the criteria for band 1.

This priority will also be awarded to those applicants who need to move due to harassment which is causing harm. and does not meet criteria for b) under band 2.

5.7 Band 4

If an application does not meet any of the criteria set out in bands 1 -3 it will be assessed into band 4. Due to the high demand for social housing in Bristol, applicants in band 4 have, realistically, less than 1% chance of being allocated a property and we would encourage all those in band 4 to consider alternatives to social housing. Information on other housing options is available on our website here:

www.homechoicebristol.co.uk/content/Information/Otherhousingoptions

5.8 Armed forces personnel (additional preference)

Applicants that meet The Housing Act 1996 (Additional Preference for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012 (SI 2012/2989) will be given additional priority on HCB. Additional priority will be awarded as follows:

a. Applicants in band 1 who meet The Housing Act 1996 (Additional Preference for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012 (SI 2012/2989) and assessed as acutely overcrowded as per section 5.4e or having an urgent medical need to move as per section 5.4i will have their applications back-dated in band 1 by six months.

b. Applicants in band 2 who meet The Housing Act 1996 (Additional Preference for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012 (SI 2012/2989) and assessed as severely overcrowded (section 5.5a), suffering harassment (section 5.5b), homeless-full

duty accepted (section 5.5c), living in unsatisfactory housing conditions (section 5.5g) or who meet the criteria for category 1 crowding and space hazard (section 5.5h), will be assessed into band 1.

c. Applicants in band 3 who meet The Housing Act 1996 (Additional Preference for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012 (SI 2012/2989) and assessed as overcrowded by one room (section 5.6a), suffering hardship (section 5.6b), Homeless or threat of homeless (section 5.6d), or assessed as needing to move for medical or welfare reasons (section 5.6e), will be assessed into band 2.

6. Direct Offers and exceptions to usual process

6.1 Direct offers

One of the key outcomes of the public consultation on the existing allocations scheme that took place in 2022 is the decision to move to a 'managed choice' approach to allocations. This means that people will be able to continue to be able to bid for properties, but we will also be intervening more often to match people to a suitable property and make a direct offer, with *up to* 50% of allocations being made by direct offer as a result of this policy change.

Applicants in bands 1 and 2 will be more likely to be made a direct offer as a result of this policy change. As noted, applicants can continue to bid while we investigate the potential of making a direct offer (based on the individual applicant's circumstances and housing needs) and there is no guarantee that a direct offer social housing will ultimately be made. However, going forward, we will make greater use of direct offers to enable us to move people in critical situations into suitable accommodation faster. We will use our discretion to prioritise cases for direct offers, based on trends and ongoing demands on the HomeChoice Bristol service.

In the circumstances listed below, a household will be directly offered a property. Offers will be made on a city-wide basis whilst having regard to suitability. Direct offers made in this way will not count as a landlord own let.

a) Offers to homeless households

Homeless households owed the main homelessness duty under Section 193(2) of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) will be expected to bid regularly for properties advertised via HomeChoice Bristol. However, at any time after the acceptance of the main homelessness duty, they may also be made a direct offer of suitable social housing under Part VI of the above Act in order to discharge the main homelessness duty. They may also be considered for privately rented properties offered on a 12-month assured shorthold tenancy basis.

Homeless households owed the Section 193C(4) duty to secure accommodation may also be made a direct offer of social housing, or of a privately rented property offered on a six month assured shorthold tenancy basis.

The length of time taken for a direct offer to be made will depend upon the circumstances of the household and the availability of suitable accommodation.

Applicants who refuse a suitable offer of accommodation will no longer be given priority based on criterion 5.5c of the HCB Allocation Scheme and they will be excluded from HomeChoice Bristol for six months. After this time a new application can be submitted and will be assessed.

b) Referrals from Police, probation Service or Home Office

Direct offers to applicants referred via one of these agencies will be agreed by a Specialist Advisor from the Council's Homelessness Prevention Team.

c) Council employee occupying tied accommodation

In some circumstances where the applicant is a Council employee in tied accommodation and the Council requires vacant possession of that property, the applicant will be made a direct offer of suitable alternative accommodation. If the offer of suitable accommodation is refused the applicant will be assessed into the lowest band.

d) Key Ring supported living

Applicants assessed as having been accepted onto Key Ring supported living scheme will be made one direct offer of suitable accommodation to enable them to move into their network. If the offer is refused the applicant will not be made any further direct offers and they will be expected to bid.

e) Priority Move-On Scheme (PMOS)

Applicants accepted onto the PMOS scheme must make bids for all suitable available properties and their bidding will be reviewed after three months. If they fail to secure accommodation within this time they will be made one direct offer of suitable accommodation, which includes privately rented properties offered on a 12-month assured shorthold tenancy basis. Failure to accept one offer of accommodation (whether that offer is made via bidding or direct offer) will result in the applicant being reassessed into the lowest band and removal from PMOS. Applicants have the right to a review of the decision to be reassessed into the lowest band.

f) Hospital discharge

Applicants assessed as a hospital discharge case under section 5.4k of this policy may be made a direct offer of suitable accommodation. The decision to make a direct offer will be dependent on the applicant's individual circumstances. In making this decision, consideration will be given to the applicant's ability to place bids for themselves and the type of accommodation required. Applicants will only receive one direct offer. If the applicant refuses a direct offer no further direct offers will be made. The applicant will remain on band 1 but will be required to place his/her own bids. If the applicant refuses a further offer they will be suspended from bidding as outlined in section 4.3c of the HCB Allocation Scheme.

g) Other exceptional circumstances

The applicant does not fall within any of the categories listed in 6.1 a-f but in the opinion of the Housing Supply Manager requires a direct offer in order to resolve an urgent need to be rehoused.

h) Direct offer to a non-registered provider landlord

In the same way as this scheme allows applicants to bid for and, if successful, be nominated to become an assured shorthold tenant of accommodation provided by a non-registered provider landlord with whom the Council has made an arrangement for the provision of accommodation (see section 6.6), the Council may make a direct offer of such accommodation where it considers it

appropriate to do so. The refusal of any such direct offer would not be counted for the purpose of section 4.3(c) of this Scheme.

