

Housing Allocation Scheme For Sunderland

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Section 1: Introduction

This document sets out the Housing Allocations Scheme (the 'Scheme') for Sunderland.

The Scheme has been developed to improve access to housing in the city and to allocate properties in an open and transparent way offering as much choice as possible for applicants. This document aims to clarify how allocations will work and make it simpler for customers to apply for a home. The Scheme is Sunderland City Council's statutory allocation scheme and it is intended that it will also be followed by all social landlords ("partner landlords") who have properties in the city.

Sunderland City Council ("the Council") has statutory (or legal) duties for housing in Sunderland and associated responsibilities which come with this. For example, the responsibility for the prevention of and assistance for those who are homeless lies with the Council. The Council also works with other housing providers in the city and has nomination rights to some of their properties.

Support and Advice

A range of support is available for applicants who are vulnerable and who may experience difficulties in applying and/or using the scheme. For further information please contact the City Council's Access to Housing Team. If you want the information in this scheme in a different language or a different format such as large print please just let us know.

Contact details:

Sunderland City Council Access to Housing Team: 0191 520 5555

Section 2: Policy and Aims

Our Policy

We recognise that the way homes are allocated is a matter of real importance to local people. The demand for social housing in Sunderland far outweighs the supply and therefore our policy seeks to make the best possible use of housing stock.

We aim to create an excellent customer experience by providing a seamless, end-to-end service and offering each customer the help and advice they need to choose the housing option which is best for them and their household.

We will regularly monitor and review this policy with our customers, the Council's Cabinet and other relevant Committees and Boards.

Our Policy Aims

Providing support for those in greatest housing and social need

Including those who are homeless, overcrowded, living in poor housing conditions, those who need to move for medical or welfare reasons and those who need to move to avoid hardship.

Promoting greater choice for prospective and existing customers

Giving people a greater choice by advertising vacant properties and providing advice on a wide range of housing options.

Promoting greater mobility for customers

Making the allocations system more flexible so that it is possible for tenants to move to a property that better meets their specific needs and aspirations and working with partners across the geographic region to provide additional mobility and choice.

Creating more mixed and sustainable neighbourhoods

Helping to create safe, prosperous and cohesive communities where different people want to live and work.

Making better use of the housing stock

Working to improve how we match people and properties so that, for example, adapted accommodation is prioritised for people with the relevant needs.

Supporting people in work

Ensuring that people who are in certain types of work, or have received an offer of a certain type of work can be assisted through our banding system if they need to move because of their job.

Maintaining a system which is open and transparent

Providing regular and accurate information to people about how many properties are available and how they are being allocated which enables customers to make informed decisions on their best housing options.

Equalities Statement

We are committed to the principles of equality and fairness. We will make sure that everyone has fair and equal opportunities to access our services and will treat everybody with dignity and respect. We acknowledge that everyone is different so we work hard to recognise, respect and respond to the different needs of our customers.

To help us to do this we collect information from applicants, that they are prepared to give us, about their gender, age, sexuality, disability, race and faith or religion. The information will be used to provide an appropriate service to individual applicants and will be anonymised and aggregated to allow us to monitor the scheme to check that there are no barriers that disadvantage particular groups of applicants.

Choice Statement (Section 167(1A) Housing Act 1996)

It is the policy of the Council to seek to extend choice to all eligible applicants for social housing by giving them an opportunity to express their preference for areas and types of housing. Wherever possible such preferences will be taken into account in allocating accommodation. However, this must be balanced with the requirement that the Council meets its legal duties as a local housing authority and addresses local housing need.

Confidentiality Statement

In order to manage our business effectively the City Council needs to collect and use confidential information. When doing so we will comply with the Data Protection Act 1998 and will treat sensitive personal information fairly and lawfully. In certain circumstances we may share sensitive and personal information with other organisations.

We will only do this with either appropriate consent from our customers or in circumstances where the law allows us to do so. **This will also extend to other social landlords and local authorities across the partnership of Tyne and Wear.**

The information provided will be held on computer and may be used for prevention and detection of fraud and any other crime.

Legislation

We have prepared this Scheme in accordance with the requirements of the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002, and have had regard to the Allocation of Accommodation Code of Guidance for local housing authorities that was issued by the Government in November 2002, and other guidance on allocations issued on August 2008 and November 2009. We have also considered relevant case law, circulars, regulations and good practice.

Consultation

The scheme has been drawn up following wide consultation with key groups.

- Members of the public
- Applicants
- Young People
- People with Disabilities
- BME Groups
- Councillors
- Council Staff, other agencies, Registered providers

All of the views expressed have been carefully considered and wherever possible they have been taken into account within the scheme. Consultation will continue as the scheme develops and this will allow us to use the experience of customers and other stakeholders to review, amend and continue to improve the scheme.

