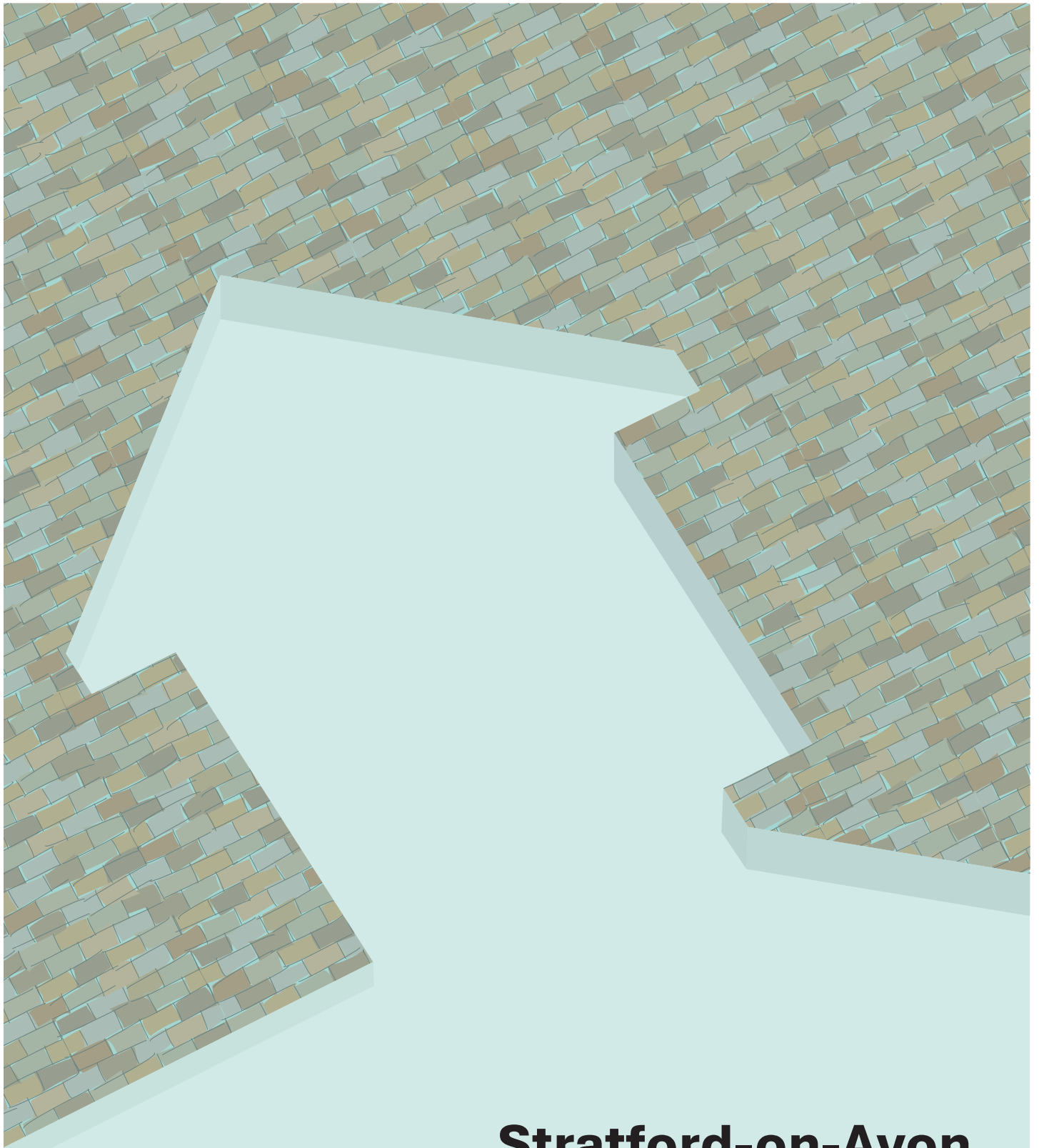




Stratford-on-Avon Housing Allocation Scheme



**Stratford-on-Avon
Home Choice**

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1. SECTION ONE - OVERVIEW

1.1 Introduction - Stratford-on-Avon District Council Housing Allocations Policy

- 1.1.1 The Stratford-on-Avon District Council Allocation Policy (known hereafter as the “Allocation Policy”) provides a broad framework of the general principles and guidelines for allocating housing through Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice.

Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice Scheme includes the Housing Register, the software used to operate it and the policy, allocations scheme and processes used to allocate social housing.

- 1.1.2 The Housing Allocations Policy is Stratford-on-Avon District Council’s (known throughout this document as “the Council”) statutory allocation scheme issued under section 166A of Part VI of the Housing Act 1996. This outlines how the Council will allocate housing and prioritise households on the Council’s Housing Register (Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice).

- 1.1.3 This policy also explains who can join Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice and how decisions are made about allocating properties through the Council’s allocation scheme. It applies to all Registered Providers of Social Housing (referred to throughout this document as Registered Providers) that the Council makes nominations to. The policy covers:

- Applicants and Household Members: Who can register to be an applicant and be included in the household.
- Eligibility: Who is permitted to apply to join Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice.
- Qualification: Who qualifies to be included on Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice.
- Assessment of Housing Need: How housing needs are assessed, and how applications are prioritised.
- Banding Structure: How bands reflect housing needs.
- Household Type: The type of property applicants are eligible to bid for, for example, ground floor accommodation or independent living schemes.
- Bedroom Entitlement: The size of a property a household can bid for.
- Applying for a Home: How to apply for a home through Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice by bidding.
- Local Lettings Plans: Extra criteria that may apply to properties that are advertised.
- Discretionary Decisions: When we may use discretion in decision-making.
- Allocation of Accommodation: How applicants are selected and nominated to Registered Providers for housing.
- Offers of Accommodation: The process that Registered Providers follow to assess and offer properties to applicants (with reference to their allocation and letting policies).

- 1.1.4 A glossary of terms is contained in Appendix 1.

1.2 Policy Aims and Objectives

- 1.2.1 This policy and the allocation scheme contained in it complies with the legal framework set out in the Housing Act 1996 and reflects current government guidance on the allocation of social and affordable housing. It also gives due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty and the Equality Act 2010.

- 1.2.2 The policy supports the aims of the Stratford-on-Avon District Housing Strategy 2021–2026 (and homelessness strategy contained within it), the Council’s Tenancy Strategy and the Council’s corporate priorities including striving to deliver affordable homes, to act in the best interests of our communities understanding their needs and deliver the best services possible. It is designed to:

- Make best use of the District's social and affordable housing stock
- Promote balanced and sustainable communities

In meeting legal and policy requirements, the Council is committed to working in partnership to:

- Offer a range of housing options to people in housing need
- Help customers understand their housing situation
- Support informed decision-making

1.2.3 The policy aims to ensure that the allocation of social housing is fair, transparent, and easy to understand. Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice will publish clear eligibility and prioritisation criteria, provide guidance in plain language, and offer support to households, particularly those who are vulnerable, to access the service. We are committed to challenging perceptions of unfairness by applying rules consistently and explaining decisions clearly.

1.2.4 **Key Objectives**

- To meet the legal requirements placed on the Council and consider local need and priorities through the qualification criteria and the banding scheme
- Prioritise those in housing need, ensuring they have the best opportunity to access suitable accommodation
- Prevent and reduce homelessness, including rough sleeping, and decrease reliance on temporary accommodation
- Support pathways for individuals moving on from care and supported housing

1.3 **The Legal Framework**

1.3.1 This Housing Allocations Policy has been developed in accordance with the legal requirements set out in the Housing Act 1996 (as amended), including amendments made by the Homelessness Act 2002, the Localism Act 2011, and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. It also reflects duties under the Equality Act 2010, Welfare Reform legislation, and relevant statutory guidance. A comprehensive list is contained in Appendix 2

1.3.2 Stratford-on-Avon District Council will ensure that allocations and nominations of social housing are made in accordance with this policy and the Housing Allocation Scheme contained within it, as required by the Housing Act 1996. A summary of this scheme is available free of charge via the Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice website and at the Council offices.

1.3.3 To be able to join Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice, applicants must be eligible and qualify as per the Allocation Scheme criteria. In line with Section 166A of the Housing Act 1996, the policy gives reasonable preference to applicants with high levels of housing need and additional preference to applicants within the reasonable preference groups with an urgent need and also meets other local needs and priorities. Further information is contained in Section 6.

1.4 **Equality and Fairness**

1.4.1 This policy has been developed in accordance with the Council's duties under the Equality Act 2010, with a commitment to:

- Eliminating unlawful discrimination
- Advancing equality of opportunity between different groups (e.g. disabled and non-disabled people, men and women)
- Fostering good relations between communities

1.4.2 The Council has had due regard to the protected characteristics as defined in Section 4 of the Equality Act 2010, which are gender, marital status, race, nationality, ethnic or national origin, disability, age, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity, gender reassignment and sexual orientation.

- 1.4.3 As permitted by the Localism Act 2011, preference for allocations will be given to applicants in the reasonable preference categories under section 166A(3) of the Housing Act 1996 and local lettings policies and any rule, condition or requirement will not unjustifiably discriminate against persons possessing protected characteristics.
- 1.4.4 We are committed to promoting equal opportunities, embracing diversity, and preventing and eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation.
- 1.4.5 Where necessary, the Council will seek to make reasonable adjustments to ensure all applicants are able to access the service, for example, provide interpretation and translation services and/or use alternative methods of communication, within a reasonable timescale.
- 1.4.6 The Council has had regard to section 11 of the Children Act 2004 and the need to safeguard and to promote the welfare of children when developing this Scheme.
- 1.4.7 The impact of the changes to the Scheme has been assessed through the Equality Impact Assessment process and periodically the policy and the Equality Impact Assessment will be reviewed.

1.5 What Are Allocations Under This Scheme?

- 1.5.1 Through the allocation scheme, available properties are advertised to eligible applicants who meet the qualification criteria. Allocations under the Scheme are for social housing tenancies from a Registered Provider.
- 1.5.2 It is important to note that Registered Providers operate their own allocation policies. Therefore, an applicant may not be rehoused by a Registered Provider if they do not meet the specific requirements of that Registered Provider's lettings policy.
- 1.5.3 Affordable housing refers to social rent and affordable rent homes allocated to eligible households whose needs are not met by the market. These homes must be affordable in relation to local incomes and house prices, and suitable for the household's needs. Further information on housing options including access to the private rented sector is available on the Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice website: <https://stratfordonavonhomechoice.org.uk>

1.6 Allocations Not Covered by this Scheme

- 1.6.1 Certain types of housing allocations are exempt from this scheme, either because they fall outside the statutory definition of an allocation under the Housing Act 1996 or because they are managed through separate processes. These include:
- 1.6.2 **Statutory Exemptions (under Section 160, Housing Act 1996)**
- Succession to a tenancy following the death of a tenant (under Section 89 of the Housing Act 1985 and Section 17 of the Housing Act 1988)
 - Assignment of a tenancy to a person who would be qualified to succeed a tenancy if the tenant died immediately before the assignment
 - Introductory or probationary tenancies: Where an introductory or probationary tenancy becomes a secure or assured tenancy.
 - Mutual exchange of tenancies
 - Transfers ordered by a court under family law, the Children's Act 1989, or the Civil Partnership Act 2004
 - Transfers initiated by Registered Providers, such as decants for major works
 - Rehousing following displacement under the Land Compensation Act 1973
 - Applicants who are not eligible under section 160ZA are covered in the Eligibility section of this policy.