6.2 Exceptions to the usual allocation process

a) Landlord own lets

The allocation scheme allows for a small percentage of available properties to be advertised as a landlord own let. This means that individual Bristol Housing Partnership (BHP) landlords may decide not to allocate the property to the applicant in the greatest need.

When allocating a property as an own let, BHP landlords will refer to their own lettings policies. Bristol City Council landlord may allocate up to 10% of their total vacancies as an own let, all other partner landlords may allocate up to 30%[2] of their total vacancies. Where a landlord has chosen to allocate a property outside of the agreed HCB allocation scheme, this will usually be made clear within the advert. The following will count as landlord own selections:

i) An internal transfer
ii) A direct offer to an existing tenant
iii) A direct offer to an applicant from the housing register (exceptions apply, see 6.1 above)
iv) Properties that are not advertised to all bands
v) Properties advertised as a sensitive let
vi) Properties advertised with a preference to a particular group, for example working households (exceptions apply, see 6.2b below).
vii) Properties allocated to an applicant not at the top of the shortlist (exceptions apply, see 6.2b below)

b) Adapted properties

In order to make the best use of housing stock landlords may advertise certain properties with adaptations (including level access properties) with priority to those applicants who need that particular adaptation. As a result, the property may be allocated to a household in a lower band. However, in making the decision to overlook higher band cases all landlords will have regard to whether this is the most suitable allocation and best use of stock. Allocations made in this way will not count as a landlord own let.

6.3 Letting restrictions

Some properties have lettings restrictions, for example 'no pets' or 'no children under 10 years old' due to lack of sound insulation. Any restrictions will be explained in the advert and applicants who do not meet the criteria will not be eligible to bid.

[2] This figure may change following the conclusion of the Bristol Housing Partnership agreement review.

6.4 Localised restrictions

Most allocations for social housing will be made from the general allocations scheme. However, different parts of the city may have localised issues which are not directly addressed by the scheme. To address these situations a Local Lettings Policy (LLP) may be introduced. LLPs place additional criteria or restrictions on certain properties that applicants on the housing register must meet in order to apply to rent them. For example, an LLP can ensure that a proportion of local key workers are given priority in developments in a particular area.

All new build schemes across the city are subject to what are commonly referred to as Local Lettings Plans (though Bristol City Council has adopted the term 'Sustainable Lettings Plans' or SLPs) for first lets.

The aim of an SLP is to create more mixed, balanced and sustainable communities - mixed in composition, balanced in terms of characteristics and needs, and sustainable by seeking to promote stability and continuity and minimise the risk of social and management issues.

a) Local lettings policies (LLPs)

The Council aims to increase the use of Local Lettings Policies (LLPs) to meet specific local needs[3]. An equalities impact assessment is undertaken for all LLPs and where an LLP is in place, the criteria will be stated in the property details when advertised. A standard Local Letting Policy Template and approach to has been developed for this purpose to ensure a consistent approach and process is followed, including representative community involvement in the development of future LLP's.

The LLPs currently in operation are listed below:

Lawrence Weston
Lawrence Weston Local Lettings Policy

Lockleaze
Lockleaze Local Lettings Policy (bristol.gov.uk)

Knowle West Regeneration Area (KWRA)
KWRA LLP JUNE 2025 FINAL.pdf

We Can Make, Knowle West
We Can Make LLP July 2021.pdf
We Can Make is the community land trust set up by Knowle West Media Centre (KWMC).

They are working with us on a pilot project to develop homes on under-used garden "micro-sites" to meet local affordable housing needs. Their first units have been completed at Novers Lane and Belstone Walk, Knowle West.

[3] We intend to introduce additional LLPs in areas with development coming forward including Fishponds, Lawrence Hill, St Pauls, Southmead, Horfield, Knowle, Hengrove & South Bristol surrounds. This is not an exhaustive list and other areas will be considered in due course. However, it should be noted that these proposals are not yet finalised. As these proposals are developed and implemented in areas across the city they will be added to the list of current LLPs (with links to the policies) noted in section 6.4 of the allocation scheme.

b) New build schemes

A common SLP has been created to standardise the lettings criteria for first lets in all new developments in order to:

- Make the process and rationale more transparent to service users,
- Reduce the need to develop new plans for every development,
- Allow for a degree of standardization across MOST new developments (except in circumstances that genuinely require a different approach).

The core criteria we have adopted in co-operation with our Registered Provider partners is set out in Appendix 6 of this policy.

It should be noted that there is no category in the standardised criteria relating to the maximum amount of housing related debt applicants are allowed to have in order to be allocated a property under an SLP. This will be determined through the allocations policies of individual registered providers.

SLPs will be put in place for all first lets in new general needs homes, which are introductory, assured or secure tenancies delivered by Registered Providers (RPs) and Bristol City Council. The terms of the revised Housing Partnership Agreement will determine how the SLP criteria are applied for subsequent relets.

The only exceptions to the SLP approach are community-led housing, specialist housing (including temporary accommodation) and certain residential estate regeneration schemes, as they will have a site specific SLP.

Where Sustainable Lettings Plans are in operation, the criteria will be stated in the property details when they are advertised.

Due to the sustainable lettings approach, vacancies will not always be allocated to the applicants who can demonstrate the greatest housing need. Applicants with lower priority may be considered for an allocation if they fulfil the criteria set out in the Sustainable Lettings Plan.

It is recognised that there may be situations in which it is not possible to fulfil the SLP criteria. In such situations the provider will be expected to provide evidence to support any deviation from the agreed criteria.

6.5 Extra care housing

Applicants who wish to be considered for Extra Care Housing must have a recognised support need. Housing accommodation is primarily for people over 65 years of age, but if you are disabled, have learning difficulties or have mental health issues then you may be eligible if you are over 55.

Properties will be allocated to people on the Adult Care 'waiting list'. To be included on this list the

applicant should contact Care Direct to request an assessment for Extra Care Housing. Applicants applying for Extra Care Housing who already have a social worker assigned to them must advise Care direct of this. Care Direct can be contacted on 0117 922 2700.

6.6 Nomination to a non-registered provider landlord

Although it would not be an allocation for the purposes of Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996, applicants may bid for and, if successful, be nominated to become an assured shorthold tenant of accommodation provided by a non-registered provider landlord with whom the Council has made an arrangement for the provision of accommodation. These properties, when they become available, will be advertised in the usual way but the advert will make it clear that the allocation is made outside of the mainstream HCB Allocation Scheme.