Section 3: Overview of how the Scheme works

There are 8 steps or elements to the Scheme:

- Step 1: Application
- Step 2: Assessment and eligibility
- Step 3: Banding
- Step 4: Suspensions
- Step 5: Property Advertising
- Step 6: Bidding
- Step 7: Short listing
- Step 8: Property offer

1. An applicant can submit an application :
 - online
 - in person at either a Council or partner organisation's office
 - by posting a completed form to the Council's Access to Housing team office (a blank application downloaded from the schemes website or can be sent on request)



2. Checks will be carried out on applicants to confirm they are eligible to apply for accommodation.



- 2a. Providing an applicant is eligible an assessment will be carried out to identify any housing need and their application will be placed into one of the category bands



3. There are four category bands in which an application could be placed:
 1. Urgent
 2. Priority
 3. Choice
 4. Renewal.



4. Once an applicant has been placed into their category band, checks will be carried out to establish whether they are subject to a suspension by any of the partner providers in line with their policies.



5. Available properties are advertised every week. Each advert has a "label" which gives information on the property and the type of customer that would be best suited. Properties are banded and advertised as Band 1,2,3 or 4 which reflects the assessment bands



6. An applicant can submit a bid for any property advertised which matches their band and where they meet the label. Applicants in any band can bid for Choice band properties where they meet the label.



- 6a. After 5 days adverts are closed (Thurs – Mon).



7. The list is compiled of applicants who have bid and the short listing procedure is used to identify the successful applicant.



8. Successful applicant views property. The applicant decides whether to accept the property. If the applicant accepts the property they sign tenancy agreement and move in.

Section 4: Application

An applicant can register alone, jointly with a partner or with another adult who wishes to live with them, including family members. The Scheme operates as an open housing register which means that anyone over 16 years of age can apply, subject to the results of an eligibility assessment (see section 5).

Out of City Applicants

We welcome applicants who live outside of the Sunderland area. This policy will be kept under review to ensure that applicants within Sunderland are not disadvantaged as a result.

Owner Occupier Applicants

We welcome owner occupiers within the Scheme. However, those who wish to access the Scheme will be required to sell or dispose of their interest in their current property or demonstrate that they are actively trying to do so.

Making an Application

Applications can be made in the following ways:

1. Complete an online application. *xxx internet site*
2. Complete an application form in person at one of the Council's Offices or the offices of any of the partner landlords across the Tyne and Wear local authority areas.
3. A blank application form can be downloaded from the Scheme's website. It can also be sent on request to a customer's home address. Post a completed application form to the Council's Access to Housing Team, or to any of the partner landlords across the Tyne and Wear local authority areas.

Applicants will need to provide information about:

- Themselves and those they wish to share a home with
- Their housing history
- Their housing needs
- Any support needs
- Their financial circumstances
- Their areas of choice

To help applicants consider their areas of choice, information on the supply and demand for properties can be found on the Scheme website, at Council offices and at the offices of partner landlords. The information provided includes details of housing stock, the types of properties within those areas and the previous year's turnover rates, in other words how many properties became available for rent in the past year.

Joint Access Arrangements

Only the parent with primary care of a child should qualify for a family home. Primary care is based on individual merits, but takes into account:

- ☐ Receipt of Child Benefit
- ☐ Court Orders
- ☐ Percentage of time spent caring for child(ren)
- ☐ Regularity and permanence of arrangement.

When a customer does not have primary care of dependent child, but shares care, either as a result of a court order or an informal arrangement, we will consider on a case by case basis. For example, this may mean granting an additional bedroom or considering a single applicant for a two bedroom flat.

Change of Circumstances

Customers are required to inform either the City Council's Access to Housing Team or the partner landlord to whom the original application was made if they have any changes in circumstances which may affect their application.

False or Misleading Information

If applicants have supplied false or misleading information which leads to them being allocated a property, legal action will be taken.

Deliberately worsening your circumstances

Where there is evidence that an applicant has deliberately worsened their circumstances in order to qualify for a higher housing priority under the Scheme, no additional priority will be given. In some circumstances this may be considered by partner landlords as unacceptable behaviour, leading to suspension of an application (see section 6). **The Council itself does not operate a suspensions policy**

An applicant will not be considered as having deliberately worsened their circumstances if they have evidence that it would have been unreasonable for them to have remained in their original accommodation.

Applicants are entitled to request a review of a decision. (See section 13 on Reviewing Decisions).

Housing applications from members of staff and their families

Applicants for housing from Sunderland City Council employees, Elected Members, Committee Members of any partner landlords, or their families must declare their interest when applying.

Such applications will be assessed in the normal way, but offers of accommodation will not be made without the prior approval of the Head of Strategic Housing, Sunderland City Council.

Section 5: Registration and Eligibility

Registration

Having received an application it will be checked for eligibility (see below) and unless the applicant is deemed ineligible then it will be registered. Once an application is registered they will be sent a letter to tell them into which band their application has been placed, to confirm their date of application and to provide their user name and password which will allow them to access their application on line.

Eligibility

Some people may be ineligible to participate in the Scheme:

People from abroad who are subject to immigration control will be ineligible unless they come within an exempted class prescribed by the Secretary of State.

Other persons from abroad may be prescribed by the Secretary of State as being ineligible for an allocation of housing accommodation by the local housing authority.

An applicant will also be ineligible if anyone in the household or with whom they have applied would be subject to one of the above categories.

The main legal provisions in relation to eligibility are currently contained in Part VI of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002); and the Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (England) Regulations 2006 (as amended).