1.6.3 Other Exempt Allocations

These allocations may consider aspects of this policy but are subject to different decision-making processes and criteria:

- Family Intervention Tenancies: Introduced by the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008, Family Intervention Tenancies are a form of residential tenancy without security of tenure. They may be offered by either a local housing authority or a registered provider to anyone who is a tenant of a secure (or assured) tenancy subject to a possession order on the grounds of anti-social behaviour or domestic abuse or anyone who (if they had a secure or assured tenancy) could have had such a possession order made against them.
- Changes to joint tenancies, including transitions between sole and joint tenancies (subject to individual Registered Provider policies)
- Provision of non-secure temporary accommodation under homelessness duties or powers
- Placements in supported accommodation
- Direct matching of properties (details provided later in the policy)
- Allocation of Extra Care Housing
- Allocation of adapted properties or properties that are suitable for adaptation

1.7 Statement on Choice

- 1.7.1 Stratford-on-Avon District Council is committed to offering applicants choice in accessing housing through Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice. This approach is in line with legal requirements and aims to support applicants in finding housing that meets their needs.
- 1.7.2 However, this commitment must be balanced against the significant demand for affordable housing, particularly some property types and areas, and the need to ensure fair and effective use of available stock. There may also be a need to limit choice to resolve a person's housing situation urgently or for risk and safety reasons. Applicants awarded higher priority for medical, or accessibility reasons may be restricted to bidding only for properties that meet their assessed needs. This ensures offers are suitable and sustainable. For example, someone requiring level-access accommodation will usually only be able to bid for homes that provide this feature.
- 1.7.3 To manage demand, the allocation scheme includes qualification criteria that determine who is a qualifying person for the purposes of the application as a whole. There are qualification criteria relating to local connection, housing need, not exceeding income and financial limits, not owning property anywhere in the world, related to behaviour and additional qualification criteria for 16 and 17 year olds. The qualification criteria need to be met unless the applicant or household member meets specific exemption criteria.
- 1.7.4 Where a household does not qualify because one member fails to meet the qualification criteria, the entire application may be non-qualified, suspended, disqualified or excluded. The joint applicant(s) and other household members may choose to consider the housing options available to their household as a whole or to individual members of the household (where only one member of the household does not qualify).
- 1.7.5 Priority for housing is determined through a banding structure, with greater preference given to those in the highest housing need.
- 1.7.6 Applicants can view available properties and express interest ('bid') on those for which they are eligible. While the scheme aims to maximise choice, there are circumstances where choice may be limited, including:

- Applicants do not meet the eligibility criteria for the scheme or the specific property as described in the property advert
- A Local Lettings Plan applies, and applicants do not qualify
- A legal agreement restricts who can be offered the property
- Registered Providers' allocation policies may restrict who can bid or be offered the property
- The applicant's household type may restrict the type of properties they are eligible to bid for (for example where households have a need for ground floor accommodation). Please refer to Appendix 3.
- Applicants who are homeless being rehoused under the Main Housing Duty under Section 193 of the Housing Act 1996 or as a Relief Duty case under homelessness legislation.

- 1.7.7 Exceptions will be clearly stated in property advertisements, unless the issue is specific to an individual applicant, in which case it will be discussed directly at the point of allocation.
- 1.7.8 In certain very limited circumstances, it may be necessary to make a direct allocation outside of the advertising system (see Section 8).
- 1.7.9 Applicants in time limited bands who refuse suitable offers or do not place bids during the period specified will be placed in Band 4 - Reduced Band. Further details are available in the relevant section of the Allocations Policy.

1.8 Housing Options – Beyond Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice

- 1.8.1 The number of households on Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice who require a more suitable home significantly exceeds the number of properties that become available each year.
- 1.8.2 As a result, many households may face long waiting times before being offered accommodation, particularly those needing larger family homes or accessible properties suitable for people with disabilities or mobility challenges.
- 1.8.3 It is therefore important to consider alternative housing options. Where applicants are homeless, these options will be discussed and included in any Personal Housing Plan they agree with the Council.
- 1.8.4 In some cases, the applicants may need to move to a home that is not social housing, such as:
- Renting in the private sector, including shared accommodation
 - Adapting their current home, for example, installing equipment or making modifications to support a household member with health or mobility needs
 - Mutual exchange: if applicants are Registered Provider tenants, they may be able to swap homes with another tenant
 - Low-cost home ownership such as shared ownership schemes
- 1.8.5 These options can offer more immediate or flexible solutions depending on the applicants' circumstances. Further advice and support are available through the Council's Housing and Communities' team and the Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice website.

1.9 Data Protection

- 1.9.1 The Council and any Registered Provider partners will not disclose to any members of the public if applicants are registered on Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice unless they have the applicant's written consent.
- 1.9.2 Personal information that the Council holds in relation to applications will be processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and any subsequent legislation. The legal basis for processing data is under the Council's public task as set out in Part VI and Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, as amended. Please note that application details may be viewed by Registered Providers for allocations purposes.

- 1.9.3 Information may need to be disclosed to partner Registered Providers or other landlords who may be able to offer accommodation. Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice also collects information about applicants' location preferences to help identify housing needs and demand across different areas of the District.
- 1.9.4 UK data protection law allows the sharing of personal information without consent if a lawful basis can be identified, for example if an individual's safety is at risk. The Council may for example consider sharing information regarding safeguarding concerns, including, but not limited to concerns about domestic violence and abuse, with other agencies.
- 1.9.5 More information about how and why the Council may process personal data, data protection rights or how to contact the Council's Data Protection Officer is available in the Council's Privacy Notice, accessible on the Council's website at <https://www.stratford-dc.gov.uk> and on Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice website at <https://stratfordonavonhomechoice.org.uk>

2. SECTION TWO – APPLYING TO STRATFORD-ON-AVON HOME CHOICE

2.1 Who Can Apply

- 2.1.1 Anyone can apply to join Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice where they are over 18 years age (or 16 and 17 years who meet the qualification criteria) and meet:
- the **eligibility criteria** that apply where there is a person from abroad which are explained in Section 3 and
 - the **qualification criteria** to join which are explained in Section 4.
- 2.1.2 There are specific qualification criteria which relate to 16 and 17 year olds because young people aged 16 and 17 years cannot hold a 'legal' interest in a tenancy until they turn 18.

2.2 Joint Applications

- 2.2.1 Two people may apply jointly if both are eligible, qualify, and the Council considers it is reasonable to consider them as joint applicants who are part of the same household. Joint applicants apply together on the same application for a housing allocation. If a joint tenancy is awarded joint tenants share security of tenure and responsibility for the tenancy. Where joint applicants are not a couple, Registered Providers may not issue a joint tenancy subject to their own allocation policy.
- 2.2.2 If a person under 18 applies jointly with someone aged 18 or over, and they intend to live together as cohabiting joint tenants, the Registered Provider may only offer a sole tenancy to the applicant aged over 18. A joint tenancy may be considered by the Registered Provider, for example if the applicant under 18 has a parental guarantor.

2.3 Applicants Aged 16–17

- 2.3.1 Young people aged 16 or 17 may apply to join the Housing Register. However, they cannot legally hold a tenancy although they can 'benefit' from a tenancy which can be granted to a third party, a 'trustee', and held on trust for the young person until they turn 18. Registered Providers will typically only grant a tenancy to someone under 18 if:
- An Equitable Tenancy arrangement is permitted and
 - A guarantor is provided to cover rent obligations
- 2.3.2 Please refer to individual provider policies for specific requirements.
- 2.3.3 This means that the Council will allow an applicant who is 16 or 17 to join (and bid for accommodation and be considered for offers) **unless** they are disqualified because they do not have someone to act as trustee.

- 2.3.4 Care leavers (see Section 6.9 for definition) are exempt. Warwickshire County Council has a duty to support their transition to independent living and has arrangements in place to facilitate this through a joint Housing and Children's Services Protocol. If a 16–17 year-old applies to Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice, it may trigger involvement from the Children's Services Team. Under the Children Act 1989, their needs will be assessed, and if accommodation is required, they may be housed under Section 20 as a 'looked after' child.
- 2.3.5 For other young people in housing need, a family member, appropriate adult friend, or professional person aged 18 or over may agree to hold a tenancy on trust for the applicant until they turn 18 years.
- 2.3.6 Where 16 or 17 year olds are not considered to have adequate support arrangements in place to sustain a Registered Provider social housing tenancy, other options may be explored such as referrals to supported accommodation.

2.4 Who Can Be Included in an Application

- 2.4.1 An individual can only appear on one active application at any time either as a main applicant, joint applicant, or household member.
- 2.4.2 Applicants should only include people who normally reside or who can reasonably be expected to reside with them as part of their household and will occupy the accommodation as their principal home. This may include:
- A partner, spouse, or civil partner
 - Dependent children, including those approved for fostering or adoption
 - Non-dependent children or adult household members living as part of the household
 - Other adults who are dependent on or provide care to the applicant, with supporting evidence
- 2.4.3 Applicants may include people in the household if they usually live with the applicant but are unable to do so solely because there is no accommodation they can occupy together.
- 2.4.4 The Council will consider whether it is reasonable to expect someone who does not normally live with the applicant as a household member to reside with them.
- 2.4.5 The Council is required to assess if people are entitled to be treated as part of the household on the application. This may include assessing if it is a long-term arrangement and if other accommodation is available to them. The Council will make any enquiries it considers reasonable to satisfy itself whether the joint applicant, children or other household members are entitled to be included on the application.
- 2.4.6 Please note that ineligible household members may be included in an application and taken into account when determining the size of accommodation that is allocated. Registered Providers will consider whether the tenancy is sustainable and affordable based on their own allocation policies.

2.5 Adding Adults to an Application

- 2.5.1 An adult is an applicant or other household member who is not a dependent child.
- 2.5.2 Applicants can add other adults to their application, in addition to Applicants 1 and 2. In such cases, the Council requires written confirmation from the adult that they wish to be added to the application (See Appendix 5 Verification Requirements). Depending on the facts of the case, additional documentation may be required to satisfy the Council it is reasonable to include them on the application.
- 2.5.3 To include an additional adult on an application, the Council would need to be satisfied that the adult either is, has been in the past, or will be in the future reasonably expected to reside as a member of the long-term household.

- 2.5.4 An example of this would be to assist with or take up caring responsibilities. The Council may require supporting documentary evidence when deciding whether to add an adult to an application. Where someone qualifies to join Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice as an exemption from the normal local connection criteria due to the need to receive or give care, then medical supporting evidence would be required.

2.6 Children in Applications

- 2.6.1 Dependent children are only considered to be part of a household where:
- Primary responsibility is evidenced and
 - The applicant receives Child Benefit for the child (or at the sole discretion of the local authority other proof may be acceptable e.g. where fostering or kinship care arrangements or special guardian or child arrangement orders) and
 - The Council considers it is reasonable to include the child as part of the household (see Section 2.4)
- 2.6.2 A dependent child is defined as someone under 18, or up to 20 years old if they remain dependent due to continuous education.
- 2.6.3 Applicants can only include dependent children as part of their application if they have primary responsibility for those children. Therefore, unless there is an exceptional circumstance, we would be unable to provide family accommodation to someone where they are not the primary carer for the child, even if they have 50% access rights. The decision on who has primary responsibility rests with the Council.
- 2.6.4 Please note depending on the facts of the case, additional documentation may be required to satisfy the Council it is reasonable to include the child on the application.

