



# **Home Choice Plus**

**– the allocation of housing association homes in Stratford-on-Avon District**

**Martin Cowan – Housing Advice Manager  
Stratford-on-Avon District Council**



# Home Choice Plus

- Why we have a waiting list
- Home Choice Plus – a sub regional choice based lettings scheme
- What do we mean by local connection?
- The allocations process
- Local lettings plans
- Key messages



# Home Choice Plus

Local authorities are required to

- have an allocation scheme for determining priorities when allocating housing [Housing Act 96 Pt VI s167(1)]
- give reasonable preference to certain categories of household [Homelessness Act 2002 16 (3)]



# Home Choice Plus

Reasonable preference categories include:

- Homeless households
- People occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing
- People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds



# Home Choice Plus

- Government expectation that choice based lettings allocations schemes be introduced by local authorities by 2010 [Sustainable Communities: Homes for all(2005)]
- Features of choice based schemes:
  - banding instead of points
  - vacant properties are advertised
  - applicants are able to express an interest in properties by “bidding”



# Home Choice Plus

- Cross boundary schemes favoured by government
- Home Choice Plus partnership formed
  - Stratford-on-Avon District
  - Wychavon District
  - Wyre Forest District
  - Worcester City
  - Malvern Hills District
  - Bromsgrove District



# Home Choice Plus

Stratford-on-Avon District Council adopted a choice based scheme in December 2008

Choice based lettings schemes bring improvements to the customer experience:

- Simple banding system
- Improved transparency
- Improved choice



# Home Choice Plus

Simple banding system:

- **Priority** (household accepted as homeless)
- **Gold Plus** (high housing need and District local connection)
- **Gold** (housing need and District local connection)
- **Silver Plus** (high housing need, no local connection)
- **Silver** (housing need, no local connection)
- **Bronze Plus** (low housing need and District local connection)
- **Bronze** (low housing need, no local connection)



# Home Choice Plus

## Improved transparency

The majority of housing association vacancies in the District will be advertised via:

- [www.homechoiceplus.org.uk](http://www.homechoiceplus.org.uk)
- property line: 01789 260 840
- property newsletters available at contact points and posted to vulnerable households

Each bidding cycle runs for a week, from Tuesday through to the following Monday.



# Home Choice Plus

## Improved choice

- Applicants are able to “bid” for properties they are interested in.
- Up to 3 bids per week can be placed via:
  - [www.homechoiceplus.org.uk](http://www.homechoiceplus.org.uk)
  - automated bidding line: 0845 270 0557
  - mobile phone: 07781 486 644
  - in person at the contact points



# Home Choice Plus

Managed in Stratford District by the Council's Housing Advice Team

The Team process Home Choice Plus applications and determine banding in line with the Home Choice Plus policy by:

- Assessing housing need
- Confirming District connection (including parish connection)



# Home Choice Plus

## Local connection

- A confirmed connection to the District determines Home Choice Plus banding
- A confirmed connection to the parish determines whether an allocation can take place
- Parish connections are of equal weighting



# Home Choice Plus

Local parish connection

Defined in the s106 agreement

- Born in the parish; or
- Currently lives in the parish and has done so for at least 12 months; or
- Currently works in the parish and has done so for at least 12 months; or
- Previously lived in the parish for at least 3 years but had to move away due to lack of affordable housing; or
- Has immediate family resident in the parish for at least 3 years (usually mother/father/sister/brother)



# Home Choice Plus

Following registration all applicants will receive:

- a letter which gives them their unique application number and their banding in all Home Choice Plus partner Districts
- a leaflet which explains how to find out what properties are available and how to bid



# Home Choice Plus

Allocation process for new affordable housing

- Housing association notifies Council of vacancy / vacancies
- Properties advertised via Home Choice Plus
- Applicants place bids
- System generates shortlist in housing need order
- Housing Advice Team manually check shortlist to confirm parish local connection



# Home Choice Plus

## Allocation process for new affordable housing (cont/d)

- Bidders with no local parish connection are removed from shortlist
- Remaining bidders with a confirmed local parish connection ranked in housing need order
- Households with the greatest need will be nominated by the Council to the housing association (subject to Local Lettings Plan)
- Properties will be allocated by the housing association



# Home Choice Plus

## Local lettings plans

- Requirement of s106 agreement
- Plans agreed between District Council and housing association landlord
- Ensures that allocations will match findings of parish housing needs survey



# Home Choice Plus

## Key messages

- Households need to be registered with Home Choice Plus
- Households need to place "bids"
- All new properties will be advertised via Home Choice Plus
- Allocations will only be made to households who can demonstrate the relevant local parish connection and have the greatest housing need
- Local connection categories have equal weighting



# Home Choice Plus

Contact details:

Martin Cowan

Housing Advice Manager

Stratford-on-Avon District Council

Elizabeth House, Church Street,

Stratford-upon-Avon, CV37 6HX

Telephone: 01789 260 849

Email: [martin.cowan@stratford-dc.gov.uk](mailto:martin.cowan@stratford-dc.gov.uk)