

## Appendix One - Homechoice board – consultation feedback and responses

### The summary below presents the questions which were consulted on and the feedback and Cheshire homechoice comments and recommendations.

1. Tenants of social landlords cannot register for a move within the first 12 months of their tenancy unless they can evidence an urgent need to move or significant risk of harm.

#### **No comments made for feedback**

2. Proposed banding for those receiving assistance for homelessness

<b>Feedback</b>	<b>Homechoice board comments &amp; recommendations</b>
Clarity required on the priority banding for 190 "Intentionally Homeless" cases.	Policy outlines that those applicants whom are homeless but not under a local authority duty will be placed in band C.
the policy states people can register on Homechoice at 16 "however tenancies are usually only offered to people 18yrs and over" – Could you share a bit more information as to why and what can be done for a 16/17yr old to have a tenancy? We ourselves have two young people in their own tenancies at this age. Do Homechoice and the housing providers just need a guarantor or is there other criteria? What for example if we had a 17yr old who was working full time and earning a good income?	Young people under the age of 18 are not financially responsible or eligible for credit and as rent to registered providers is often paid in arrears this would place young people in a position the car not legally accountable for. Young people with a guarantor earning over £16,000 per year will be considered based on the basis of the financial stability of their guarantor. Young people earning a good income are still not liable for financial credit so would not be considered without a guarantor.
Following an appeal, the local authority has 40 working days to review it. – To me 8 weeks seems a long time to make a decision. Could the reason for this timescale be explained or could it be reduced?	This is because a panel review requires a full panel meeting and a quorum to provide fairness and equality and these meetings are bi-monthly. In exceptional cases, an email to all parties could be considered but this is not preferable as it reduces the opportunity for fairness and debate.
The Homechoice Panel (Appeal Panel) – Can other agencies be represented on this panel such as Children's' Social Care / Adults? Do minutes of these panel's get shared with families and services that support them?	Other agencies can submit representations and evidence in support of an application or even attend the hearing but an appeal is against the policy it is for the partners to determine if the policy has been followed or not. Minutes are not shared due to data protection and the families and individuals discussed my not all be known to other agencies.
Reduced preference on banding – It does not give a timescale – previously it has been 12 months for care-leavers but there was a suggestion that this was being reduced to 6 months. However now the policy is vague and gives no timescales. Can you give a timescale?	This detail is contained within the procedure document and not the outline policy. Timescales are currently at 12 months for all applicants.
When Housing considers reducing a care-leavers banding I believe that this should be done in consultation with Children's' Services. This could be a joint Housing/Children's' meeting and then a	This is outside the scope of the policy review as it relates to the assessment detail. However, in response board are happy for the ignition panel to be party to the decision making

decision recorded on both the young persons Children's' file and Housing's own systems. Length could be negotiated with the person given actions and targets to work to.	on care leavers provided there is representation from the Homechoice partnership at each meeting. This will be addressed in the Homechoice procedures.
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3. Proposed banding for armed forces personnel

<b>Feedback</b>	<b>Homechoice board comments &amp; recommendations</b>
Armed forces personnel will be in receipt of pensions which allows them to access the private housing sector.	Some ex-armed forces personnel will have disabilities or needs that cannot be accommodated by private sector housing. Not all ex-armed forces personnel will be in receipt of a pension that will be sufficient to meet their housing needs.

4. Proposed banding for households in social housing wishing to downsize

<b>Feedback</b>	<b>Homechoice board comments &amp; recommendations</b>
Under-use of properties should have a high banding for those wishing to down size to free up much needed larger properties.	This will remain the case.
I think the downsizing criteria need to be placed in a higher band than band C, making room for people in need of larger homes.	This comment supports the decision to place sponsored downsizing households in band B

5. Proposed banding for people living in supported accommodation

<b>Feedback</b>	<b>Homechoice board comments &amp; recommendations</b>
Need to consider Tenancy Sustainability in these instances, what support packages are in place/need to be in place and tenure of these support services to aid tenancy sustainment.	Cheshire East floating support services will be used to ensure tenancy sustainment. Cheshire East has procured Housing Related Support Services across Cheshire East.