In order to confirm a customer's eligibility we may carry out checks with a number of statutory agencies, for example the Home Office.

If an applicant is considered to be ineligible they will be notified of this decision and the grounds for it in writing. Applicants have the right to request a review of this decision (see section 13).

Section 6: Suspensions

Partner landlords and our partners across the Tyne and Wear local authority areas may operate Suspensions or Exclusions Policies. If an application is suspended by a partner then an applicant would not be able to express interest in that partner's properties and would not be offered a tenancy with that partner until their suspension was lifted.

To decide whether an application will be suspended partner landlords may consider behaviour and/or breaches of tenancy from current or former;

- Social housing tenants
- Private rented tenants
- Owner occupiers
- Applicants who live in with any of the above

Where an application is suspended the applicant will be notified of the decision and the reasons for it in writing. An applicant can request a review of the decision to suspend their application (see section 13).

For further details, support or advice, contact the relevant landlord or Local Authority.

Applicants who have been suspended by a partner landlord can still register in Sunderland and may be considered by the City Council for accommodation with other housing providers. It is the responsibility of other partner landlords to carry out their own relevant checks as to the suitability of the applicant.

Section 7: Application Banding

The Scheme has four bands, into which all registered applications, will be categorised.

The different bands distinguish between applicants who have an urgent need to move, those with a recognised priority need, those who wish to move out of choice and those who need to move from an area that is being developed or renewed by the City Council or other partners within the City.

We will review an applicant's band status on a regular basis to ensure they are effectively accessing the Scheme.

An applicant must contact the Council or other relevant partner if their circumstances change.

Band 1: Urgent Housing Need

This Band is for cases of urgent housing need and to meet the criteria a customer must have an immediate need to move. The following reasons mean that an application will be put into this band.

Medical Reasons

To qualify for this band based on medical needs an applicant or member of their household will have a chronic/degenerative illness or impairment (which may be physical, mental, learning or sensory) which has resulted in them being no longer able to cope in their present home.

In making an assessment about whether an applicant qualifies for this band a Principal Officer will consider the impact the applicant's home has on their ability to access essential facilities and whether the existing home can be adapted to meet their needs.

Written recommendation will be required from a health professional(s) to confirm that an urgent move is necessary to resolve the current difficulties and that the current home cannot be adapted to meet the medical needs. The information may be provided from a variety of health professionals such as a GP, Consultant, or Occupational Therapist.

Severe Harassment

To qualify for this band based on severe harassment an applicant will either be a victim of serious anti-social behaviour (ASB) or harassment that the Council, partner landlord, the Police or other agencies cannot resolve.

Harassment will include actual violence, serious threats of violence, hate crime motivated by prejudice or intimidation significant enough to be deemed unreasonable for the applicant to remain in their home. This band will only be awarded to assist an applicant to move from the locality of the ASB or harassment, and be rehoused to an area that is a sufficient distance to avoid a re-occurrence of the problem.

Written evidence and supporting documentation will be required from a senior officer of the Police.

Domestic Abuse

To qualify for this band based on domestic abuse an applicant will need immediate rehousing because they have been categorised as at a high risk of domestic abuse, for example via a Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) or partner landlords. Also, applicants who are experiencing domestic abuse will be assessed via the Council's Access to Housing Team under the homeless legislation as prescribed in the Housing Act 1996 (as amended), see below.

Homelessness

Homelessness is a statutory (legal) duty that the Council are required to investigate and assess. The Council's Access to Housing Team will assess all potentially homeless applications.

To qualify for this band based on homelessness an applicant will need to have had their circumstances assessed and have received confirmation in writing from the Council that they have been accepted as statutorily homeless and that they are owed a duty under section 193(2) or 195(2) of the Housing Act 1996.

An applicant is likely to be statutorily homeless if they are

- ✓ Homeless or threatened with homelessness within 28 days **and**
- ✓ Eligible for housing assistance **and**
- ✓ Not intentionally homeless **and**
- ✓ In priority need.

Unfit Property

To qualify for this band based on unfit property a household must be assessed as living in insanitary or unsatisfactory housing where they have one or more "category 1" hazards (as defined and assessed under the Housing Act 2004 and the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (England) Regulations 2005); and where it is not feasible to satisfactorily resolve the problem within an acceptable time period.

Statutory Overcrowding

To qualify for this band based on statutory overcrowding a household must meet the current statutory (legal) standards on overcrowding, contained in the Housing Act 1985. An applicant will have had their circumstances assessed by the Council and will have received confirmation in writing that they have been accepted as statutorily overcrowded. An assessment for statutory overcrowding will consider the number of rooms and space in the rooms within the current property. (See Appendix 1 for the definition of statutory overcrowding).

Verification or evidence will be required to be awarded Priority Housing Need.

Band 2: Priority Housing Need

This band is for cases of priority housing need. The following reasons may mean that a customer's application will be put into this band.

Medical Reasons

To qualify for this band based on medical reasons an applicant or member of their family will have a chronic/degenerative illness or impairment (which may be physical, mental, learning or sensory) which could be eased or improved by rehousing.

As with the Urgent band, verification or evidence will be required from health professionals.