2.7 Types of Properties Households are Able to Bid on

- 2.7.1 The type of property applicants are eligible to bid for may depend on their household type, age or a particular exempt group that they fall into. For example:
- 2.7.2 Applicants whose only qualifying local connection is linked to a Section 106 local connection are only eligible to bid for properties which are subject to a Section 106 agreement. Please see the definition of Section 106 Agreement in Appendix 1 Glossary of Terms).
- 2.7.3 Applicants aged 55 or over where this is the reason for the exemption from qualification criteria linked to financial and household income limits or the disqualification criteria where people own a home, are only eligible to bid for Independent Living Schemes (sheltered and extra care properties).
- 2.7.4 Households may be restricted according to the type of property they can bid for because priority is given to people who qualify for and/ or who are most in need for certain types of accommodation. Registered providers also have their own allocation policies which can affect which types of households that can be considered for different types of properties. For example, families may be prioritised for houses and people with disabilities or people over 60 prioritised for bungalows and ground floor properties. Please see Appendix 4.

2.8 The Size of Properties Households are Able to Bid on

- 2.8.1 Applicants should only bid for properties that are of the appropriate size for them and their household.
- 2.8.2 The priority in establishing this bedroom criteria is to ensure that households are offered accommodation that they can afford, which meets their needs and ensures best use of housing accommodation. As welfare benefits legislation can impact on the number of bedrooms a person is eligible for, any policy review will, where appropriate, consider any changes to the welfare system.

2.8.3 The Bedroom Criteria for Property Allocation and Under Occupation determines the number of bedrooms required by the applicants' household and allocates one bedroom for:

- Any adult couple
- Each remaining adult aged 16 or over, not in a couple
- Two children of the same sex under 16
- Two children of the opposite sex under 10 years
- Any other child who cannot be paired with another as above

(unless exemptions apply).

2.8.4 **Please note:**

- Applicants requiring more than four bedrooms may not be offered a property that fully meets their assessed need due to the limited availability of larger homes in the District.
- Households made up of adults rather than dependent children may find it more difficult to secure larger family-sized properties, as Registered Providers policies may prioritise households with children for houses.
- Different criteria are used for assessing overcrowding, we use the Government's Bedroom Standard (see Section 6.11).

2.9 Exemptions and Discretion – Bedroom Criteria

2.9.1 The Council will consider when calculating bedroom size for property allocation, under occupation and overcrowding whether exemptions apply, or if discretion may be exercised (see Section 2.10-2.12). For example:

- Where applicants or household members are assessed by the Council as needing an additional bedroom due to their disability/medical need (see Section 2.10). For example:
 - Where they require regular overnight care, which is essential and long term.
 - Where they require an additional bedroom because of their disability e.g. for specialist equipment.
 - Where they are a member of a couple, or are a child, and cannot share a bedroom due to their disability/medical condition.
- Households with adult children in the armed forces are treated as if they are living at home, even if they are deployed on operations (additional documentation may be required for verification)
- Pregnant applicants (with no other children) will be recognised as a family from 25 weeks of pregnancy, allowing access to family-sized accommodation and an additional bedroom. Pregnant applicants with other children may also be entitled to an additional bedroom from 25 weeks (depending on the above criteria).
- Where applicants are foster carers and there is a need for an additional bedroom (see Section 2.13)
- Where applicants are approved or are undergoing approval as foster carers, adopters or special guardians, or family and friend carers with a high likelihood of a placement the Council may consider awarding additional bedrooms (see section 2.17)
- Where Registered Providers may apply their own policies to determine bedroom eligibility.
- Properties subject to a Local Lettings Plan where under-occupation may be intentional
- With regards to two bed general needs bungalows, eligible applicants with a one bed need may be considered for properties of this size.

- Properties where there is low demand or difficulty letting, may be allocated outside standard criteria
- Situations where no suitable applicants can be identified to make best use of larger accommodation.
- There are other special circumstances to deviate from this, for example rare or complex cases involving medical, welfare or legal considerations. These cases will be considered on an individual basis and following a recommendation for the officer it will have to be authorised by a housing manager from the Council, who will take into account relevant case law and guidance. Due to the high demand for housing, such requests are only likely to be agreed in exceptional circumstances.

2.10 Additional Bedrooms for Medical, Health and/or Social Care Needs

- 2.10.1 The Council will consider whether an additional bedroom is required on medical or welfare grounds.
- 2.10.2 When assessing such requests for an additional bedroom, the Council will consider different criteria dependent on the reason that the household requires an additional bedroom.
- 2.10.3 **Where applicants or household members requires an additional bedroom for overnight care:**
- 2.10.4 This will only be considered where:
- The person is disabled.
 - No one in the household can provide the care.
 - The need is for regular overnight care, which is essential and long term.
 - Living areas would normally be expected to be used as a sleeping area for occasional carers. In these cases, applicants would only be eligible for an additional bedroom in exceptional circumstances.
 - When an extra room is required for a carer, only one extra room will be awarded even if more than one person in the household needs overnight care.
- 2.10.5 **Where applicants or household members requires an additional bedroom because of their disability**
- 2.10.6 We will consider:
- Whether they are undergoing essential home treatment (e.g. dialysis requiring equipment storage).
 - Whether they have a permanent and substantial disability requiring space for specialist equipment (not including a mobility scooter).
- 2.10.7 **For couples requesting a second bedroom due to difficulty sharing, the Council will consider:**
- The severity, regularity, and permanence of the issue which must be evidenced
 - Whether there is a severe detriment to health caused by sharing and this must be demonstrated.
- 2.10.8 **Disabled Child – the Council will consider:**
- Whether the child is disabled and their disability means that they are unable to share a bedroom with another child.

2.11 Households Requesting an Additional Bedroom– Additional Requirements

2.11.1 In addition, all households with a need for an additional bedroom for medical, health and/or social care needs will need to demonstrate that:

- There is a need for an additional bedroom and no alternative way to meet the need within the existing household or space.
- The person is receiving at least one of the specified benefits required as part of the criteria to qualify for an additional bedroom and be exempt from the ‘bedroom tax’ which is an ‘under-occupation charge’ for housing costs (see Appendix 5 Verification Requirements).
- There must also be medical evidence supporting the above criteria, for example a letter from adult social care or children’s social care, demonstrating to the satisfaction of the Council an essential need for an additional bedroom.

2.11.2 The final decision will be made by officers at the Council.

2.12 Foster Children, Adopted Children or Special Guardians

2.12.1 Where applicants require an additional bedroom in order to accommodate a looked after child, or a child who was previously a looked after child, an additional bedroom may be allowed for:

- Applicants who have a foster child placed with them and the normal rules would require the foster-child to share a bedroom or where there is a gap between foster care placements of up to 12 months. Only one additional bedroom can be awarded under this rule regardless of how many foster-children are living in the property
- Applicants approved or undergoing approval as foster parents or adopters. It would also include special guardians, holders of a residence order and family and friend carers who are not foster carers, but who have taken on the care of a child because the parents are unable to provide care. There must be evidence that there is a high likelihood of a placement being made.
- Applicants with a child or young person placed with them prior to adoption.

The Council may request:

- A report from the supervising social worker which states that an additional bedroom is required and evidences the above requirements.
- Confirmation that approved to adopt, approved foster carer or where special guardian or other special circumstances.
- Any other relevant information deemed necessary.

2.12.2 The Council will make the final decision on awarding an additional bedroom and each case will be assessed individually.

3 SECTION THREE – ELIGIBILITY

3.1 Eligibility for an Allocation of Social Housing (People from Abroad)

3.1.1 Eligibility for social housing allocations from Registered Providers is determined in accordance with Part 6, Section 160ZA of the Housing Act 1996, and any associated legislation or regulations. The Council will update its eligibility in line with any future changes made by the UK Government.

3.1.2 Eligibility affects whether an applicant can join Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice.

3.2 Who Is Usually Eligible

- 3.2.1 Applicants are generally eligible to join the Housing Register and be considered for social housing if they:
- Are a British or Irish citizen
 - Have Indefinite Leave to Remain
 - Hold Settled Status under the EU Settlement Scheme
 - Have the Right of Abode as a Commonwealth citizen
 - Have been granted Refugee Status or Humanitarian Protection
 - Have immigration status that makes them eligible for an allocation of social housing under relevant legislation and regulations. For example, hold a visa that provides recourse to public funds (e.g. eligibility for Universal Credit)
- 3.2.2 For joint applications, both applicants must meet the eligibility criteria. If an applicant becomes ineligible after being accepted onto the register, their application will be cancelled and they will be notified.

3.3 Who Is Not Eligible?

- 3.3.1 Under Section 160ZA of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) and associated regulations the following persons are not eligible for an allocation of social housing:
- People subject to immigration control, unless they fall within a class prescribed by regulations issued by the Secretary of State.
 - Other persons from abroad who are not subject to immigration control but are prescribed by regulations as ineligible, including British citizens not currently residing in the UK and therefore not habitually resident.
 - Certain European Economic Area (EEA) and Swiss nationals, depending on their residence and/or employment status.
- 3.3.2 Eligibility is assessed based on the law at the time of:
- Application
 - Any change in circumstances
 - A formal offer of accommodation
- 3.3.3 Applicants must provide evidence of their immigration status at each of these stages and must notify the Council of any changes to their status (see Appendix 5 Verification Requirements).

3.4 Important Notes

- 3.4.1 If an applicant's partner is ineligible, the eligible applicant may still apply and bid for properties, but the partner will be unable to be a joint applicant.
- 3.4.2 Eligibility rules do not apply to existing social housing tenants who are seeking a transfer and meet the reasonable preference criteria.
- 3.4.3 If the application is refused due to ineligibility:
- The application will not be registered or given a registration date.
 - Applicants will be informed of the decision and their right to request a review.
 - If the applicant(s) immigration status changes, they may submit a new application, but it is their responsibility to provide evidence of the change.
- 3.4.4 If the applicants are unsure about their eligibility or believe they may be affected by these rules, they are encouraged to contact the Council for advice or seek independent legal support.

4. SECTION FOUR – QUALIFICATION CRITERIA

4.1 Qualification for an Allocation of Social Housing

- 4.1.1 In addition to meeting the eligibility requirements described in Section 3, applicants must also meet the qualification criteria to join Stratford-on-Avon District Council's Housing Register. This means that not all eligible applicants will automatically qualify.
- 4.1.2 Under Section 160ZA(7) of the Housing Act 1996 (Part VI), the Council has discretion to determine which classes of persons qualify for inclusion on the Housing Register. If both eligibility and qualification criteria are met, applicants will be accepted onto the register.
- 4.1.3 If the application is assessed and an applicant or member of their household is suspended or does not qualify to join, the whole application is suspended, non-qualified, disqualified or excluded. The applicants will be notified in writing, with reasons provided. The notification will include details of their right to request a review and how to do so.

4.2 Non-Qualification and Disqualification Criteria

- 4.2.1 The following are examples—though not an exhaustive list—of circumstances in which applicants will not qualify for social housing, either at the point of application or at any time while registered on Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice unless they are exempt:
- 4.2.2 Applicants will not qualify to join Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice if any of the following apply:
- They do not meet the age-related qualification criteria
 - They do not have a local connection to Stratford-on-Avon District. In the case of joint applicants at least one applicant must have a local connection
 - The household's financial resources or combined household income exceed the Council's threshold
 - The applicant(s) or a member of their household owns a property anywhere in the world
 - The household is assessed as having no housing need
 - Their behaviour, or that of a household member, makes them unsuitable to hold a tenancy
- 4.2.3 Further details and exceptions to these criteria are provided in the following subsections including exemptions.

4.3 Qualification by Age – 16 and 17 year olds

- 4.3.1 Young people aged 16 or 17 may apply to join the Housing Register. However, they cannot legally hold a tenancy until they turn 18. The Council will allow applicants who are 16 or 17 to join (and bid for accommodation and be considered for offers) unless they are disqualified because they do not have someone to act as trustee.
- 4.3.2 Care leavers are exempt from these requirements as special rules apply (please see Section 2.3).