6.7 Discretionary tenancy award

Where at the time of application a person is in use and occupation (occupying a Council property without a tenancy and no legal right to one under succession) Bristol City Council, while having due regard to this policy, may use discretion to make an offer of a tenancy; either at the existing property or at another property depending on the outcome of their application assessment, in accordance with Bristol City Council Policy and Procedure.

7. Monitoring and management

7.1 Monitoring applications

a) Applicants that do not bid

Applicants in Bands 1 and 2 will be given six months from the date of assessment in band 1 or 2 to place a bid. If they do not place a bid during that time they will no longer qualify for the housing register. The HCB Team will review the applicant's bidding within this period.

Applicants in Bands 3 and 4 will be given one year from their registration date on HCB to bid. Applicants that have not bid will no longer qualify to be included on HCB.

The decision to exclude applicants in any band will be made on the basis that they will not qualify for HomeChoice Bristol for a period of six months unless there is a significant change in circumstances. Exceptions may be considered depending on the availability of suitable accommodation and personal circumstances of the applicant. Applicants can seek a review of this decision (see 3.9 above).

At the end of the exclusion period a new application would need to be submitted in order to be reconsidered on HCB.

a) Applicants owed a homelessness duty under Section 193(2) or Section 193C(4) of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) who do not bid

These applicants are not subject to paragraph 7.1a above. However, they may be made a direct offer as specified in section 6.1a above.

b) Applicants accepted on the Priority Move-On Scheme who do not bid

These applicants are not subject to paragraph 7.1a above. However, they may be made a direct offer as specified in section 6.1d above.

7.2 Applications from Bristol City Council employees in tied accommodation.

Bristol City Council employees in tied accommodation will be placed in band 1 in instances of:

- redundancy
- ill health retirement
- retirement
- resignation where service has been satisfactory for a minimum of five years
- redeployment or promotion to a non-residential post.

Partners of employees who die in service also qualify for band 1.

Rehousing applications from people who resign before completing 5 years' service are to be

considered on their individual merits.

Employees will be eligible to bid for accommodation that is appropriate to the size of their household (see Appendix 3).

Owners who become wardens/caretakers

People who own residential accommodation at the time of being offered a post are to be made aware that band 1 will not be awarded when the period of employment ends (unless there are exceptional circumstances). The application for housing will be assessed on the employees housing need.

Council tenants who become wardens/caretakers

Where a council tenancy is relinquished in order to take up such a job offer the applicant is to be advised that they may only bid for accommodation of a size, and type, appropriate to the households needs at the end of the period of employment (as specified above) and not the same type of accommodation they lived in previously.

7.3 BHP tenants going to prison - future rehousing requests

Where a BHP tenant is about to serve a prison sentence, they will be encouraged to surrender their tenancy where that tenancy is not sustainable during the sentence. The tenant will:

- be issued with a letter explaining the process upon their release
- be advised to submit an application on HomeChoice Bristol upon their release with a copy of the letter issued to them (as above).

The application for rehousing will be considered in band 1 they will be allowed 1 month to successfully bid for a property after which time a direct offer of a property will be made on a citywide basis.

However, if their prison sentence relates to an offence that could have resulted in proceedings to regain possession of their tenancy, further enquiries will need to be made to ascertain if the applicant qualifies to be on the Bristol Housing Register (see 4.2 – Qualification Criteria)

7.4 Worsening or deliberately failing to improve housing circumstances

An applicant will be given reduced priority if the Council is satisfied they deliberately did, or failed to do, something which, in consequence, led to a worsening of their housing circumstances. The household will be placed into Band 4. The situation will be reviewed upon a material change of circumstance within the household.

Examples of which could include (but not limited to):

- A household moving from an affordable property where, according to the bedroom standard they are appropriately housed to a property where they are overcrowded.
- A household giving up an affordable and suitable private rented tenancy which they are able to maintain, to move in with other relatives, creating a situation of overcrowding.
- A household requesting or colluding with a landlord or family member to issue them with a Notice to Quit.
- Where there is evidence that an applicant has deliberately worsened their financial circumstances in order to qualify for and/or receive additional priority on the housing register.
- An applicant gives up settled accommodation that is reasonable to occupy in order to move into less settled or overcrowded accommodation.
- An applicant deliberately overcrowds their property by moving in friends and/or other family members who have never lived together previously and/or have not lived together for a long time, then requests rehousing to larger accommodation
- An applicant who refused a final offer of accommodation made in order to discharge a homelessness duty, and who has subsequently re-applied to HCB following the end of their exclusion.

The above list is not exhaustive.

7.5 Homeless households who are unable to live independently

Where it is considered that an applicant who falls within any of the homelessness banding categories is unable to sustain independent accommodation, their application will be suspended until such time as their Housing Advisor, in consultation with any relevant professionals such as a supported housing provider, considers that the applicant is able to manage a tenancy and is ready to move on to independent living. The decision to suspend an applicant will be made by the Housing Advisor. Applicants will have the right to request a review of any such decision (see section 3.9 above).

Appendix 1: Glossary

Terms Used	Definition
Acceptable Behaviour Agreement	A voluntary written agreement signed by an individual committing anti-social behaviour. In signing the agreement, the individual is agreeing to abide by the terms specified and to work with any support services identified.
Administration orders	A legally binding administrative arrangement that allows a person to pay only what they can afford towards their credit debts. This is an order by a County Court.
Affordable rent	Affordable rents are set at 80% of the market rent in the private sector.
Allocation	For the purposes of Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996, a housing authority allocates accommodation when it: • selects a person to be a secure or introductory tenant of accommodation held by that authority, • nominates a person to be a secure or introductory tenant of accommodation held by another housing authority, • nominates a person to be an assured tenant of accommodation held by a Private Registered Provider.
Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)	Bristol City Council adopts the definitions of anti-social behaviour (ASB) set out in the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. Part 1 of the Act defines ASB as: • Any act that causes, or is likely to cause, nuisance or annoyance to a person in respect of their dwelling. and • Any act that causes, or is likely to cause, alarm, harassment or distress to a person not in respect of their dwelling. We also make use of the Community Protection Notice under Part 4 of the Act, which includes this definition: • Conduct of an individual that is having a detrimental effect (that is persistent or continuing) on the quality of life of those in the locality and that conduct is unreasonable. Formal legal action against ASB is taken using civil injunctions, Community Protection Notices (CPN) or Criminal Behaviour Orders (CBOs). These legal measures replace Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs), which were repealed in 2014.
Assured shorthold tenancy (AST)	The most common tenancy for people who rent from a private landlord or letting agent. Assured Shorthold tenancies give the tenant the right to occupy a property for a fixed period of time, provided that they keep to the terms of their tenancy agreement. At the end of the fixed period