Welfare need

To qualify for this band based on a welfare need an applicant will have been assessed as having a social need. For example this could be someone leaving care or another vulnerable person who needs a secure base from which to build a stable life and who could not be expected to find their own accommodation.

To receive or give support

This is intended to reduce the need for formal care services and allow the care recipient to receive support from their immediate family to remain in their own home environment rather than moving into residential care. To qualify for this band an applicant will need to either give or receive full-time assistance or monitoring due to chronic health problems, physical disabilities, dementia, or terminal illness.

The criteria for this category are:-

The person requiring the care must have a critical support need, **and**
The need cannot be met by local carers or support networks without moving home, **and**

The need can be met by the care recipient, or care giver being moved nearer to their support network, **and**

The care giver will be eligible to receive carers allowance, **and**

The move must be to a different location which is beyond reasonable travelling distance, **and**

Where failure to meet that need will cause hardship to themselves or others.

To avoid hardship

To qualify for this band based on avoiding hardship an applicant will have been assessed as having a need to move to a particular locality. For example to take up education, employment or training or to access specialist medical treatment, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship.

Applicants at risk of homelessness

To qualify for this band based on the risk of homelessness applicants will meet all of the following criteria, confirmed by a home visit by Access to Housing staff:

- Living in with friends or family
- Have their own dependant child or children, or who would otherwise be in priority need if homeless – as defined under section 189 of the Housing Act 1996
- Are likely to be asked to leave their current home in the near future
- Have a local connection with Sunderland
- Have not intentionally worsened their circumstances.

Other Homeless

To qualify for this band, applicants will have been assessed by the Access to Housing team as homeless but as not meeting the criteria for homelessness in the Urgent Housing Need Band. The details of how this category is assessed are set out in Appendix 2.

To take up an employment opportunity

To qualify for this band based on an employment opportunity an applicant will have received an offer of key worker employment within the city. The applicant will need to move into Sunderland to take up the offer of work. Key workers are defined as those people who provide essential services necessary for the economic growth of Sunderland and those who fill skill shortages within the city. Acceptance into this band will be subject to the provision of appropriate written evidence/proof from the employer.

Moving on from Supported Accommodation

To qualify under this category an applicant will be living in supported accommodation, will have successfully engaged in and completed a programme of support and be ready to move on to independent living. An assessment will be completed and evidence will be required from the organisation that has provided the support.

Overcrowding

The Council expects its partner landlords to act as responsible landlords and to make best use of stock. Partner landlords may look to award their tenants priority in such circumstances. To qualify for this Band based on overcrowding an applicant must be a current social tenant and they will have been assessed in the following way:

- The assessment will be based on the number of bed spaces that are needed. Every person within a household needs one bed space - a double room counts as two bed spaces and a single as one bed space.
- If a room will fit a double bed and wardrobe, even if there is very little space left, this is classed as a double bedroom. A room that cannot physically accommodate this amount of furniture will be classed as a single room.
- We will only count people in households who live there on a permanent basis and have been there for more than six months.
- If an applicant is short by two or more bed spaces then they will be accepted for assistance in the Priority Band.
- Children of opposite gender over the age of 10 years will not be expected to share a bedroom.

We would expect that household members make the best use of space and rooms i.e. single parent in a single room.

Under occupancy

To qualify for this band based on under occupancy an applicant will be a current social landlord tenant and be living in a property which is too big. If there are two or more spare bedrooms then it is possible that an applicant could be placed in band two. However, an assessment will be carried out and acceptance into this band will depend upon the applicant's current property and area in which the property is located. Social Landlords will consider under occupancy for tenants as this will free up larger properties which will be allocated to someone else thus making best use of the available stock.

Please note: a child for the purpose of assessing overcrowding or under-occupancy is anyone under the age of 18 years.

Children in Upper Flats

To qualify for this band based on having children in an upper flat an applicant will be a current social tenant and will have child (ren) under the age of 16 years living in an upper flat of two or more storeys. This does not include maisonettes. In addition by moving an existing tenant to another more suitable property a vacancy will be created which will be allocated to someone else thus making best use of the available stock. For a woman who is pregnant, proof of pregnancy will be required using form MATB1 (this is received from a midwife or doctor after 21 weeks pregnancy).

Other landlords and partners in the Tyne and Wear local authority area may have their own policies in place. Contact them direct for further details.

Verification or evidence will be required to be awarded Priority Housing Need.

Band 3: Choice

This Band is for all applicants without an urgent or priority need to move who would like to move out of choice. Every application will initially be placed into this band pending further assessments of need.

Band 4: Renewal

This Band is the renewal band. An applicant will be assessed and admitted into this band if their housing is going to be imminently affected by Sunderland City Council or partner landlord renewal programme. Applicants will only be awarded this band status once a renewal schedule has been agreed.

Reviewing Band Status

An applicant's band status will be reviewed to assess whether circumstances have changed and to ensure an applicant is actively engaging in the process. The minimum frequencies within which reviews will be carried out are detailed below:

Band 1: Urgent Housing Need – Priority given for 4 weeks. A review will be carried out at the end of the 4 week period.

However if applicants within the Band 1 due to 'Homelessness' do not engage appropriately in bidding for properties they may be made a single final offer of a suitable property.