4.4 Qualification by Local Connection

- 4.4.1 To qualify, the applicant (or one joint applicant) must have a local connection to Stratford-on-Avon District (the District). This is usually demonstrated by:
- Current continuous residence in the District for at least two years, by choice
 - Employment in the District for at least 6 months, based on the physical location of their workplace (not the employer's head office)

- Close family connections with someone who currently lives and has lived in the District continuously for five years (meaning mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister, or such other relative(s) as the District Council may agree qualify in the particular circumstances of any given case as a close family member or has a link to a particular family which the District Council consider qualifies)

4.5 Residence Does Not Include:

- 4.5.1 Living in a mobile home, caravan, or motorhome that is not the applicant's principal home
- Occupying holiday accommodation (e.g. hotels, B&Bs)
 - Residence in prison, bail hostels, or similar institutions
 - In-patient stays in hospitals or specialist centres where the applicant has a connection elsewhere

4.6 Employment That Does Not Qualify:

- 4.6.1 The following types of employment do not qualify:
- Marginal employment (less than 16 hours per week)
 - Ancillary work (occasional or secondary work in the District)
 - Voluntary work (unpaid or expenses-only roles)
- 4.6.2 Applicants needing to move to the District for work will be assessed on a case-by-case basis, considering evidence and local circumstances, including potential financial hardship.
- 4.6.3 Self-employed applicants or those whose work occasionally takes them outside the District must demonstrate that their employment has been primarily based in the District for at least 6 months prior to application, prior to any review of their application, and at the point of nomination.
- 4.6.4 Applicants on maternity or sick leave who remain employed will still qualify under this criterion, provided there is no indication that their employment will end.

4.7 Maintaining Local Connection Qualification

- 4.7.1 Once registered on the Housing Register, the applicant (or joint applicant) must continue to meet the continuous local connection qualification. However, there are specific exemptions where the local connection requirement does not apply.

4.8 Exemptions from the Local Connection Requirement

- 4.8.1 Applicants may still qualify for the Housing Register without meeting the local connection requirement if any of the following apply:

a) Homeless Duty and meets homeless local connection criteria

- Applicants who are owed the following homelessness duties under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 by this authority (Sections 189B Relief Duty, 193(2) Main Housing Duty, 195(2) Prevention Duty) will be treated as having a local connection if they meet the homelessness local connection criteria set out in section 199 of the Housing Act 1996. The local connection exemption may no longer apply when the duty ends.

b) Supported Housing outside Stratford-on-Avon District

- Applicants residing in a supported housing scheme outside of Stratford-on-Avon District that were referred to by or with agreement of Stratford-on-Avon Council and met the qualification criteria immediately before the placement.

c) Care and Support

- Households where the Council is satisfied that the applicant(s) needs to live in the District to provide or receive ongoing, regular, and significant care or support to or from a person who lives in the area and their application is supported by medical supporting evidence.

d) Reciprocal Arrangements

- Applicants being rehoused under a reciprocal agreement between local authorities or housing providers.

e) Social Housing Tenants Right to Move

- Applicants who are social housing tenants who need to move for work or have been offered work in the District and would otherwise suffer hardship (Right to Move).

f) Main Housing Duty

- Applicants who are homeless where the Council has accepted the Main Housing Duty under Section 193(2) of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended).

g) Domestic Abuse

- Applicants or members of a household who are moving to escape domestic abuse.

h) Armed Forces

- Those who are currently serving or have served in the Regular Armed Forces.
- Where the bereaved spouse or civil partner has recently ceased (or will cease) to be entitled to reside in Ministry of Defence accommodation following the death of their Service Spouse or civil partner and the death was attributable to their service.
- Serving or former members of the Reserve Armed Forces who are suffering from a serious service-related injury, illness, or disability.
- A divorced, separated, or ex-civil partner of armed forces personnel required to vacate a Ministry of Defence property within the next 56 days.
- Current or former members of an armed forces household (such as adult children or a divorced spouse or civil partner) who have applied to join the register and are in exceptional circumstances.

i) Care Leavers

- Applicants who are care leavers under the age of 25 as defined in section 6.9 on Care Leavers.

j) Prison Leavers

- Applicants who served a prison sentence and return to live continuously in the District upon release and previously lived in the District for two continuous years before entering prison retain their local connection upon release.

k) Leaving hospital or other care facility

- Applicants leaving hospital or another residential care facility who previously lived in the district for 2 years continuously prior to being admitted.

l) Exceptional Circumstances

Other applicants without a local connection will only be registered in exceptional circumstances. Applicants will need to explain and evidence their exceptional circumstances as part of the application process. The decision to register an applicant without a local connection will be assessed on an individual basis, as agreed by the Council.

m) **Local Connection to Section 106 / Village Exception Sites**

Applicants may also qualify through meeting a local occupancy requirement related to a Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 or village exception site, as defined in legal agreements. This may include:

- People who are born in a particular parish in Stratford-on-Avon District
- People who have lived in the parish for 12 months or more
- People who are currently employed for more than 16 hours per week in the parish for at least 12 months
- People who have previously lived in the parish for a total of 3 years or more
- People who have immediate family members (meaning mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister) or such other relative(s) as the District Council may agree qualify in the particular circumstances of any given case as a close family member or has a link to a particular family which the District Council consider qualifies) who are currently living and have lived in the parish for 3 years or more.
- **Please note applicants accepted onto the register via this exemption will be restricted to bidding only for Section 106 properties across the District (see definition of Section 106 properties in Appendix 1, glossary of terms).**

4.9 **No Housing Need**

- 4.9.1 Applicants who are assessed as having no housing need and are currently adequately housed (i.e., as assessed against the provisions of the scheme and the statutory reasonable preference categories) will not qualify to join Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice.

4.10 **Financial Resources and Household Income Limits**

- 4.10.1 Applicants or adult household members with financial resources that would normally enable them to meet their own housing needs—either through purchasing or renting suitable accommodation on the open market—will not qualify to join Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice.
- 4.10.2 The threshold for household assets or savings will be aligned to the Government's upper limit for savings set out in the common rules of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Benefit and Pensions Rates.
- 4.10.3 Applicants and adult household members will be considered to have sufficient financial resources if they meet any of the following criteria:
- A single person or childless couple of any age with a combined gross annual household income of £45,000 or more.
 - A family or other household type with a combined gross annual household income of £60,000 or more.
 - Savings and assets that exceed the maximum capital limit used by the DWP Benefit and Pension Rates.

The Council reserves the right to review these limits annually.

- 4.10.4 Applicants and adult household members must declare all their actual (not estimated) income, savings, investments, assets and property ownership in the UK or abroad as part of their housing application. The following will be considered when assessing financial resources:
- Income from all paid employment within the household.
 - All benefits or allowances received by household members.
 - Savings and investments held by anyone included in the application.
 - Assets, including property ownership or financial interest in property.

- 4.10.5 The following types of income and capital will be disregarded when assessing a household's financial resources for the purposes of qualification under this Policy:
- Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independent Payment and Attendance Allowance
 - Bereavement Support Payment
 - Foster Care Allowance, Adoption Support Allowance and Special Guardian Allowance
- 4.10.6 Compensation payments are not automatically disregarded; instead, the Council will consider their purpose when determining how they should be treated in the financial assessment.
- The Council will consider the purpose and nature of the payment when deciding whether it is reasonable to include or disregard the payment in assessing a household's ability to secure housing on the open market. This includes, but is not limited to:
- Certain Government approved compensation payments
 - Any lump sum compensation received by a member of the armed forces for injury or disability sustained during active service.

4.11 Homeowners or Those with a Financial Interest in Property

- 4.11.1 Applicants who own a freehold or leasehold interest in property in the UK or abroad are not considered qualifying persons.
- 4.11.2 This includes being named on a mortgage or holding joint ownership or a share in a property in the UK or abroad.

4.12 Exceptional Circumstances and Exemptions for Home-Owners and Financial Resources and Household Income Limits

- 4.12.1 The above limits and qualifying criteria do not apply where:
- People over 55 want to be considered exclusively for Independent Living or Extra Care Schemes (but applicants will not be able to bid for other properties).
 - Homeowners who can demonstrate that it is unreasonable for them to continue to occupy the accommodation AND they cannot liquidate or sell the property which would enable them to purchase or rent an alternative property suitable to meet their needs. In these circumstances the income and savings rules may not apply.
- 4.12.2 Examples of where it may be unreasonable to occupy include:
- Have a need for specialist accommodation, such as significantly adapted properties, and are unable to adapt existing home or
 - Are homeless and the Council has accepted a Prevention or Relief Duty or the Main Housing Duty or
 - Are fleeing domestic violence or abuse or
 - Are affected by a demolition or redevelopment programme led by Stratford-on-Avon District Council or its partners, and lack the financial means to secure alternative accommodation
- 4.12.3 Other exceptional cases may be considered. Where any exceptional circumstances exist, these will be assessed on a case by-case basis. In such cases, the Council may waive the financial resources and household income limits and the exclusion for homeowners, subject to a case-by-case assessment.

4.13 Behaviour and Disqualifying or Suspending an Application

- 4.13.1 Applicants may be excluded or disqualified from Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice if the main applicant, joint applicant, or any member of the household is treated as a non-qualifying person where a household or members of a household's behaviour means that they are considered unsuitable to be a tenant. The following list illustrates the types of serious unacceptable behaviour which may make applicants unsuitable to be a tenant and therefore could lead to exclusion from the allocations scheme or in other cases may result in suspension from the list.
- 4.13.2 Suspension, exclusion or disqualification may occur if:
1. An applicant has an unmanaged housing related debt (including council tax) (see Section 4.14)
 2. An applicant or member of the household has committed serious breaches of tenancy or has a history of unacceptable behaviour, anti-social behaviour or where verified serious criminal behaviour presents a current and significant risk to others.
 3. An applicant or member of the household has provided false information or deliberately worsened or failed to disclose information
- 4.13.3 This will continue to apply until the applicant has demonstrated, to the satisfaction of the Council, that the behaviour does not warrant exclusion or suspension from the Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice and/or the applicant has provided evidence that circumstances have changed such that the previous conduct is unlikely to reoccur and has met the reassessment criteria, they may qualify to join Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice or have their suspension removed.
- 4.13.4 Where an applicant or member of the household is assessed that they may meet the reassessment criteria within 12 months the applicant may be suspended from Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice instead of disqualified. Where the applicant or member of their household is assessed that they will not meet the qualification criteria within 12 months or more the applicant may be disqualified.
- 4.13.5 Suspension means the applicant remains on Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice, but any offer of accommodation may be withdrawn, and they cannot bid for accommodation until they provide evidence that means the decision can be reassessed and the Council is satisfied that the suspension can be removed.
- 4.13.6 The following sections illustrate the type of serious unacceptable behaviour which may make an applicant unsuitable to be a tenant and lead to exclusion or in other cases suspension from Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice.

4.14 In Respect of Housing- Related Debt (Unacceptable Behaviour)

- 4.14.1 Housing-related debt refers to rent, licence, and service charge arrears, recharges (including rechargeable repair costs), former tenant arrears, rent deposit debt, court costs, other accommodation related debts, and council tax (including any enforcement costs) and includes situations where:
- An applicant has been evicted for or had a possession order served for rent arrears or license arrears.
 - Applicant(s) owe more than £500 in housing related debt(s) and do not have payment plan(s) in place for all their housing related debts or have maintained a payment plan for a minimum of 13 consecutive weeks (3 months).
 - Where applicant(s) owe more than £1000 rent or licence arrears (current and former tenant arrears) they will be excluded. Other housing related debts may be included within this total where appropriate, at the sole discretion of the Council.