	of time (often six months), the landlord or the tenant has the right to terminate the tenancy but it can be renewed for another fixed period of time if both parties agree.
Assured tenancy	An assured tenancy is a type of tenancy that some private tenants and most housing association tenants have. A landlord can only end an assured tenancy if they have a legal reason or ground for possession. For example, rent arrears or antisocial behaviour.
Bankruptcy orders	A legal status that usually lasts for a year and can be a way to clear debts a person can't pay. When a person is bankrupt, their non-essential assets (property and what you own) and excess income are used to pay off creditors (those the person owes money to). At the end of the bankruptcy period, most debts are cancelled.
Bedroom entitlement	The number of bedrooms that a household can be considered for. This is done in accordance with the bedroom standard (see overcrowding, defined below).
BHP tenant	A tenant of one of the Bristol Housing Partners (BHP) whose tenancy is in the Bristol City boundary.
Breach of tenancy conditions (BOTC)	All tenants sign a 'tenancy agreement', agreeing to uphold the 'conditions of tenancy' as stated in the agreement. A breach of tenancy conditions refers to when those conditions have not been upheld by the tenant(s). Common breaches of tenancy conditions include: • Non-payment of rent • Incidences of ASB/hate crime/domestic abuse, • Non-occupation or sub-letting of the property, • Failure to keep the property in good condition/ failure to report necessary repairs.
Bristol City boundary	If you are liable for Council tax in Bristol then you will be classed as living in the Bristol City Boundary. Applicants can check whether or not they live within the Bristol City boundary by going to www.gov.uk/pay-council-tax and entering their postcode.
Care leaver	A young person aged between 16 and 25 who is or has been looked after for a total of 13 weeks or more after their fourteenth birthday and who continue to be looked after at 16 or 17 years of age.
Carer	Anyone who looks after a family member or friend who needs help because of illness, frailty, disability, a mental health problem or some other care need and cannot manage without this additional support. Carers can be adults or young people and the support they provide is unpaid.
Composite need	When an applicant has more than one housing need that effectively makes their situation worse than someone else in the same band. Factors currently taken into consideration include over-crowding, where someone's health is made worse by their accommodation, domestic violence and/or harassment.
Debt Relief Orders (DROs)	A form of personal insolvency. It is a way for people in debt to have

	their debts written off. The total qualifying debts must be below £30,000 and the person must have little to no assets and a low income.
Demoted tenancy	An alternative to possession proceedings for social housing landlords where a tenant is causing nuisance through antisocial behaviour or using the property for an unlawful purpose. The tenant does not lose their home and can regain their original tenancy and security of tenure after 12 to 18 months.
Direct offer	A way of allocating social housing whereby the Council actively approaches someone on the waiting list with an offer of housing which is considered suitable for their needs according to the information provided on their application form.
Effective date	The date an application was assessed into one of the housing allocation scheme bands.
Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA)	An evidence-based assessment designed to help organisations ensure that their policies, practices, events and decision-making processes are fair and do not present barriers to participation or disadvantage any protected groups from participation.
Fixed term tenancy	Fixed term tenancies are offered for a fixed period of time and the tenancy ends on the last day of that period or term. The partner landlords will decide their own typical length to offer a tenancy.
Flexible tenancy	A flexible tenancy is a fixed term secure tenancy with most of the same rights as a secure tenancy but last for a fixed period. A flexible tenancy will usually last 5 years, following an introductory tenancy of 12 months.
Foster carer	Someone who looks after a child or young person in their home, as agreed by Bristol City Council Children and Young People's Services, who cannot live with their parents.
General needs housing	Housing which is not aimed at specific populations (such as older people) and where there is no additional support provided to tenants beyond normal housing management and repairs services.
Genuine and effective employment	For employment to be considered 'genuine and effective' supporting evidence indicating regular employment is required, such as a contract of employment. Even if there is no contract, there must be evidence of an employer and regular hours and payment. Family or friendly arrangements with no contract or regular hours may be considered 'marginal and ancillary' (see definition below) rather than 'genuine and effective' employment. A range of factors are considered when deciding whether employment is 'genuine and effective' or 'marginal and ancillary'. These include: • the period of employment • the number of hours worked • the level of earnings • whether the work is regular or erratic.
Hardship	As defined in section 4.11 of the Allocation of accommodation:

	guidance for local authorities (2012) hardship includes situations where an applicant needs to move to a different locality in order to give or receive care, or to access specialised medical treatment or take up a particular employment, education or training opportunity that is not available elsewhere and not within reasonable commuting distance.
Housing, Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)	The HHSRS assesses 29 housing hazards (ie. crowding and space, mould, excess heat or cold etc) and the effect that each may have on the health and safety of current or future occupants of the property. The HHSRS provides a way that hazards can be assessed and identifies the best way(s) they can be dealt with. If a hazard is a serious and immediate risk to a person's health and safety, this is known as a Category 1 hazard. If a hazard is less serious or less urgent, this is known as a Category 2 hazard.
HN	The letters 'HN', used throughout this document, refers to qualifying 'housing needs' which are categories given to certain applicants who are more in need of housing than others. The categories include: • Overcrowding • Health affected by current housing • Harassment • Hardship • Unsanitary or unsatisfactory housing Applicants with **more than one** qualifying housing needs will receive higher priority when their application is assessed.
Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA)	A specialist professional who works with a victim of domestic abuse to develop a trusting relationship. They can help a victim with everything they need to feel safe and rebuild their life and represent their voice at a MARAC (defined below), help them navigate the criminal justice process and work with the different agencies to provide support.
Introductory tenancy	A 12-month probationary tenancy given by Bristol City Council and is known as a trial period. An introductory tenancy will become secure so long as there are no serious breaches of tenancy.
Key Ring scheme	Key Ring are an adult social care service provider. They run a number of schemes in Bristol for people with learning disabilities and/or mental health issues and/or autism living in the community.
Marginal employment	Marginal (or 'marginal and ancillary') employment broadly means that the work involves so little time and money as to be largely irrelevant to the lifestyle of the person. For example, a student who gets a job working behind a student union bar for two hours a week is primarily a student, their work is 'marginal and ancillary' to their actual role as a student. Voluntary work for no payment or material reward would similarly not qualify as 'genuine and effective' employment (see definition of 'genuine and effective' employment above).
Medical and welfare grounds	Medical grounds refers to the medical circumstances of a household that is directly affected by current housing conditions and where a move to more suitable accommodation would improve the medical