Applicants have a right to request a review of this decision (see Section 13).

For all others in the band 1 category: if they refuse 3 suitable offers, priority status for housing may be removed and the application will be placed into Band 3 only (Choice). Applicants have a right to request a review of the decision to refuse to extend band status.

Band 2: Priority Housing Need – Priority given for 3 months.

Applicants in the 'Other homelessness' category of Band 2 who do not engage appropriately in bidding for properties may be made a single final offer of a suitable property.

Applicants have a right to request a review of this decision (see Section 13).

For all others in Band 2: a review will be carried out at the end of the 3 month period. If the applicant refuses 3 offers which are deemed to be reasonable after reviewing suitability, priority status for housing may be removed and the application will be placed into Band 3 only (Choice). Applicants have a right to request a review of the decision to refuse to extend band status.

Band 3: Choice – Everybody is placed into this band. A review will be carried out annually.

Band 4: Renewal – Priority given for 4 weeks. A review will be carried out at the end of the 4 week period.

For applicants in Bands 1, 2 or 4 who have not engaged in the bidding process, the Scheme may introduce Automatic Bidding (see section 9) and offer the applicant extra support with the process.

Band Overview

Band 1 (applicants who have an immediate need to move)	Band 2 (applicants who have a priority housing need)	Band 3 (open to all applicants)	4 - Renewal (applicant living in renewal area)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicants or a member of their household who are unable to cope in their present home due to medical reasons • Applicants who are experiencing severe harassment and have been assessed as being at risk if not re-housed • Applicants who are experiencing domestic abuse and have been assessed as being in immediate risk if not re-housed • Accepted homeless cases, where Sunderland City Council need to discharge their full statutory duty • Applicants living in a property which is unfit for occupation agreed by Sunderland City Council • Applicants who are statutorily overcrowded as assessed by the City Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicants with a medical need which could be eased or improved by rehousing • Applicants who need to move for a welfare reason • Applicants assessed as needing to move to receive or give support • Applicants who need to move to avoid hardship • Applicants at risk of homelessness • Other homeless applicants who do not satisfy the Urgent Band criteria. • Applicants assessed as needing to move to take up Key Worker employment • Applicants moving on from supported accommodation. • Applicants assessed as overcrowded in social tenancy • Applicants assessed as under occupying the property in social tenancy • Applicants with children under 16 years who are living in an upper flat in social tenancy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All applicants without an urgent or priority need to move 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicants who are currently living in a social landlord renewal area • Applicants who are currently living in a Sunderland City Council renewal area

Section 8: Property Advertising

Vacant properties are advertised openly and anyone who is registered can bid. Properties may be advertised in the following ways:

- On the Scheme website
- Displayed in Council Offices
- Displayed in partner landlords' local housing offices

The advertisements for properties will open at 00:01 on a Thursday morning and close at 23:59 on a Monday night. This may vary on weeks with a Bank Holiday.

The advertisement will include information on the property type and number of bedrooms, the current rent for the property, property labels (see below) and any special features. The advertisement will also detail which bands will be given preference.

Property labels

A property label will be attached to each property advert. The label gives information on the accommodation and the type of customer that would be best suited to the property. This takes into consideration factors including the type of property and the surrounding community. Information may include:

- The minimum and maximum number of people who could be accommodated in the property
- Any age restrictions for example, 60 years+ for a bungalow
- Any pet ownership restrictions
- Any adaptations (for example walk-in shower) which make the property suitable for someone with specific needs or requirements
- Any local lettings criteria.

Local Lettings

Some partner landlords have local lettings arrangements in place. Some examples of these are age restrictions on bungalows and a 35 and over age requirement for multi storey accommodation. The local lettings arrangements aim to introduce social balance whilst still addressing housing need.

Partner landlords use local lettings to:

- Help meet particular unmet needs within a locality
- Help regenerate areas
- Help to target the best use of properties in higher demand areas

- Help to promote properties which are in low demand and help promote the regeneration of an area through different management arrangements
- Encourage greater community cohesion and sustainability
- Respond to particular housing management issues where problems of anti-social behaviour, nuisance or crime occur where there may be an imbalance of customers from different age groups or family type within existing properties.
- Help achieve balanced communities when letting new developments.
- Allocate supported housing schemes for people with specific support needs.

Where a property is to be let under local lettings arrangements it will be clearly labelled on the advertisement.

Sunderland City Council has a local lettings policy in place in relation to Accommodation with Care and Support and some of these properties are owned by other housing providers (see Appendix 3).

Further details of Local Lettings Plans can be found on the Scheme website.

Minimum age for any offer of a property

A person cannot legally hold a tenancy until they are 18 years old. Therefore any tenancy granted by many social providers to a young person will be an equitable tenancy which means that an adult will need to sign the tenancy and agree to hold the tenancy for the young person until they reach 18 years. Applicants aged between 16 – 18 years will be offered a support package providing extra help and guidance to enable them to maintain a tenancy.

Property Banding

When a property is advertised, the advert will indicate the order of preference of the bands.

The number of properties prioritised to each band is determined by levels of need and demand on the housing register. This is monitored on a regular basis. Changes will be made as necessary to enable us to be responsive to local circumstances.