4.15 In Respect of Breach of Tenancy (Unacceptable Behaviour)

4.15.1 The Council and its housing partners expect tenants to uphold standards that promote safe, sustainable communities. The examples below are related to breaches of tenancy for unacceptable behaviour:

- An applicant (or where it is anti-social behaviour or criminal behaviour, an applicant or another household member), has been or is subject to a court order and is at risk of being evicted due to breach of tenancy conditions.
- The property condition deteriorated significantly, leading to eviction or a possession order
- An applicant made unauthorised alterations that rendered the property unsafe
- An applicant caused substantial damage to the property

4.16 In Respect of Criminal Behaviour (Unacceptable Behaviour):

4.16.1 The below are examples related to Criminal Behaviour that may be applied:

- An applicant or member of the households has unspent convictions for serious offences, including perpetrating domestic abuse.
- An applicant or member of the household used a property for illegal or immoral purpose, such as unspent drug-related offences or convictions.
- An applicant or member of the household has committed criminal offence near the home resulting in an unspent conviction.
- An applicant or member of the household is subject to or has been subject to criminal or civil action for unacceptable behaviour towards Council staff within the last 5 years.
- An applicant or a member of the household has unspent convictions for hate crimes or is listed on the Violent and Sex Offender Register (VISOR) and poses a significant threat to the local community

4.16.2 This exclusion may apply where the information available indicates that the person if housed would pose significant risk to another joint tenant, members of their household, council or housing staff, neighbours or the local community which cannot be adequately managed or mitigated. Evidence may be required from the police, probation or the Community Safety team or other relevant agencies.

4.16.3 Spent convictions will not be taken into account.

4.17 In Respect of Anti-Social Behaviour (Unacceptable Behaviour):

4.17.1 The below are examples related to anti-social behaviour:

4.17.2 An applicant or a member of the household who is subject to a court order or has been subject to a court order or evicted within the last 5 years due to anti-social behaviour.

4.17.3 An applicant or member of the household who are subject to, or has been subject to within the last 5 years court orders such as:

- Injunctions
- Criminal Behaviour Orders
- Community Protection Notices
- Restraining Orders
- Closure Orders
- Possession Orders

- 4.17.4 An applicant or member of the household breached a court order under Section 1 of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 within the last 5 years.
- 4.17.5 An applicant or member of the household received a noise abatement notice under Section 80 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 within the last 12 months.
- 4.17.6 An applicant or member of the household is subject to or who have been subject to criminal or civil action for unacceptable behaviour towards Council staff within the last 5 years.

4.18 In Respect of Providing Misleading Information (Unacceptable Behaviour)

- 4.18.1 The below are examples related to an applicant or member of the household providing false or misleading information within the previous 5 years:
- False or omitted information in housing or homelessness applications
 - Misrepresentation of circumstances to obtain a tenancy
 - Unspent convictions for housing-related fraud
 - Illegal subletting of a Council or Registered Provider property
 - Obtaining a tenancy through deception or illegal means
- 4.18.2 In addition to being treated as a non-qualifying person or suspension on grounds of unacceptable behaviour, failing to disclose relevant details, may constitute a criminal offence under Section 171 of the Housing Act 1996 and may also result in:
- Immediate cancellation of the housing application
 - Prosecution in criminal court

4.19 Deliberate Worsening of Housing Circumstances or Failing to Disclose Information

- 4.19.1 The below are examples where there may be clear evidence that an applicant has deliberately worsened their housing situation to gain advantage under the Allocations Scheme within the last 5 years:
- Selling a suitable and affordable property without obligation to do so
 - Moving from secure accommodation to unsafe, insanitary, overcrowded or insecure housing without necessity
 - Allowing others to move into the property, causing overcrowding, when those individuals could reasonably have secured their own accommodation
 - Not disclosing information in order to get a high banding or to prevent disqualification or suspension of the application.

4.20 Suspension or Disqualification from the Housing Register

- 4.20.1 When determining whether an applicant should be suspended or disqualified from the Housing Register due to unacceptable behaviour (which includes housing-related debt), the Council will ensure that:
- Each application is assessed individually
 - Any exceptional circumstances provided by the applicant are fully considered including whether to exercise discretion
 - The application remains inactive until a decision is made

4.20.2 The Council will consider:

- the seriousness of the behaviour/offence
- the duration of the behaviour and/or the number and frequency of incidents
- the length of time that has elapsed since the behaviour occurred, its location and its relevance.
- the nature of the offence and type of any intervention previously taken by partner agencies such as police, probation services, other council services and support providers
- health, disability, relevant vulnerabilities and support needs
- if violence, abuse or harassment have occurred including domestic abuse
- the reasons and the circumstances for the arrears
- If the housing related debt was as a result of armed forces service families being asked to vacate Ministry of Defence (MOD) accommodation and remaining in occupation after expiry of a notice to vacate. For example, where difficulty affording the accommodation was linked to becoming irregular occupants charged mesne profits and not being eligible for Universal Credit
- whether the property was affordable e.g. the debt accrued as a result of 'bedroom tax' and under occupying accommodation
- whether there has been meaningful engagement with support services leading to a demonstrable improvement in behaviour.
- whether there has been a significant and sustained change in the applicant's behaviour.
- whether any conviction has been spent
- homelessness and rooflessness and inability to find alternative accommodation
- Households in temporary accommodation provided by the Council under Section 188 or Section 193 as part of its homeless duty where urgent move on is required

4.20.3 Once a decision has been reached, applicants will be notified in writing, if they are to be suspended or disqualified from Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice with the reasons for the decision clearly stated. The notification will also include information about the applicant's right to request a review of the decision.

4.20.4 Where there is new evidence regarding exceptional circumstances the Council will consider whether discretion should be applied on a case-by-case basis.

4.20.5 The table below provides information about the recommended period for exclusion or suspension and evidence required to determine when to reassess a decision (where exceptional circumstances do not apply) but only where there has been no reasonable cause for complaint or concern in relation to the specified behaviour for the stated period:

Area related to Behaviour	Evidence to reassess Decision/ Recommended Period of disqualification exclusion or suspension
An applicant and where appropriate a member of their household) was evicted or are at risk of being evicted (where discretion not applied) and there is no demonstrative evidence of behaviour change in accommodation	Where in accommodation a minimum of 3 consecutive months with rent and any rent arrears payments being maintained and tenancy well managed with no breaches of tenancy or reasonable cause for complaint or concern including reports of damage or antisocial behaviour. Where no settled accommodation since eviction an assessment will be made as to whether there is evidence of a demonstrative change in behaviour for a minimum of 3 consecutive months since the eviction that satisfies the Council that they would comply with future tenancy conditions. Evidence includes behaviour references and rent statements from landlords. Any supporting evidence from support services demonstrating evidence that steps have been taken to ensure no recurrence of any breach of tenancy and sustained change in behaviour. Please note that the Council reserves the right to extend the period of exclusion or suspension significantly for severe breaches in tenancies and this will be decided on an individual basis.
Applicant(s) have has a housing related debt (including council tax) of greater than £500 and they have not met the criteria for reassessment.	Where applicant(s) total rent and/or licence arrears are below £1000 the applicants may not be excluded. Other housing related debts may be included in addition to rent or licence arrears at the discretion of the Council. The Council may consider exercising discretion where repayments have been in place for 13 consecutive weeks (or 3 consecutive months) and there is evidence from a third party that the debt will be cleared in full when an offer is made. Where applicant(s) have housing related debts, totalling above £500 (and below £1000 for the total rent arrears and/or licence arrears), they will be required to evidence that repayment plans are in place for all housing related debts for 13 consecutive weeks (or if monthly payments 3 consecutive months) for the Council to consider removing the suspension or exclusion. Where a debt is written off, paid by a third party or forms part of an Insolvency, Debt Relief Order (DRO) or Individual Voluntary Agreement (IVA) an assessment will be made as to whether there is evidence of a change in behaviour by the applicant in deciding whether the exclusion or suspension should continue. Debts being addressed by Insolvency, DRO or IVA will be considered as still existing until the agreement is discharged.
An applicant or member of their household has made a fraudulent claim, providing false or misleading information for housing and/or housing benefit or deliberately worsened their accommodation to gain advantage under the Allocations Scheme	This will depend on the severity but would normally be a minimum of 6-12 months suspension or exclusion for disqualification, but the Council reserves the right to extend this significantly for severe fraud and this will be decided on an individual basis.

Area related to Behaviour	Evidence to reassess Decision/ Recommended Period of disqualification exclusion or suspension
Criminal behaviour of an applicant or a member of their household	The Council will consider demonstrative evidence including from the police, probation or community safety team in order to assess the risks the applicant or household member would pose to another joint tenant, members of their household, Council, housing staff, local community or neighbours if they were housed and how any risk of harm can be mitigated or managed. The Council will not take spent convictions into account. Where it is assessed that the risk of harm cannot be sufficiently managed or mitigated for them to be housed, and dependent on the type of criminal behaviour (not including spent convictions) there would need to be demonstrative evidence of improved behaviour change for 6 months for reassessment to be considered. Evidence of behaviour change may include: • Verified reports from police, probation, or community safety services relating to current risk factors or behaviour (limited to unspent convictions only). • Confirmation of engagement with and completion of relevant rehabilitation, behaviour change, or support programmes. • Supporting information from other agencies involved in risk management or support. • Evidence of stable behaviour, absence of concerning incidents, and compliance with statutory or support requirements. The Council reserves the right to consider longer periods for exclusion or suspension for the more serious cases of criminal behaviour posing risks of harm if housed but only where based on current risk or unspent offending
Anti-social behaviour of an applicant or a member of their household with no demonstrative evidence of behaviour change	There has been a minimum of 12 months' time elapsed since anti-social behaviour and 3 months demonstrative evidence of improved behaviour change e.g. no reasonable cause for complaint or concern including reports of anti-social behaviour and no further legal proceeding or enforcement is pending. Longer exclusion periods for exclusion or suspension may be considered for the most serious acts of anti-social behaviour.

- 4.20.6 For types of evidence required to verify improvement in behaviour see Appendix 5 Verification Requirements.
- 4.20.7 Requests for reassessment must be submitted in writing, either by email or via the Council's online form with any supporting evidence.
- 4.20.8 Please note that where new information has been received suggesting there has been a deterioration in behaviour then the Council may consider at any time, whether it is appropriate to disqualify or suspend the application. This may include where the person has stopped making agreed payments towards a payment plan without good cause.
- 4.20.9 If the Council exercises discretion and decides not to disqualify or suspend an application as a result of any housing related debt or other behaviour, Registered Providers may still refuse to accommodate the applicants due to their own allocations policies, and they may be skipped. In these situations, applicants are encouraged to pursue other housing options (see Section 1.8).

5. Section Five - How to Apply to Join Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice

5.1 Making an Application Online

- 5.1.1 Before anyone can apply for available properties advertised through the Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice they must first register with the Scheme.
- 5.1.2 If applicants believe that they meet the eligibility and qualifying criteria in Sections 3 and 4, they can apply as detailed below. All applicants will need to complete the online application form at <https://www.stratfordonavonhomechoice.org.uk>.
- 5.1.3 Applicants will be provided with a user account that they will be able to securely log into via the Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice website. The Council will primarily communicate with applicants via their user account about their application on matters such as advice and assistance, notifications, clarification on evidence, etc. Whenever necessary, the Council will also communicate with the applicant via other means such as email, telephone, virtual calls, letter/ leaflet, in person, such as when they are having difficulty using their scheme account, including when a person needs or asks for an alternative format or reasonable adjustments to be made.