	condition. Welfare grounds can encompass a wide range of needs. For example: • providing accommodation from which a care leaver can build a stable independent life. • providing accommodation to help someone recover from the effects of violence or threats of violence, or physical, emotional or sexual abuse. • assisting foster carers, or those approved to adopt who need to move to a larger home in order to accommodate a looked after child or a child who was previously looked after by a local authority.
Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)	The Criminal Justice Act 2003 led to the establishment of Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) in each criminal justice area of England and Wales. MAPPA is designed to protect the public, including previous victims of crime, from serious harm by sexual and violent offenders. They require the local criminal justice agencies and other bodies dealing with offenders to work together in partnership in dealing with these offenders.
Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)	A MARAC is a meeting where information is shared on the highest risk domestic abuse cases between representatives of local police, probation, health, child protection, housing practitioners, Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs) and other specialists from the statutory and voluntary sectors. The primary focus of the MARAC is to safeguard the adult victim.
Noise Abatement Notice	Councils must investigate complaints about issues that could be a 'statutory nuisance' (a nuisance covered by the Environmental Protection Act 1990). If noise levels from a premises are considered '*prejudicial to health or a nuisance'* councils will serve a noise abatement notice.
Notice of Possession Proceedings (NOPP)	A legal notice given to a tenant that says the landlord is seeking possession of an introductory tenancy. A Notice of Possession Proceedings must be served upon the tenant before the expiry of the introductory tenancy period and an application made to court to hear the case.
Notice Seeking Possession (NoSP)	A legal notice given to a tenant that says the landlord intends to take back the occupancy of the property because the tenancy conditions have not been adhered to. This is warning of the intention to refer to court to seek eviction.
Overcrowding	Section 4.8 of the Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local authorities (2012), states that the bedroom standard is an appropriate measure of overcrowding for allocation purposes, and recommends that all housing authorities should adopt this as a minimum. The bedroom standard allocates a separate bedroom to each: • married or cohabiting couple

	• adult aged 21 years or more • pair of adolescents aged 10-20 years of the same sex • pair of children aged under 10 years regardless of sex
Priority Move-on scheme (PMOS)	A discretionary scheme to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of supported housing provision by assisting residents to move on to other accommodation when their support needs reduce. The scheme enables an accommodation provider to refer a client who is ready to move on directly in to HomeChoice. The referred client is awarded band 2 with a six month backdating which puts them high up in band 2 with swifter move on times being achieved through bidding. PMOS also gives scope to identify a direct offer of social housing for the client which can be made if bidding does not deliver an outcome in the short term.
Residence order	A residence order establishes where a child will live and a contact order sets out who the children should spend time with.
Responsible authority	This is the Local Authority that last looked after the child or young person.
Restricted person/restricted case	Someone who is not eligible for assistance under Part 7 of the Housing Act, 1996 and is subject to immigration control and either: a) Does not have leave to enter or remain in the UK, or b) Does have leave but it is subject to a condition of 'no recourse to public funds' A restricted case is where the housing authority would not be satisfied that the applicant had a priority need for housing without having had regard to a 'restricted person' in the household. For example, where an applicant is an eligible British citizen who would not have priority need if they applied alone but does have priority need because of their dependent children who are 'restricted persons'.
Secure tenancy	A secure tenancy will be awarded at the end of a 12-month probationary tenancy so long as there have been no breaches of tenancy.
Serious illness or disability	Cases that have been assessed, by the Council's Health and Housing Team, as having acutely serious overt health problems with unequivocal need for change of accommodation to alter the course of daily functioning e.g. a wheelchair user who lives in a top floor flat with no lift or who has extreme mental health issues living in a neighbourhood which is overtly contributing to destruction of independent living.
Serious unacceptable behaviour	Any breach of tenancy conditions including ASB and non-payment of rent where legal action has been taken by the Police or any Council department or any landlord.
Social rent	Social rent is based on a formula set by government. It is usually less than an affordable rent.
Special guardianship	Special Guardianship is an order made by the Family Court that places a child or young person to live with someone other than their parent(s)

	on a long-term basis. The person(s) with whom a child is placed will become the child's Special Guardian.
Starter tenancy	Starter tenancies are assured short-hold tenancies which are given to new social housing tenants. This is a probationary tenancy for a period of 12 months. After 12 months, if the tenancy has been conducted satisfactorily, it will automatically convert to an assured tenancy. If a starter tenancy is not conducted satisfactorily, it may be extended for six months or terminated.
Suitable offer	A suitable offer is defined in detail in Appendix 5 of this document.
Supported lodgings	A scheme which offers young people accommodation in a home environment when leaving foster care or residential care. Supported lodgings are provided by people who can offer a bedroom in their homes, along with some level of support, to care leavers.
Supported housing	Accommodation provided with additional tenancy support for individuals with specific needs.
Temporary accommodation (TA)	Under Homelessness legislation, if a person or family becomes homeless and urgently needs a home, the Council may provide temporary accommodation while helping them find a more sustainable long-term housing solution.
Tied accommodation	Accommodation occupied by employees of the Council where their contract of employment requires them to occupy dwelling houses for the better performance for their duties.
Under-occupation charge	Often called 'the bedroom tax', cuts someone's universal credit housing element or housing benefit if they are: • of working age • classed as having a spare bedroom • a council or housing association tenant
Under occupying	A household under occupies accommodation when they are occupying accommodation that is larger than their maximum room entitlement.