We will publish information in relation to the letting of properties on the Scheme website.

Section 9: Bidding

Bidding is the name for the way in which an applicant expresses an interest in an advertised property. The bidding system is led by the applicant.

An applicant can only bid for a property within the timescales indicated on the advert. Within each advert cycle an applicant can only make three bids.

Before making a bid an applicant should check that they meet any labels set out in the property advert (see Section 8).

How to bid

There are a variety of ways in which an applicant can bid for a property:

- On line www....etc

- By telephone on 5255000 or 0800 (this is available in a number of different languages).

- By text number xxxxxxxxxx

- At any of the local Council or partner landlords' offices

- Via the Support worker/Advocate

Automatic bidding

Automatic bidding is the name of the process by which the system will match properties to suitable applicants and place bids on behalf of an applicant.

Automatic bidding will only be used in the following circumstances:

- Where an applicant has been assessed and placed into the Urgent, Priority or Renewal bands and fails to engage in the bidding process, a review of their circumstances will be carried out and automatic bidding may be introduced.

- For vulnerable applicants who need extra support in the bidding process.

Applicants within Bands 1 (urgent) or 2 (priority), who have been made 3 offers of property deemed to be reasonable after reviewing suitability, may have their priority removed and be placed into Band 3 (Choice). However, those applicants within the Band 1 in the 'Homelessness' or Band 2 'Other homelessness' categories who do not engage appropriately in bidding for properties may be made a single final offer of a suitable property.

Applicants have a right to request a review of this decision (see Section 13).

Section 10: Listing and Offering a Property

Once the bidding cycle has closed a list of applicants who have bid for each property will be produced.

The table below shows how we will create each list to identify the successful applicant.

Band	Listed by:
1: Urgent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Matching the property label criteria• Date accepted into the Urgent band
2: Priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Matching the property label criteria• Date accepted into the Priority band
3: Choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Matching the property label criteria• Date application was received
4: Renewal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Matching the property label criteria• Date accepted into the Renewal band• Programme phase

Property Viewing and Offer Checks

The viewing and offer checks will be carried out according to the relevant landlord's policies. The partner landlord will normally arrange a viewing with the successful applicant. This viewing does not constitute a formal offer of property. Such offer will not be made until certain checks have been carried out to confirm details and can include:

- Identity
- Current housing need
- Current circumstances
- Previous housing history
- Satisfactory property condition

A successful applicant will be expected to make a decision within 48 hours of a viewing. An applicant who is successful for more than one property within the same bidding cycle will also be expected to make a decision within 48 hours of each viewing. Future bidding will only be allowed when an applicant has confirmed that they do not wish to accept an offer, or the offer has been withdrawn by the partner landlord.

An offer could be withdrawn in the following circumstances:

- The applicant has provided false or misleading information.
- The property is required for exceptional housing management reasons.
- The outgoing tenant has withdrawn their notice of termination.

If a property has been formally advertised twice and no suitable applicants have been identified, then social landlords may take alternative action to let the property, for example by changing the labelling, rolling the advert over on a first come-first served basis, or by making an exceptional allocation.

Section 11: Exceptional Circumstances

All properties should be advertised unless a property needs to be used for Exceptional Circumstances.

Under exceptional circumstances it may be necessary for a partner landlord to act outside of the allocations scheme. This will be to address an unforeseen need or situation that cannot be resolved reasonably within the banding criteria. For example, a fire, flood or major incident. Where this occurs, records will be kept of why the allocation took place.

Section 12: Cancelled and Used Applications

Used Applications

An application is considered 'used' when an applicant:

- Accepts a tenancy from a social housing provider through a Tyne and Wear partner landlord
- Is assigned a tenancy through a Tyne and Wear partner landlord
- Is granted a succession of tenancy through a Tyne and Wear partner landlord
- Purchases or part-purchases their own property, for example right to buy, shared ownership or outright ownership through a Tyne and Wear partner landlord
- Has carried out a mutual exchange.

This means the application will no longer be included in the system. An applicant will have to register again if they wish to access the Scheme. An applicant can request a review of this decision (see Section 13).

Cancelled Applications

We will cancel an application in the following circumstances:-

- It is used
- At the applicant's request
- If an applicant does not respond to a review letter or other correspondence
- If an applicant moves and does not inform us of their new address
- If an applicant leaves the country and they are subsequently prevented from being registered because of immigration status
- If we find that an applicant has supplied false or incomplete information connected with their registration
- If it is a duplicate application.

This means the application will no longer be included in the system. An applicant can request a review of this decision (see Section 13).

Section 13: Reviewing Decisions

Applicants will be able to request a review against any decision relating to:-

Review reason	Who carries out review
1. Eligibility	The organisation who made the original decision i.e. City Council or partner landlord
2. Facts of the case	The organisation who made the original decision
3. Access to Bands	The organisation who made the original decision
4. Extension of band status	The organisation who made the original decision
5. Date of registration	The organisation who made the original decision
6. "used" or cancelled applications	The organisation who made the original decision
7. Reasonableness of offer	Partner landlord or the City Council in cases where it is a final offer for a priority given by the Council.
8. Suspension	Partner landlord
9. Exceptional allocation	Partner landlord monitored by the City Council
10. Homelessness	City Council

All reviews

Requests for a review must be made in writing **within 21 days** of the date of receiving a decision letter. In the review request letter an applicant should explain why they think the decision was wrong and provide any available evidence.