5.2 Help with Registration

- 5.2.1 Help with registration can be given to applicants by the Council as well as other organisations such as County Council social care services, health workers, support workers and voluntary bodies.
- 5.2.2 The Council can guide people through the application process, via the phone or in person at the Council offices. Applicants requiring further assistance can contact the Council to discuss their requirements (see Appendix 1 - Council Contact Details). This may include a referral to a support organisation.
- 5.2.3 Staff from the Council will be able to work with anyone that the applicant has requested to act on their behalf, subject to the applicant's written consent.

5.3 Providing Information

- 5.3.1 Both at the point of application, and if requested when the application is reassessed and prior to any offer of accommodation, applicants will be required to produce documentary evidence to support the information on their application form. This is to ensure applicants are eligible and qualify to join Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice. This can include but is not limited to:
 - proof of identity for all those included on the application.
 - proof of eligibility for joint applicants.
 - proof of current address.
 - details of any dependants and other household members, and parental responsibilities.
 - confirmation of income and savings.
 - confirmation of employment, where appropriate.
 - details of any court orders or legal restrictions relevant to the application
 - details and supporting evidence relating to previous accommodation, where appropriate.
 - details and supporting evidence, where required of their housing need and circumstances.
 - if related to behaviour, evidence demonstrating that behaviour has changed
- 5.3.2 Applicants are asked in each section of the application form to upload the relevant supporting information to enable the application to be assessed.

- 5.3.3 However, we reserve the right to request that the applicant(s) present their original documents in person, to verify the validity of any document, for example to check eligibility by verifying identity and immigration status documents. This includes providing their:
- Passport or any travel documents
 - E-Visa share code/evidence of their immigration status
 - Completed Habitual Residency Test document
- 5.3.4 In order for the application to be assessed the applicant must submit the application with all the required supporting evidence. In exceptional circumstances an alternative approach may be adopted, e.g. for care experienced young people the Council may liaise with the young person's Personal Advisor for supporting evidence.
- 5.3.5 All applicants will be required to give consent for third parties to be contacted to check information, and to obtain any further information relating to housing need and circumstances (if required). This may include the Council contacting the applicant(s) current or former landlord to obtain a tenancy reference, land registry checks, Experian checks and seeking expert medical opinion.
- 5.3.6 Where the application is submitted but not all the required supporting evidence is provided the application may be suspended pending receipt of the required information. If the applicant fails to provide the required information within 28 days of the application being submitted, the application may be closed.
- 5.3.7 Further details relating to providing information and verification are set out at Appendix 5 Verification Requirements.
- 5.3.8 Applicants and any household members may also be asked to provide their original ID again at the point at which a suitable offer is made to verify that they are the same person who made the housing application, that there has been no change in circumstances that needs to be taken into account, and that applicants are eligible for the property. If the applicants do not provide this when requested by the Council or Registered Provider landlord as part of its assessment, they may not be offered the property or able to sign the tenancy for their new home.

5.4 Declaration Required

- 5.4.1 When applicants apply to join Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice they will be asked to sign a declaration which includes:
- confirmation that the information and identification provided is complete, true and accurate.
 - confirmation that the Council will be informed immediately of any change in circumstances.
 - agreement for us to make enquiries in relation to applicants and household members to confirm that the information on their application form is correct, or to add to the information given, where this is necessary to complete an assessment of need or to consider suitability for housing.
 - agreement that information provided may be shared with partner organisations (such as Registered Providers) and other relevant organisations, in order to complete or verify the application, to prevent fraud or protect public funds. This includes where applicants have engaged an agency in relation to their housing application.
 - Information including around what happens if false information is given (see Section 5.11) and about data protection (see Section 1.9) and the Council's privacy statement.

5.5 Registration and Band Start Dates

- 5.5.1 As long as the applicants meet the eligibility and qualification criteria, they will be accepted on to Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice once the Housing application form is received with all the required information, supporting documentation and authorising signatures.

- 5.5.2 The date that this occurs is known as the 'registration date'.
- 5.5.3 The date that applicants are placed into a band is called the 'band start date'. The band start date is important as it is the date that applicants will be ranked within their band. The registration date will be used to decide between any tied positions.
- 5.5.4 Applicants' band start date will be calculated from the date a higher need banding was awarded (Bands 1-3); the date the applicant was placed into Reduced Band 4; or the date the online application was received (Band 5).
- 5.5.5 The registration and band start dates can be the same (usually when applicants first apply to join Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice) but the band start date may change if the applicants' circumstances change and they are placed into a different band. If applicants need to request a banding reassessment and are awarded additional priority, their band start date will be the date on which they were awarded the additional priority.

5.6 Councillors, Staff, and Relations

- 5.6.1 Everyone who applies to join our Housing Register will be treated equally and fairly. If applicants or household members are a Councillor, District Council staff member or a relation of either, we will not favour them over other applicants on our Housing Register.
- 5.6.2 Any relationships to Councillors, or staff, stated above must be declared by applicants, made clear on their housing application and a completed declaration of interest returned to us. These housing applications will be clearly marked on our housing system. Applicants, household members, or their relatives must have no direct input into any decision making regarding their rehousing, including awarding of a priority, or management of their housing application.
- 5.6.3 Should an offer of accommodation be made this must be approved and signed off by an appropriately authorised Housing Manager from the Council who has no interest in the case. Elected Councillors cannot be involved in assessing housing applications, awarding of a priority or the allocation of housing. Elected Councillors can seek or provide information on behalf of their constituents and be involved in developing and approving a future Allocations Policy.

5.7 Changes in Circumstances

- 5.7.1 It is applicants' responsibility to update their housing application and ensure they let us know immediately of any change in their circumstances (or those of any of the household members) which may affect applicants' position on Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice. If applicants fail to notify the Council of any changes in circumstances this could lead to an offer of accommodation being withdrawn or where appropriate the account being suspended or closed.
- 5.7.2 Where applicants move to a new settled address, unless this is temporary accommodation provided by the Council as part of its homelessness duties, the application will be closed, and the applicants will be required to complete a new application to reflect their current circumstances.
- 5.7.3 Most changes of circumstances can be completed online but evidence will still be required. Examples of changes of circumstances include (this list is not exhaustive):
- Someone joining or leaving the household.
 - Any confirmed pregnancy
 - Changes in name
 - A change in immigration status for any member of the household
 - Any change in assets or savings including if applicants or household members own a property which they have inherited or acquired, including any which are rented out.
 - Changes in income, including a change of employment.
 - Changes in behaviour (positive or negative) in relation to qualification criteria (housing related debt, serious breaches of tenancy, unacceptable behaviour, criminal convictions, false information or deliberate worsening of housing circumstances).

- Outstanding housing related debt or former arrears which have come to light.
- Changes in housing need.

5.7.4 Following a change of circumstances, the application will be re-assessed. This will not usually change the original registration date (unless applicants are found ineligible or are disqualified) but might change the effective date, if they are moved into a different band. Following re-assessment, applicants may:

- Gain greater priority and be placed into a higher band.
- Lose priority or have their priority reduced and be placed into a lower band.
- Remain in the same band.
- Be suspended or no longer qualify for Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice.
- Have suspension removed and qualify for allocation on Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice.

5.7.4 If applicants provide information which places them in a higher band their 'band start date' in the new band will be the date on which they provided the necessary evidence for this band to be awarded. If applicants provide information which places them in a lower band, their band start date will be reassessed.

5.7.6 Applicants will be notified of the decision in writing with a full explanation of the reasons for the outcome. Applicants will have the right to request a review of the decision, and the letter will explain these rights and how the request for a review can be made.

5.8 Renewing the Housing Application

5.8.1 Applicants will be responsible for updating their application online annually. This is to confirm that they still want to be registered and what their current circumstances are. Applicants may be required to supply additional information.

5.8.2 Applicants will need to do this on or around the anniversary date that their housing application was registered, whether or not we have reminded them to do so. If applicants do not do this, their application will be closed.

5.9 Registered Providers

5.9.1 We work in partnership with Registered Providers participating in Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice across the District. When applicants join Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice they may bid and be nominated for some of the properties advertised. Registered Providers' lettings or allocations policies may differ from our Allocations Policy so if they are nominated by the Council, the Registered Provider will make the final decision about who they offer their properties to.

5.9.2 A list of our Registered Providers can be found on the Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice website.

5.10 Fraud and Withholding Information

5.10.1 Section 171 of the Housing Act 1996 makes it an offence to withhold information that the Council reasonably requires to assess a housing application, or to provide false information that leads to gaining a tenancy. By dishonestly making a false representation, or by dishonestly failing to disclose information, applicants may be committing an offence of fraud. If applicants do this, their Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice application may be immediately cancelled, and they may be deemed to be a non-qualifying person. Applicants may also be prosecuted in the criminal courts.

5.10.2 If applicants have been given a Registered Provider property as a result of withholding information or providing false information on their application or in response to a request for further information or following a review of their application or at point of offer, the Registered Provider landlord can take possession of the property. Where there are less serious omissions, alternative penalties may be applied, such as disqualification or suspension from Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice.

5.10.3 Examples of giving false information or fraudulent behaviour include:

- Applicants or household members giving false information or omitting relevant information in their Housing Registration or homelessness application including providing a false professional or landlord reference; withholding or failing to declare information relating to past or current offences or convictions, property ownership and financial income.
- Applicants knowingly or recklessly misrepresenting their circumstances on their housing application or to obtain a previous tenancy.
- Having a conviction for housing-related fraud and the conviction is unspent.
- Illegally subletting a Council or Registered Providers property.
- Obtaining a tenancy by deception or by illegal means.

6. SECTION SIX - ASSESSING HOUSING NEED

This section explains:

- How we prioritise applicants, including the awarding of reasonable and additional preference as well as other local priorities
- How we assess housing need and additional considerations for special groups

6.1 Prioritisation of Applicants

6.1.1 The banding scheme has been adopted to prioritise the housing need of applicants who are eligible and qualify to join Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice.

6.1.2 There are five housing need bands:

6.1.3 Band One: Very urgent housing need

- Band Two: Urgent housing need
- Band Three: Significant housing need
- Band Four: Reduced band
- Band Five: General housing needs

6.1.4 Further details of the banding scheme are contained in Section 7.

6.2 Reasonable Preference

6.2.1 The law, as it applies to local housing authorities, requires that Reasonable Preference for housing must be given to those in the categories set out in Section 166A (3) (a) to (e) of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended). The statutory Reasonable Preference categories cover:

- (a) People who are homeless or threatened with homelessness within the meaning of Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (including those who are found to be intentionally homeless and those not in priority need).
- (b) People who are owed a duty by the housing authority under relevant housing and homelessness legislation
- (c) People occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing.

- (d) People needing to move on medical or welfare grounds, including grounds relating to disability
- (e) People who need to move to a particular locality in the district, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or others)

6.3 Additional Preference

- 6.3.1 Section 166A (3) enables the Council to give additional preference to applicants who fall within the statutory reasonable preference categories and have urgent housing needs, and they must do so for some members of the Armed and Reserve Forces who fall within those categories (see Section on Armed Forces).
- 6.3.2 Examples of other people with urgent housing needs to whom additional preference may be given include:
 - Those who need to move urgently because of a life-threatening illness or sudden disability
 - Families in severe overcrowding which poses a serious health hazard
 - Those who are homeless and require urgent re-housing as a result of violence or threats of violence, including intimidated witnesses
- 6.3.3 The Council has had regard to the Government's Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local authorities Annex 1 to frame its medical and welfare reasonable preference categories.