Appendix 2: Bristol Housing Partnership (BHP) landlords

Landlord	Address
Abri	Lupin Way, Yeovil, Somerset, BA22 8WN
Brighter Places	Eden House, 10 Eastgate Office Park, Eastgate Road, Eastfield, Bristol BS5 6XX
Bristol City Council	PO Box 595, Bristol, BS99 2AW
Bromford	Building 1, Riverside Court, Bowling Hill, Chipping Sodbury, Bristol BS37 6JX
Brunelcare	Saffron Gardens, Prospect Place, Whitehall, Bristol, BS5 9FF
Clarion Housing	Level 6, 6 More London Place, Tooley Street, London, SE1 2DA
Curo	The Maltings, River Place, Lower Bristol Road, Bath, BA2 1EP
Elim Housing Association	Units 3 & 4, Pinkers Court, Briarlands Office Park, Gloucester Road, Rudgeway, South Gloucestershire, BS35 3QH
Green Square Accord	Methuen Park, Chippenham, SN14 0GU
Guinness Partnership	Estune Business Park, Block C, Wild Country Lane, Long Ashton, Bristol, BS41 9AF
Habinteg Housing Association Ltd	41 Valentine Close, Hengrove, Bristol BS14 9ND
LiveWest	Weston Gateway Business Park, Weston Super Mare, Somerset, BS24 7JP
Places for People Housing Association	4th Floor, 10 Victoria Street, Bristol, BS1 6BN
Riverside Group	12 Dowry Square, Hotwells, Bristol, BS8 4SH
Sanctuary Housing South West Ltd	Estuary House, Peninsular Park, Rydon Lane, Exeter, EX2 7XE
Sovereign Housing Association	Brabazon House, Unit 11 Brabazon Office Park, Golf Course Lane, Filton, Bristol BS34 7PZ
Stonewater Housing Association	450 Woodland Court, Ash Ridge Road, Bradley Stoke, Bristol, BS32 4LB

Appendix 3: The bedroom standard

a) Bedroom standard

For the purposes of this policy, overcrowding and bedroom entitlement is assessed in accordance with bedroom standard. The bedroom standard allows a separate bedroom to each:

- married or cohabiting couple
- adult aged 21 years or more
- two children under 10 of either sex can share a bedroom
- two boys under 21 can share a bedroom
- two girls under 21 can share a bedroom

b) Sharing with another household

Where a household applying for rehousing is sharing a property with another household that will not be moving with them, the bedroom entitlement (see Appendix 3) will be applied to all people living in the property. The application will be assessed on the basis that children of appropriate ages and gender (as set out in section a) can share a bedroom regardless of whether they belong to the same family unit.

c) Appropriate rooms

When assessing if a household is lacking a bedroom a second living room that is suitable to be used as sleeping accommodation will be treated as a bedroom.

d) Studio flats

Where an applicant and children are occupying a studio flat/bedsit, the property will be classed as having '0' bedrooms.

A studio flat is considered to be suitable for a single person or couple and if occupying such accommodation will not be considered as lacking a bedroom.

e) Expectant mothers

Expectant mothers, who on the birth of the child, will be eligible for a property larger than they currently need (as per section h) will be allowed to bid on the larger property once they are 20 weeks pregnant.

f) Additional bedrooms

Bedroom entitlement will be calculated based on the bedroom standard. However, in exceptional circumstances, an additional bedroom may be agreed. This is most likely to apply in the following circumstances: (i) where an applicant or household member has significant overnight care needs

which require the presence of an overnight carer every night; or (ii) where an applicant or household member, who would otherwise be expected to share a bedroom, cannot reasonably be expected to do so because of significant medical or behavioural issues which are likely to have a seriously detrimental impact upon his or her health wellbeing, or that of the person with whom he or she would normally share a bedroom.

Each case will be assessed on an individual basis, after all relevant information has been taken into account. The decision to agree to the provision of an extra bedroom on health grounds will be made by a Health and Housing Officer.

The Health and Housing Team will consult with any other agencies or services who have relevant knowledge of the applicant's or household member's circumstances. The provision of an additional bedroom will only be agreed if documentation showing that an assessment of need has been undertaken by appropriate health or care professionals which supports the requirement for an additional bedroom. For example, decisions in cases involving children with special needs will take into account evidence such as Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) reports, information from Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), as well as information provided by paediatricians, occupational therapy (OT) services, general practitioners (GPs), health visitors, and other relevant professionals. This also includes referrals and assessments for Carers or Care Act Assessments, which also provide evidence of need.

g) Split families

Applications from split households who wish to live together will be assessed from the better of the two properties based on the households needs.

h) Bedroom entitlement

The size of property a household can be considered for is based on the bedroom standard (see section a).

The following table outlines the number of bedrooms a household would usually be considered for. However, this may vary dependant on permitted numbers allowed in the property. On occasions where a property has a smaller permitted number than usual this will be outlined in the property advert. It should be noted that the number of bedrooms your household needs is not a reviewable decision.

Household	Number of bedrooms
Single Applicant	Studio or 1 bed
Single applicant aged over 60 years	Studio or 1 bed (including sheltered accommodation)
Couple [Couples can bid for studios that are large enough for 2 people. This will be specified on the advert.]	1 bed or studio

Household	Number of bedrooms
Couple aged over 60 years	1 bed or studio (including sheltered accommodation)
Single applicant or couple expecting a child	1 bed or 2 bed
Single applicant or couple with 1 child	2 bed
Single applicant or couple with 2 children (mixed or same sexes under 10 years)	2 bed
Single applicant or couple with 2 children (same sexes both under 21 years)	2 bed
Single applicant or couple with 2 children (mixed sexes at least 1 over 10 years)	3 bed
Single applicant or couple with 3 children (mixed sexes, all under 10 years)	3 bed
Single applicant or couple with 3 children (same sexes, all under 21 years)	3 bed
Single applicant or couple with 3 children (mixed sexes, all under 21 years)	3 bed
Single applicant or couple with 3 children (same sex, 2 under 21 years and 1 over 21 years)	3 bed
Single applicant or couple with 3 children (same sex, 1 under 21 years and 2 over 21 years)	3 or 4 bed
Single applicant or couple with 3 children (same sex, all over 21 years)	3 or 4 bed
Single applicant or couple with 3 children (mixed sexes, all over 21 years)	3 or 4 bed
Single applicant or couple with 3 children (1 over 21 years and 2 mixed sexes 1 under 10 years and 1 over 10 years).	3 or 4 bed
Single applicant or couple with 4 children (same sex, all under 21 years)	3 bed
Single applicant or couple with 4 children (mixed sexes, all under 10 years)	3 bed
Single applicant or couple with 4 children (2 of each sex, all under 21 years)	3 bed
Single applicant or couple with 4 children (same sex, 3 under 21 years and 1 over 21 years)	3 or 4 bed
Single applicant or couple with 4 children (3 same sex under 10 years and 1 opposite sex over 10 years)	4 bed
Single applicant or couple with 4 children (3 mixed sexes under 10 years and 1 over 21 years)	4 bed
Larger families may bid for large 3 bedroom, 4, 5 and 6+ bedroom properties. Due to the lack of availability of larger family accommodation, households requiring 4+ bedrooms may, with the household's agreement, be considered for properties smaller than their bedroom entitlement so long as this does not make them overcrowded by 2+ rooms. Please note that The Council's Health and Housing team may restrict the type of property or increase the size of a property a household can bid for due to health reasons.	