All reviews will be considered by principal officers who were not involved in the original decision. The officer will consider the review on the basis of the applicant's individual circumstances, the written submission and in accordance with the Scheme. Furthermore careful note will be taken of relevant legislation, Statutory Instruments and Code of Guidance. The officer will notify the applicant of the outcome of their decision within 28 days normally, or 56 days for homelessness reviews.

Possible Outcomes of a Review

Uphold the original decision – the applicant will be notified in writing and give reason supporting the review decision.

Reject the original decision – the decision letter will explain what actions will be carried out and the reasons for doing so.

Section 14: Information and Decision Making

Information

Applicants have a right to request general information which will enable them to assess:

- (i) How their application is likely to be treated under the Scheme (including, in particular, whether they are likely to be regarded as a member of a group of people who are to be given preference by being placed in Band 1 or Band 2); and
- (ii) Whether housing accommodation appropriate to their needs is likely to be made available to them and, if so, how long it is likely to be before such accommodation becomes available for allocation to them.

Applicants also have the right to request the Council to inform them of any decision about the facts of their case which is likely to be, or has been, taken into account in considering whether to allocate housing to them.

Decision Making

In accordance with the Allocation of Housing (Procedure) Regulations 1997, no elected member of the Council will at any stage be involved in the allocation of properties within the Scheme.

Section 15: Monitoring and Reviewing the Scheme

Publishing Lettings

We aim for our Scheme to be open and transparent. Results of all completed lettings will be published weekly and made available to customers. Details will include the following:

- Types of property let during the period
- Total number of bids received for each property advertised
- Band and waiting time of the successful applicant

Monitoring the Scheme

The Council will put robust monitoring arrangements into place to ensure that the objectives of the policy are met.

We will monitor personal information from the application form and the Scheme overall to ensure it is meeting our aims and objectives and to continuously improve our services. To do this, we will monitor the following:

- Housing management performance ie. Re-let times and refusals
- Support mechanisms
- Need and lettings outcomes
- Equality and diversity data
- Potential disadvantaged applicants
- Tenancy sustainment
- Bidding behaviour
- Inter authority or inter regional mobility
- Customer satisfaction
- The numbers, types, sizes and locations of properties in each band.

Reviewing the Scheme

We will provide monitoring reports at least annually to our customers, Council's Cabinet, relevant scrutiny committee and Executive Management Team. We will look to fundamentally review the Scheme every 3 years, as a minimum.

The Council will continue to review the appropriateness of the policy and respond to changes such as legislation, demand and supply and other strategic issues.

Section 16: Other Housing Options

Enhanced housing options

Sunderland City Council Access to Housing Team provides free, confidential and impartial advice for people in housing need. The team will work to try and assist customers to find alternative solutions in a more managed and sustainable way.

Other partner's housing options

As demand for properties is far greater than the number of properties available there may be a long wait for a socially-rented or affordable rented home. Unfortunately, not everyone will be able to be offered a socially-rented or affordable rented home that they would like so other partner landlords may be able to offer advice and assistance on other housing options, including:

- Market Rented Properties
- Intermediate Market Rented Properties
- Affordable Homeownership products.

Assignment and Succession

Social providers are legally required to give their tenants one right to assign their tenancy, or succeed to a tenancy where a tenant dies. Further details of these rights and the conditions attached can be found at social landlords offices.

Mutual Exchange

The Council takes part in the Tyne and Wear Sub-regional scheme for mutual exchanges (called 'HomeXchange'). This allows tenants to advertise their property via the HomeXchange website throughout Sunderland and the Tyne and Wear area.

Nominations to other social housing providers

The Council has nomination rights with a number of social housing providers operating in Sunderland. These providers offer a proportion of their vacant homes to the Council for nomination. This means that properties from such housing providers may be advertised through this Scheme even if the provider in question is not a partner landlord.

The receiving provider of the nomination will then make their own enquiries as to the suitability of the applicant by applying their own policies and procedures.

Extra Care and other accommodation with care and support

The term 'Accommodation with Care or Support' refers to housing specifically designed for people with a care and/or support need which enables them to live independently in their own home, with access to care or support tailored to meet their needs.

Due to the special nature of this type of accommodation, Extra Care and Supported Housing Schemes are let under a Local Lettings Policy or – by partner landlords – as an Exceptional Circumstances letting.

This does not include sheltered housing or accommodation used to prevent homelessness.

Appendix 3 provides further detail on accommodation with care or support.

Section 17: Service Standards

We will:

- Register an application **within 10 working days** of receiving it once all information has been received

- Support a customer to complete a housing registration form, where required

- Advise the customer in which band their application has been placed

- Send a personal reference number to use when expressing interest in advertised properties.

Appendix 1: Statutory Overcrowding Definition

Households who meet the current statutory standards on overcrowding – contained in the Housing Act 1985 – will be placed in Band 1 (Urgent).