6.4 Local Priorities

- 6.4.1 The Council's local priorities can be included providing:
 - That they do not dominate the Scheme; and
 - Overall, the Scheme operates to give reasonable preference to those in the statutory reasonable preference categories over those who are not.
- 6.4.2 We have included in our priority mechanisms to award preference to:
 - People under occupying accommodation in the District who may be subject to under occupation rules so they can find more affordable accommodation.
 - Freeing up accommodation in short supply in the District so it can be used for people in greater need.
- 6.4.3 This includes:
 - Freeing up larger properties and significantly adapted properties, in the District.
 - Enabling move on from supported accommodation.
 - Enabling care leavers to move on from local authority care.
- 6.4.4 People with general housing needs are included in Band 5, below additional preference and reasonable preference groups.
- 6.4.5 Specific details of how reasonable preference, additional preference and priorities are determined and applied are detailed in Section 7: The Banding Structure.
- 6.4.6 In addition to the above, particular groups of people may be prioritised for an allocation, for example due to the type of property and eligible household type, age restrictions (e.g. for independent living schemes), Local Letting Plans in place, requirements in Registered Providers' allocations policies or where preference given to households with a local connection to a specific area as a result of a Section 106 agreement.

6.5 Determining Priority between Applicants

6.5.1 Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice determines priority between applicants (who are eligible and meet the qualification criteria, requirements of the scheme and criteria in the property advertisement) according to their banding and:

- The length of time the applicant has been waiting within their current band and
- Any community contribution made by the household (including where awarded to members of the armed forces)

6.6 Special Consideration for Particular Groups

6.6.1 We have outlined below particular groups where specific consideration was needed when framing the Allocation Policy.

6.7 Armed Forces Community

6.7.1 The Council is committed to upholding the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant, ensuring that serving and former members of the Armed Forces, and their families, do not face disadvantage in accessing social housing. In some cases, special consideration will be given, particularly where there is an urgent housing need due to injury, bereavement, or transition from service life.

6.7.2 In accordance with the regulations made under Section 160ZA (8)(b) of the 1996 Act, the Council must not apply a local connection test to the following applicants:

- Current or former members of the Regular Armed Forces
- Bereaved spouses or civil partners of service members whose death was attributable to service who have recently ceased or will cease to be entitled to live in Ministry of Defence accommodation following their death of their spouse or civil partner
- Members or former members of the Reserve Forces suffering from a service-related injury, illness, or disability

6.7.3 We have also provided in the scheme for exceptional circumstances where other members of the armed forces community may also be exempt (see Section 4.7).

6.7.4 Reasonable and additional preference will be awarded to the Armed Forces Community

6.7.5 Additional preference will be awarded to the following categories of people from the armed forces community who fall within one or more of the reasonable preference categories and have urgent housing needs:

- Former members of the Regular Armed Forces
- Serving members of the Regular Armed Forces who are suffering from a service- related injury, illness or disability attributable to their service.
- Serving or former members of the Reserve Armed Forces who are suffering from a service-related injury, illness or disability attributable to their service.
- Bereaved spouses or civil partners of service members whose death was attributable to service who have recently ceased or will cease to be entitled to live in Ministry of Defence accommodation following their death of their spouse or civil partner

6.7.6 Where an applicant or a household member meets the above criteria for additional preference, they will qualify for an additional six months in waiting time at the point that need has been assessed or date of registration (if need hasn't changed over time), please see Community Contribution Section 6.20.

6.7.7 Certain members of the armed forces community who have additional preference, may meet the criteria to qualify for a Band 1 award (see Band 1 award for Armed Forces in Section 7).

- 6.7.8 Members of the armed forces who are required to vacate Ministry of Defence accommodation and have been served with a cessation to occupy accommodation may meet the criteria to qualify for a Band 2 award.
- 6.7.9 The Council will assess housing need based on:
- The applicant's current housing circumstances
 - The impact of service-related injury, illness, or bereavement
 - The urgency of the need to move (e.g. discharge from service accommodation, homelessness risk)
 - The availability of suitable accommodation and support
- 6.7.10 Verification evidence that may be required is contained in Appendix 5 Verification Requirements.
- 6.7.11 To prevent homelessness and support a smooth transition to civilian housing the Council will work proactively with The Ministry of Defence (under the Duty to Refer), Local Veterans' Services including charities such as the Royal British Legion and SSAFA.

6.8 Domestic Abuse and Other People at Risk

- 6.8.1 The Council is committed to ensuring that victims of domestic abuse can access safe, secure, and appropriate housing. In line with Section 166A(3) of the Housing Act 1996 and the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, applicants fleeing domestic abuse will be awarded reasonable preference within the housing allocation scheme.
- 6.8.2 Applicants who are or have been a victim of domestic abuse carried out by another person and who need to move for reasons connected with that abuse, including from accommodation initially occupied on a temporary basis will not be disqualified from Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice due to a lack of local connection. This ensures that individuals can relocate to a safer area without being penalised for not having previously lived there.
- 6.8.3 As defined in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, domestic abuse includes any incident or pattern of incidents of:
- Physical or sexual abuse
 - Violent or threatening behaviour
 - Controlling or coercive behaviour
 - Economic abuse
 - Psychological, emotional, or other abuse
- 6.8.4 This definition applies regardless of gender, age, or relationship status, and includes abuse by partners, ex-partners, or family members.
- 6.8.5 Applications from victims of domestic abuse, or other people at risk of violence, harassment, abuse or neglect will be assessed with urgency, sensitivity, and a trauma-informed approach. The Council will consider whether the need to move is connected to the domestic abuse, violence, abuse or neglect and work with the victim/survivor to assess:
- The immediacy and severity of risk to the applicants or household members.
 - Whether the applicants are unable to remain safely in their current accommodation.
 - Whether the applicants are currently in refuge or temporary accommodation due to abuse.
 - The impact of the domestic abuse, harassment, violence, abuse or neglect on the applicant's physical or mental health and wellbeing.
 - Any legal restrictions in place (e.g. orders).

- 6.8.6 Applicants and their household members fleeing domestic abuse, harassment, violence, abuse may be awarded priority as a result of
- Their homeless status, relevant homelessness-related bands and requiring urgent rehousing as a result of the domestic abuse, harassment, violence, abuse
 - Recovering from the effects of violence or threats of violence, or physical, emotional or sexual abuse and being accommodated in a refuge or other temporary accommodation,
 - Their medical and welfare needs.
- 6.8.7 Where housing-related debts have arisen as a consequence of domestic abuse, harassment, violence or abuse, the Council may exercise discretion when applying qualification criteria.
- 6.8.8 Safety needs are considered when undertaking risk and safety planning with the victim, which may include the Council removing bids that an applicant has placed if they are not suitable e.g. where a victim of domestic abuse selects a property near to the perpetrator.
- 6.8.9 All applications from victims of domestic abuse, harassment, violence or abuse or neglect will be handled with the utmost confidentiality. The Council will:
- Protect personal information and ensure secure communication.
 - Avoid disclosing location or contact details without consent.
 - Consider location-based risks when allocating housing and making property offers.
 - Work with relevant agencies to ensure the applicant's safety and support needs are met.
 - Consider how to safeguard the victims of domestic abuse, harassment, violence or abuse or neglect.
- 6.8.10 Warwickshire Safeguarding policies and procedures will be followed where there are concerns about someone's wellbeing or in relation to abuse or neglect.

6.9 Care Leavers

- 6.9.1 The Council gives special consideration to Care Leavers within this Allocation Policy .
- 6.9.2 The Council has applied Regulation 2 of The Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Victims of Domestic Abuse and Care Leavers) (England) Regulations 2025. Care leavers will not be disqualified from joining the Housing Register solely because they do not have a local connection to Stratford-on-Avon District.
- 6.9.3 For the purposes of this Policy, a Care Leaver includes:
- a) An Eligible Child as defined in paragraph 19B of Schedule 2 to the Children Act 1989. An Eligible Child is a child who:
 - is currently being looked after by a local authority
 - is 16 or 17; and
 - has been looked after by a local authority in England or Wales for a period of 13 weeks, or periods amounting in total to 13 weeks, which began after reaching the age of 14, and ended after reaching the age of 16.
 - (b) A Relevant Child as defined by Section 23A(2) of the Children Act 1989. A Relevant Child is a child who is:
 - no longer a looked-after-child;
 - is aged 16 or 17; and
 - was, before ceasing to be looked after, an Eligible Child

- c) A Former Relevant Child is a child as set out by Section 23C(1) of the Children Act 1989. A Former Relevant Child is a person who:

- is aged 18 to 24; and
- was previously a Relevant Child or an Eligible Child.

6.9.4 For the purposes of this Policy, “Care Leaver” has the meaning given by the Children Act 1989 and includes Eligible Children, Relevant Children and Former Relevant Children.

6.9.5 The Council is committed to ensuring that young people leaving care do so in a planned way and that homelessness is prevented wherever possible. The Council will work with Warwickshire County Council, or any other relevant authority with responsibility for the Children’s Social Care, to support this transition. All appropriate housing options will be considered, in addition to social housing allocations. The Council will follow the Joint Housing Protocol for 16 and 17 years olds agreed between Warwickshire County Council’s Children Services and the five District and Borough Council’s in Warwickshire.

6.9.6 The Council will consider any request from Children Services for a welfare need award for care leavers moving on from local authority care.

We have outlined below more detailed information about the assessment of banding for different awards.

6.10 Assessment of Banding – Homelessness

6.10.1 Applicants stating that they are homeless on their Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice application or presenting as homeless within the meaning of Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act will be subject to an assessment to determine the following and if applicable placed in the relevant band:

- Whether the applicant has been served a valid Section 8 notice, has been provided with advice or assistance, and are at risk of homelessness but not yet threatened with homelessness within 56 days.
- Whether it is likely that their homelessness can be prevented.
- Whether the applicant has made a homelessness application to the Council or has withdrawn their application
- Whether homeless prevention measures can keep the applicant in their current accommodation
- Whether the applicant is eligible and is likely to become homeless within 56 days
- Whether the applicant is threatened with homelessness and owed a Prevention Duty by Stratford-on-Avon District Council
- Whether the applicant is already homeless and is owed a Relief Duty by Stratford-on-Avon District Council
- Whether the applicant has a priority need for accommodation
- Whether the applicant is likely to be considered homeless through no fault of their own or homeless due to their own actions or omissions.
- Whether the applicant has a local connection under homelessness legislation
- Where an applicant is (or would be) owed a Relief or Prevention Duty