6. If a Household is overcrowded in excess of the bedroom standard or overcrowded as defined in Part 10 of the Housing Act 1985, they will be placed in Band C+ if they do not have long term security of tenure as opposed to Band C

**No comments made for feedback**

7. Where an applicant's current accommodation is having an adverse effect on a diagnosed medical condition of any member of the household who intends to move, applicants will be placed in Band C+ if they have no security of tenure as opposed to Band C.

<b>Feedback</b>	<b>Homechoice board comments &amp; recommendations</b>
Requires clarity on medical condition as this is open to interpretation.	“Any condition or disability that is being impacted by an applicants current housing circumstances.” Full clarity for officers is available in the procedure’s document instructing staff on the detail of their assessment.
People with Asperger’s or Autism should receive more support in terms of banding/allocation. Cheshire Homechoice needs to be more accessible- for those with physical AND non-physical impairments.	Learning disabilities would be considered within this assessment and the impacts of an applicants current housing circumstances on their disability would be taken account of. The Banner “medical” does not just refer to physical health.
People with medical conditions should be placed in a higher band than band C, your policy does not support their health needs and the impact they have.	Where an applicant’s condition is significantly impacted by their housing their application would be considered under band B “urgent housing need” where the need to move has an urgency or there is a risk of harm this assessment would be used rather than the general medical assessment

8. Where an applicant’s current accommodation is having an impact on the welfare of household members, applicants will be placed in Band C+ if they have no security of tenure as opposed to Band C

<b>Feedback</b>	<b>Homechoice board comments &amp; recommendations</b>
Requires clarification i.e. "Poor Property Condition (not caused by tenant)	Poor property condition would be confirmed following a visit from our Housing Standards team. Only disrepair that is something that requires landlord action and that the required action is not being address would result in a priority.
I cannot see that the information explicitly mentions sufferers of domestic abuse. It does mention violence but not all domestic abuse includes violence but could be harassment, stalking etc.	Assessments for domestic abuse would be made under the band B criteria “urgent housing need”. Clarity will be added to the final policy in this regard.

9. Changes to the definition of having a local connection

<b>Feedback</b>	<b>Homechoice board comments &amp; recommendations</b>
I don't think you are going far enough in terms of how long a person should be living in Cheshire East before being allocated social housing. I think a person should have lived in the area for 5 years minimum as an over 18. I think it would be harder to fake living here for 5 years than it would for 2 years, reducing the Council’s burden to support bogus claims for support.	This change responds directly to government guidance. There is not the opportunity to be more flexible.
Clarify Page 17 of the draft policy: “Currently live, or have lived, within Cheshire East and have	As an adult or child. Any 2 consecutive years that

<p>done for at least 2 consecutive years.” This appears very ambiguous and open to interpretation, does not mention as an adult, or when the 2 consecutive years are considered as being applicable.</p>	<p>can be evidenced by the resident would be acceptable. The burden of proof is with the applicant, however we are able to refer to the electoral register and other council resources, where required.</p>
<p>i.e. lived in Cheshire East in late teens and early 20s then moved to another borough, many years later fancied returning to their ‘routes’ – appears would have local connection, also very difficult to evidence the two years if they are historic.</p>	<p>The evidence in this case would need to be provided by the resident. The guidance on this is taken from central government; it is more robust than our former policy.</p>
<p>The local connection for social housing appears to be more stringent when many people would qualify as local connection under other remits, but not for local connection to the social register, it appears we would have to result in channelling more people via HRS accommodation and into the PRS, both of which are a finite and expensive alternative outcome.</p>	<p>This change is a requirement outlined by Central government. Applicants whom are former residents will gain the right to return but residents whom have just arrived will have to have been resident for longer.</p>
<p>In the proposed changes to a Local Connection then the issue of the changes made to the legislation in the Homeless Reduction Act in relation to Care Leavers has not been addressed in the new Policy. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 states that where a care leaver is aged under 21 and normally lives in a different area to that of a local authority that owes them leaving care duties, and has done for at least 2 years including some time before they turned 16, the young person will have a local connection in that area. The Policy only references Care Leavers under Cheshire East Council. Regard needs to be made to the change to the legislation.</p>	<p>A qualification for a connection under any homelessness legislation will be considered under the “other significant reason criteria” This seemed simpler than creating a new variable criteria. The detail for this assessment will be contained in the supporting document for staff (the procedures) to help them understand how to conduct all policy assessments.</p>
<p>Largely welcome these proposals. However, I represent the large rural ward of Sutton, in which Sutton itself has a large number of bungalows: the neighbouring parishes of Wincle, Wildboarclough and Macclesfield Forest are all in the National Park. I am concerned that local knowledge has been lost. When the bungalows were built, I was told that the reason there were so many, was to ensure that the needs of the local farmers and others could get access to a semi-rural property on retirement, as with the National Park's policies, it would never be possible to recreate them in those parishes. Can there please be an assurance that, if any of these are not fully adjoining Sutton Parish, they will be given the local occupancy category, as though the residents were from Sutton Parish itself?</p>	<p>There is no record of this agreement in planning records or a formal section 106 agreement.</p>
<p>Obviously we are most concerned for our service users – will there be exemptions to people fleeing domestic abuse re: needing to have a local connection and/or waiting 12 months before a move? The rule seems rather ‘blanket’ as set out here.</p>	<p>As per the current policy, each case would be considered separately and regard given to an assessment under the criteria of “Other significant reason”.</p>