There are two elements to assessing whether a household is statutorily overcrowded:

1. The **'room' standard** which requires that there should be enough rooms in each letting so that no male and female aged 10, or over, should have to sleep in the same room, unless they are living together as 'husband and wife'; and

2. The **'space' standard** which specifies the maximum number of people who can sleep in any room considered suitable for use as a sleeping room and the maximum number who may sleep in any individual letting when taking into account the number of sleeping rooms available to the occupants. In this second standard, children aged between one and ten count only as $\frac{1}{2}$ a person and babies under one year are not counted at all.

The table below shows the maximum number of people who can live in a house before the space standard is contravened.

Number of rooms	Number of persons
1	2
2	3
3	5
4	7 and a half
5	2 for each room

For the purposes of these standards, a room is considered to be "available as sleeping accommodation" if it is "of a type normally used in the locality either as a bedroom or a living room".

Appendix 2: Other Homelessness

The Band 2 (Priority) category of “Other Homeless” includes people (other than those who qualify for Band 1 homelessness) who:

- have been confirmed as homeless under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 by the Council’s Access to Housing Team (for example verified rough sleepers and others who do not have a home);
- are owed a local housing authority duty because they are homeless and have a priority need, whether or not they became homeless intentionally or because they are threatened with homelessness, have a priority need and did not become threatened with homelessness intentionally (sections 190(2), 193(2) or 195(2) of the 1996 Act or sections 65(2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985);
- are unintentionally homeless with no priority need and a local housing authority has decided to exercise the power to provide accommodation for them (section 192(3) of the 1996 Act).

However, this priority may not be given – following an assessment of the issues in each individual case – to those who are homeless because of eviction due to serious unacceptable behaviour (by the applicant or a member of their household), including serious or persistent non-payment of rent, such that they are considered to be unsuitable to be a tenant of the authority and undeserving of any preference for the allocation of housing.

Appendix 3: Accommodation with Care or Support

The term 'Accommodation with Care or Support' refers to housing specifically designed for people with a care / support need which enables them to live independently in their own home, with access to care or support tailored to meet their needs. This includes accommodation for older people (such as extra care housing) people with a cognitive impairment; physical, sensory or learning disability, or with a significant mental health need. When a relevant property becomes vacant – it will be identified as 'Accommodation with Care / Support' and the process set out here will be followed.

Excluded accommodation types

Because the term Accommodation with Care or Support can be applied to a broad range of accommodation it is important to clarify that this term – as used in this document – does not refer to sheltered housing or accommodation used to help prevent homelessness. It is specifically for the types of accommodation set out above.

Accommodation with Care or Support allocated within a local policy

Section 167(2E) of the 1996 Housing Act enables a local authority to allocate particular accommodation to people of a particular description, whether or not they fall within the reasonable preference categories. This is the statutory basis for 'local lettings policies'. This element of the Allocations Scheme is a local lettings policy. Most of the clients referred for Accommodation with Care or Support would be likely to be due reasonable preference for allocations as they will tend to have medical and/or welfare needs. However, where accommodation includes care provision it is best to make decisions based first on people's care needs – while also taking account their housing need – on a case by case basis.

Housing Associations and Nominations

Accommodation with care or support may be owned and managed by housing providers with whom the Council may have nomination rights. A person nominated by the Council and accepted by the housing provider may therefore count as having been allocated accommodation under the Council's Housing Allocations Scheme. Allocation of rented or shared ownership accommodation with care or support will be as described in this section.

Accommodation with Care or Support – Nominations' Criteria

To be considered for a nomination to accommodation with care or support applicants, or a member of their household, must be in need of support or care at home.

In addition, to be considered for a nomination to extra care accommodation applicants must normally be aged 55 or over (with any partner aged 50 or over). Someone below this age with a long term disability may be considered.

Applicants – or their partner or dependant if relevant – for accommodation with care or support must also meet at least one of the following criteria, as assessed and identified by the Council's Adult Services section:

- A combination of housing, support and / or care needs, or are awaiting discharge from residential / nursing/ hospital or other care settings
- Require assistance with their daily living tasks and / or personal care.

Applicants must be considered to have a positive attitude towards retaining or regaining their independence.

Expressions of Interest

People interested in applying for Accommodation with Care or Support will need to complete a Self Assessment Form. These will be made available on the Internet, at Customer Contact Centres and through the Council's Adult Services.

Joint Assessments

A joint assessment will be carried out to assess the applicants:

- Care and support needs.
- Housing need.

Local Connection

Due to the Council having an open housing register an applicant does not need to have a local connection to apply for housing in the City. However for extra care accommodation an applicant must ordinarily be a resident of Sunderland. Applications will be considered from out of City applicants. This may be, if the applicant has existing connections with the City which may assist their current or future care needs.

Allocations' Panel

An Allocations' Panel (or panels) will consist of representatives from the council sections responsible for housing and for assessing and meeting the care and support needs of the clients covered by this part of the Housing Allocations Scheme. Where relevant a panel will include representatives from providers – for example housing associations that provide Extra Care accommodation. Panel meetings will discuss the allocation of Accommodation with Care.