Appendix 4: Household members

Applicants can only include members of their 'immediate family' on their application. For the purposes of this policy, immediate family is defined as:

- The applicant
- The applicant's spouse or partner.
- Dependent children – including children to whom the applicant has legal guardianship of and children that are adopted or fostered. A kinship foster child will only be included as an immediate family member if the arrangement is formally agreed and approved by Bristol City Council's Children's Services
- Elderly parents - will only be included where the Health and Housing team have agreed that they need to live with the applicant for health reasons and only if they are eligible for housing assistance. Due to the lack of large/adapted family accommodation any request to include elderly parents as household members may be refused if their housing needs can be better met via sheltered housing and a package of care.

Who cannot be included as part of the Household?

- Adult children unless it can clearly be seen that they have occupied the parental home as their only or main home for the last 2 years. They will not be included where they have spent a considerable amount of time away from the home and only recently returned.
- Students in full time education/residential setting and living away from the address applied from
- Extended family members - for example grandparents, aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces and cousins.
- Siblings of the applicant or applicant's spouse or partner
- Friends
- Lodgers

Exceptions

People who have an exceptional need to live with the applicant can be defined as those people who are not included in the definition of immediate family, but who have a real need to live as part of the household in order to give or to receive care or support.

This may include:

- An adult child
- Elderly parents - Elderly parents will only be included where the Health and Housing team have agreed that they need to live with the son or daughter for health reasons and only if they are eligible for housing assistance. Due to the lack of large/adapted family accommodation any request to include elderly parents as household members may be refused if their housing needs can be better met via sheltered housing and a package of

care.

- A carer – If an applicant needs full- time care and there is no one available in their immediate family to provide this care and there are no other housing options.

Applications where household members have a BHP debt from a former or current tenancy of £500 or more will be prevented from bidding. This will also apply where the household member's BHP debt combined with the applicant's BHP debt exceeds £500 as set out in section 4.3a.

Appendix 5: Defining a 'suitable offer'

Introduction and general points

Applicants who refuse suitable offers may have their HomeChoice Bristol applications suspended or closed in certain circumstances, which are set out in more detail in the Allocation Scheme.

If an applicant places a bid for a particular property, the Council will normally take the view that the applicant took all of the information contained in the property advertisement into account before placing the bid and determined that the property was suitable for his/her household based on that information.

However, it is acknowledged that, in some situations, an applicant may consider a property to be unsuitable for reasons which do not relate to the information contained in the advertisement, and these reasons will need to be given fair consideration when determining whether the property was in fact suitable for the applicant's household.

In other situations, an applicant may have had a genuine misunderstanding about an aspect of the information contained in the advertisement. It will be necessary to consider the circumstances of the application as a whole in order to determine whether the applicant could genuinely have held such a mistaken view. Even if this is acknowledged, consideration must still be given to whether the property was actually unsuitable for the applicant's household.

If an applicant refuses a direct offer of a property, consideration will need to be given to any information that the applicant had provided previously regarding his/her housing requirements in order to inform the direct offer process.

In relation to both properties offered following a bid and those offered directly, the applicant's bidding history may also be taken into account when determining suitability. For example, if an applicant has previously placed bids for properties in a particular area but subsequently refuses a property in the same area on the grounds that that area is unsuitable, the previous bids may be regarded as a factor indicative of suitability, although this will not necessarily be conclusive.

It is the applicant's responsibility to update his/her application with any new information which may have a bearing upon the size, types and locations of properties which are suitable for his/her household. If this information has been provided by the applicant but has not been assessed by the time that an offer is made, it will need to be taken into account by the HomeChoice Bristol Team before any decision on the suitability of the property can be made. Such information may relate to, but is not limited to, changes in household composition, health-based housing requirements, and recommendations from relevant professionals regarding areas which may be unsafe for the applicant's household.

Specific factors relating to suitability of accommodation

The specific factors below may need to be taken into consideration when determining whether a particular property would have been suitable for an applicant's household. The considerations set out above may be relevant to any of these factors in a particular case.

1) Property size

In order to be regarded as suitable, the property must have had the appropriate number of bedrooms for the applicant's household at the time of making the offer and at the time of the refusal. Bedroom entitlements are set out in Appendix 3 of the Allocation Scheme.

Given the scarcity of social housing in Bristol, it is unlikely that a property will be regarded as unsuitable for any other reason relating to its size. For example, if a property has the requisite number of bedrooms, but the applicant claims that the living room is too small, it is unlikely that a finding of unsuitability would be made.

2) Property type and characteristics

The fact that a property may not be of an applicant's preferred type or may not have his/her preferred characteristics does not in itself mean that the property will be regarded as unsuitable for his/her household. For example, the fact that a property may be in a multi-storey block or may not have a garden or a particular heating system, is not by itself indicative of unsuitability, although the particular circumstances of the applicant's household will need to be taken into consideration.

Any health-related housing requirements should already have been identified prior to any offer being made, but any new information regarding potential requirements of this nature will still need to be considered when determining suitability.

The fact that a property may have features that an applicant does not require, such as adaptations for disabled people, does not in itself mean that the property will be regarded as unsuitable for the applicant's household.