10 & 11. Removal of the assessment criteria for pregnant women over 20 weeks in term of overcrowding. Pregnant women will only be considered for an additional room for baby after baby is born

Feedback	Homechoice board comments & recommendations
The criteria for pregnant women should also include males who may be main carers following separation and accommodation banding should be based on future need not after the child is born to avoid risk to a child at arrival.	Men with caring responsibility will also be considered.
It's contradicting that a pregnant person qualifies for extra room than say someone who has 2-5 children in one room	The policy allows an allocation of an addition room when there are more than 2 people sharing a room.
Making pregnant women wait until they've given birth would put the mother through stress which could harm the baby. It also means she could give birth in an unsafe, unsuitable environment and would prevent the mother from 'nesting' instinct which I understand helps to bond with the baby. I'm unsure why it would be suggested to wait until after the baby is born - I hope it's not in case the child is still born or given up for adoption, but can't see why else, which is baffling.	The decision on this mirrors the decision made by the DWP & Housing Benefit qualification. The policy is not a blanket policy and where there is an urgent need to move a housing officer would work with an expectant mother to secure a discretionary housing payment and a property of a suitable size.

12. Additional policy regarding re-lets in multiple unit blocks of flats or maisonettes - will be allocated on a 50-50 basis 50% to singles over 25, couples and families in employment 50% to applicants in the highest priority band

Feedback	Homechoice board comments & recommendations
"Multiple unit flats - speaking as a homeowner with a young family, you buy in an area with people in similar circumstances to yourself - so you buy near other families, for friendship, community, support and so on. You wouldn't want to bring a family up around lots of single people - that's two very different groups. Would it not make sense to put singles/child free couples together in one bed accommodation in a multi unit block of flats, and families in 2+ bed accommodation in a different block of multiple unit flats?"	Where a household elects to request a move to a multiple unit block we would not refuse an application. The policy outlines in the allocation criteria that families get priority for houses but should they chose to live in a flat, those whom are working would be given a priority for every other let.

13. Other comments

Feedback	Homechoice board comments & recommendations
The corporate parenting duty applies to the whole Council and should be supported by relevant partners (which would include Registered Providers of social housing). The Council commissions Voice for Children to support the Council to deliver excellent services for our cared for children and care leavers. The contract for 2018-19 has been revised to include a mentoring scheme for cared for	Where Cheshire East Care leavers are in adequate accommodation, they will remain in band D (adequate means that all their housing needs are met and there are no risks to their health of safety). Where Cheshire East care leavers have a need

children / care leavers that require support in respect of debt, youth offending and drugs and ensure that their ability to access good / sustainable housing is not put in jeopardy. Hope this supports the conversation re: an allocation policy for care leavers that cements a Band B priority irrespective of concerns that, as corporate parents, we are working with our vulnerable children to turn around.

to move they will move to band B (above all other young people with a housing need and in the same group as residents at risk of homelessness)  
Where Cheshire East care leavers have arrears or other reason for reduced preference their case will have a tailored approach (agreed at the ignition panel between Social Care colleagues and Housing) to supporting them to achieve a re assessment as quickly as possible.