3) Property condition

Where an applicant refuses a property because he/she considers it to be in an unsuitable condition for his/her household, it is unlikely that this will be regarded as a reasonable ground for refusing the offer. This is because confirmation that the property meets the minimum standard for re-letting must be given by an appropriately qualified professional before a property can be offered through HomeChoice Bristol.

If significant disrepair is identified at a particular property after an offer has been made, a decision may be made by the landlord to withdraw the offer so that further work can be carried out. This

would not count as refusal of the offer on the applicant's part, so no decision would need to be made about whether a suitable offer had been made.

4) Location of property and risk of violence or harassment

The Council does not consider that any part of the city should automatically be regarded as 'off limits' to people from particular ethnic or religious backgrounds, or who have any other protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010. Applicants who have concerns about living in particular areas are strongly advised not to place bids for properties in those areas.

However, if an applicant becomes aware of information which may indicate that his/her household would have been at risk in a particular area after being offered a property in that area, this information will need to be taken into account when determining the suitability of that property. For example, an applicant might become aware that his/her violent ex-partner lives in the vicinity of the property. Or an applicant might be racially abused when he/she visits the property for a viewing. In the latter scenario, it may be necessary for enquiries to be carried out with relevant professionals with knowledge of the area, in order to determine whether there is a significant problem with racism in that area, or whether the applicant's experience is likely to have been an isolated incident.

Other than where a possible risk towards a member of the applicant's household has been identified, it is unlikely that a property that an applicant has placed a bid for will be regarded as unsuitable because of its location. This is because the location of the property is always clearly stated in the advertisement, and it is therefore reasonable to conclude that the applicant considered how he/she would access any relevant services, such as schools, workplaces, childcare or healthcare, before placing the bid.

This is also likely to be the case where an applicant is offered a property directly, as he/she will have had the opportunity to provide information regarding suitable and unsuitable areas before any offer is made. However, where a direct offer is made, it is possible that the applicant's circumstances may have changed since the applicant provided this information, in which case further enquiries may need to be carried out in order to determine suitability.

5) Type of landlord and affordability

A property will not be considered to be unsuitable because the landlord is a housing association rather than the Council, and the right to buy the property does not therefore arise.

In rare circumstances, a housing association property may be regarded as unsuitable if there are particular conditions attached to the grant of a tenancy which concern the payment of additional fees, such as rent in advance, which the applicant is unable to afford. However, in most situations, it is likely that the applicant will be able to obtain some form of financial assistance to help to pay these fees, possibly through a loan from Bristol Credit Union. If it is considered reasonable for the applicant to pursue such measures, the property is unlikely to be regarded as unsuitable.

6) Pets

Applicants are expected to provide information about any pets that they own as part of the application process. A property will not be offered to the applicant if the types of pet that the applicant has declared on the application form are not permitted in the property. It is unlikely that a property will be regarded as unsuitable if an applicant has acquired additional pets which have not been declared on the application form and which are not permitted in a property that the applicant has placed a bid for or has been offered directly.

Service animals (e.g. guide dogs for the blind, hearing dogs etc.) are not classified as pets. Service animals should not be included as a pet on applications but should be disclosed. Evidence of the need for a service animal is required from secondary health services or the charity that provided the animal. Feedback from a GP would generally not be seen as sufficient.

Appendix 6: Sustainable Lettings Plans (SLPs) for new developments: core criteria

SLPs will be in place for all first lets in new general needs homes, which are, introductory, assured or secure tenancies delivered by Registered Providers and Bristol City Council (BCC). The only exceptions to the SLP approach are community-led housing, specialist housing (including temporary accommodation) and certain residential estate regeneration schemes, as they will have a site specific SLP.

Note: An individual placement could meet multiple criteria, for example a homelessness placement may also have a care and support need. In such examples, a single placement would contribute to both the homelessness and care and support need targets.

Criteria	Description
Enforcement action for Anti-Social Behaviour/breach of tenancy conditions	Households should not have had enforcement action taken against them (for example, relating to ASB, Harassment, Drug related offences etc) for (up to) the previous five years to be considered for first lets. We will take a trauma informed approach and discretion may be given in cases where the applicant, or members of the household, have shown a commitment to engage with support agencies and any references that support the application will be taken into consideration when deciding on rehousing. This will be done on a case-by-case basis.
Children	Allocations will be made to families with a range of ages and numbers of adults and children, ensuring a mix of differently aged children in the locality, with criteria being based on the specific characteristics of the development.
Employment	For 40% of the properties, at least one adult in the household of working age should be in employment (All types considered, including volunteering. Proof of employment required). Those participating in dedicated training schemes or back to work initiatives will be deemed to be 'in employment' provided 30% of residents as a whole are in paid work.
Support needs	Registered Providers will take into account the overall needs profile of applicants across the site when considering bids from people requiring high levels of support. No less than 15% of 1 bed flats will be made available to households with a care and support need, provided that the placement has been assessed as being capable of sustaining an independent tenancy and that a suitable care and support plan is in place.

Homelessness	Not less than 20% of homes will be let to households to whom the Council owes a Homelessness Duty.
Accessibility	M4(3) wheelchair accessible homes will be allocated to households with an identified need for a wheelchair adapted home. The Registered Provider may request the local authority for a direct match for M4(3) wheelchair accessible homes. Furthermore, where applicable, priority for ground floor flats without a lift, and all M4(2) homes, will be given to those whose housing need means they need ground floor accommodation, including people with mild to moderate mobility issues or visual impairment.
Equality and diversity	All Sustainable Lettings Plans will be responsive, accessible and sensitive to the needs of all by having regard to the protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010. They will ensure that all applicants are treated fairly and without unlawful discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation and will enable applicants with diverse needs to access accommodation to these schemes.
Monitoring	Once all units are allocated, the Local Authority may request that the Registered Provider demonstrate that they have complied with the first lets policy approach.
Exception provisions	Where it is agreed with the Council that the standard sustainable letting requirements are not appropriate for the development or where additional criteria need to be considered e.g. (age restrictions, ethnicity, families in flats, downsizing strategies), a site specific SLP will be supported. This is an exception to the policy and evidence will be required to show the need to vary the standard approach. A standard template will be provided by the Council. These may extend beyond first let, with clear review and monitoring processes established.