- 6.10.2 The banding/ application may also be reviewed where:
- New information is received which impacts on the above assessment
 - A new decision is made regarding a Relief or Prevention Duty
 - The Council issues a Section 184 homeless decision notification letter
 - The Main Housing Duty is owed
 - The applicant does not comply with the bidding requirements
 - The applicant turns down a suitable offer (including a private sector offer)
 - A homeless accommodation duty is discharged
 - Their homelessness has ended/they have moved address.
- 6.10.3 For Band 1 Main Housing Duty cases, this banding only applies only while the Council owes the applicant the Main Housing Duty under Section 193(2) of the Housing Act 1996.
- 6.10.4 For Band 2 Prevention and Relief Duty cases, this banding will only apply while the applicant is owed a Prevention Duty under Section 195(2) or Relief Duty under section 189B of the Housing Act 1996 and the Council consider they are homeless through no fault of their own.
- 6.10.5 For Band 3 Relief and Prevention Duty cases, this banding will apply where the applicant is owed either a Prevention Duty Section 195(2) or Relief Duty under Section 189B of the Housing Act 1996 and the Council consider that they are homeless as a result of their actions (or omissions).
- 6.10.6 Please note that where an applicant is owed the Main Housing Duty or Relief Duty the homelessness duty may be ended following one suitable offer of accommodation.
- 6.10.7 Where applicants are owed the Main Housing Duty (Band 1) or the Relief Duty (Band 2) they will be subject additional requirements under the Allocation Policy which means that they can be placed into Band 4 Reduced Band if they refuse one suitable offer of accommodation (rather than 2 suitable offers), see bidding requirements, offers and discharge of duty.
- 6.10.8 When the Main Housing Duty, Prevention Duty or Relief Duty ends, the applicant's Housing Register application will be reassessed. This includes where the duty ends due to acceptance of a suitable offer of accommodation, refusal of a suitable offer of accommodation, a decision that the applicant is intentionally homeless from temporary accommodation, or Section 184 homeless decision (for example that they are intentionally homeless or not in priority need) or any other decision or event that brings the duty to an end.
- 6.10.9 As part of the reassessment, the Council will review whether the applicant continues to satisfy the qualification criteria for joining the Housing Register, including any local connection requirements. Where an exemption from the local connection requirements applied solely because the applicant was owed a homelessness duty, that exemption may no longer apply once the duty has ended.
- 6.10.10 Following reassessment, the applicant's banding may be increased, reduced, or remain unchanged depending on their circumstances and housing need. Band 4 Reduced Band may be applied where the applicant has refused suitable offers of accommodation or failed to bid appropriately in accordance with this policy.
- 6.10.11 Applicants placed in Band 4 Reduced Band due to refusal of suitable offers or failure to bid will have their application reviewed after six months. If the homelessness duty has been discharged, the applicant may not return to their original housing need band.
- 6.10.12 Where an applicant's circumstances change, they will be reassessed, and banding will be awarded accordingly.

6.11 Assessment of Banding - Overcrowding

- 6.11.1 Overcrowding assessments will include all household occupants and the overall size of the property in determining the band, regardless of whether the whole household wish to be rehoused together or not.
- Applicants may be awarded a higher banding if their current accommodation is statutorily overcrowded, as defined under Sections 324–326 of the Housing Act 1985 (The Room Standard (Section 325), and/or The Space Standard (Section 326).
 - Where a property is not statutorily overcrowded the Council will assess whether there is overcrowding by using the recommended Government Bedroom Standard.
- 6.11.2 A room is considered suitable for sleeping if it is typically used as a bedroom or living room.
- 6.11.3 Only members of the permanent household will be included in the bedroom need assessment. Children for whom the applicant does not have primary parental responsibility or who it is not considered reasonable to include in the household will not be counted, except in exceptional cases.
- 6.11.4 If overcrowding results from someone moving into the household, the Council will consider the reasons for their move. Where overcrowding could be resolved by a household member forming a separate household, priority may be awarded to that individual, even if they are not the current tenant.
- 6.11.5 When deciding whether a household is overcrowded, the Council will assess the household against the Government's Bedroom Standard.
- 6.11.6 Please note that this is different to the bedroom eligibility when allocating accommodation or assessing under-occupation.
- 6.11.7 The Government's Bedroom Standard, allows a separate bedroom each for:
- any adult couple
 - any remaining adult aged 21 years or over, not in a couple
 - two people of the same sex aged 0-20 years
 - two children of opposite sex under 10 years
 - Any other child who cannot be paired with another as above
- 6.11.8 Please note that there may be exemptions to the above, for example where there is a foster child or the Council awards an additional bedroom on grounds of disability. Please see section 2.9-2.13.

6.12 Assessment of Banding - Insanitary, Unsafe or Unsatisfactory Housing Conditions (not overcrowding)

- 6.12.1 A Band 1 award will be considered where a private sector property contains Category 1 Hazards (not for overcrowding) under Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) or a prohibition, or demolition or clearance orders issued by the Council for disrepair and the Council is satisfied that because of the disrepair continuing to occupy the accommodation will pose a high risk of harm to the household's health and there is no prospect of the issues being remedied by the landlord or property owner within a reasonable timeframe defined by the Council.
- 6.12.2 The Council will assess whether applicants meet the criteria for a Band 1 award as detailed above and in the Banding Section.
- 6.12.3 Properties will be required to be inspected by the Private Sector Housing Team so they can carry out a Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) inspection to assess any hazards, the level of harm and decide if any action should be taken. Applicants must allow the Private Sector Team from the Council and the landlord or property owner access to improve the disrepair and must engage with and follow any advice given by the Council to resolve the disrepair. Information and advice from the Private Sector Housing Team will inform banding decisions for this award.

- 6.12.4 Where applicants do not qualify for Band 1 priority for disrepair, any reasonable preference for this category will be considered when assessing for medical, welfare or hardship need.

6.13 Assessment of Banding – Medical Need

- 6.13.1 We recognise that housing difficulties can cause significant stress and anxiety and may impact on an individual's mental health. Whilst we are committed to providing support and signposting to appropriate services, the presence of stress or anxiety alone does not increase priority under this policy. Priority is awarded based on assessed housing need in accordance with the Housing Act 1996 and this Allocation Policy. Where applicants have a clinically evidenced medical condition that is significantly worsened by their current housing circumstances, this will be considered under the medical priority criteria.
- 6.13.2 The medical and welfare reasonable preference category includes people who need to move because of their disability or access needs, and this includes people with a learning difficulty as well as those with a physical or mental disability.

See below for Medical Needs Awards Overview

- 6.13.3 Priority on health or disability grounds is awarded only after a formal assessment of the supporting evidence provided confirms that a member of the household has an enduring, limiting illness or a permanent and substantial disability, and that their current housing is very urgently, urgently, or significantly impacting their health or quality of life.
- 6.13.4 Medical priority is not based solely on the presence or severity of a medical condition or disability. Instead, it is determined by the extent to which the applicant's current housing situation exacerbates their condition or limits their ability to manage it.

See below for Assessment Criteria:

- 6.13.5 The Council will consider:
- Whether the current accommodation meets the applicant's medical needs.
 - The extent to which the housing is contributing to or worsening the condition.
 - Whether a move would significantly improve the applicant's health or quality of life.
 - Assessments of impacts relating to the physical circumstances of the property and/or its location.
 - Whether the property can be reasonably adapted to meet the applicant's needs.
 - Whether continued management is possible with support.
 - Supporting evidence from health and social care.
- 6.13.6 Applicants will be asked to complete medical self-assessment questions and provide relevant supporting evidence from qualified health and social care professionals having direct knowledge of the person and knowledge of the area of medical need. All medical evidence will be considered but supporting evidence from a specialist and occupational therapist may better evidence severe need for Band 1 (very urgent) or Band 2 (urgent need) awards. For Band 3 awards applicants may provide letters of support from a GP.
- 6.13.7 Only current medical needs will be considered. While some conditions may deteriorate over time, priority will be based on present circumstances, not anticipated future needs.

See below for Medical Priority Levels:

6.13.8 The Council may award one of the following levels of medical priority:

- Very Urgent Medical Need – A very urgent and exceptional requirement to move.
- Urgent Medical Need – A high medical need requiring relocation.
- Significant Medical Need – A notable impact on health that warrants a move.
- No Medical Priority – Where the threshold for medical need is not met.

Very Urgent Medical Need: Band 1

6.13.9 This relates to circumstances where there are very urgent exceptional reasons for a move due to the medical needs of the applicant or member of the household, which pose an immediate risk of harm with a serious, adverse and long-lasting impact on their health or that of others in the household.

6.13.10 This includes applicants or household members with a very urgent medical need to move as a result of terminal conditions, conditions which are life threatening, as a result of being housebound, or a planned discharge from hospital where their permanent accommodation is unsuitable for their medical needs (see Band 1 Section).

6.13.11 Urgent Medical Need Band 2

This level of priority may be awarded where:

- The current accommodation is completely unsuitable and cannot be adapted.
- The applicant is unable to manage their condition in the current home.
- There is an imminent risk of serious injury or health deterioration.
- A move is expected to severely improve the applicant's health or daily living.

6.13.12 Significant Medical Need Band 3

This may be awarded where:

- The current accommodation is unsuitable and cannot be made suitable.
- The applicant is experiencing substantial difficulties, though still managing to some extent.
- A move is likely to alleviate or improve the condition.

6.13.13 The Council will consider:

- How long the applicant has managed in their current home.
- Whether continued management is possible with support.
- Professional input from health or social care providers.

6.13.14 For all medical decisions, the final decision rests with the Council's officers, based on all available evidence.

6.13.15 Types of medical need are wide ranging. It can include the need for adapted housing and/or extra facilities, bedroom or bathroom need for improved heating (on medical grounds), need for sheltered housing (on medical grounds) or need for ground floor accommodation (on medical grounds). Where someone has a severe medical need or significant medical need that is related to lacking an additional bedroom, please also refer to the Section 2 on additional bedrooms for medical, health and social care needs.

6.14 Assessment of Banding – Welfare or Hardship Need

- 6.14.1 Priority to move on welfare or hardship grounds will only be awarded after an assessment confirms that a change of accommodation could reasonably be expected to alleviate the problem.

6.14.2 Very urgent Welfare or Hardship Need (Band 1)

This relates to circumstances where there are very urgent exceptional reasons for a move due to the welfare needs of the applicant or member of the household with a serious, adverse and long-lasting impact on their welfare or that of others in the household. This includes:

- Young people ready to move on from local authority care (care leavers) where they are the responsibility of Warwickshire County Council
 - Other examples of a very urgent welfare need include where there is an immediate and high risk of harm (threat to life) in existing accommodation. In the interests of fairness to all applicants these circumstances are kept to a minimum and apply only where very urgent rehousing through Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice is assessed as the most suitable option by the Council and recommended and supported by senior officers within the Police or a formally established multi agency meeting in the last 3 months.
- 6.14.3 This may include applicants who need to move immediately due to domestic abuse, serious violence, exploitation, racial harassment or hate crime. It may also apply to applicants or members of their household who are a witness of crime or victims of crime giving evidence at court where Police have assessed there is a high risk. There must be a current assessed high risk of harm to the safety of the applicant or a member of their household.
- 6.14.4 Supporting evidence may include police evidence that an urgent move is required to protect the life of an applicant or a member of the household and it is not safe for them to remain in their home.
- 6.14.5 For domestic abuse cases it may include cases where they are assessed as a current high risk of harm, where cases have been to MARAC in the last 3 months with a recommendation of rehousing.
- 6.14.6 This band may be considered where children are part of the application, and the current housing situation is a contributory factor to the risk to a child/children. This will occur where the child or children are subject to a Child Protection Plan and the Child Protection Conference recommends immediate rehousing (through Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice) as being very urgent for the welfare of the child (and the risk of serious harm would reduce with suitable housing) and the Council agree with this recommendation.
- 6.14.7 Cases in this welfare need band where the award is on the basis of an immediate and high risk of harm will be referred to the homelessness team to consider whether other accommodation is more suitable to immediately reduce the risk of harm, (e.g. through safe refuge or dispersed accommodation or temporary accommodation) and to consider a safety plan or referrals to other agencies. Band 1 welfare need awards relate to people who are at current high risk of harm now rather than recovering from a risk of harm following being placed in other accommodation. Members of homelessness team (approved by a Housing Manager from the Council) will retain discretion as to whether award priority for cases in this band.

6.14.8 Urgent Welfare or Hardship Need (Band 2)

This will be awarded where:

- There is an urgent need to move due to a severe impact on the household's wellbeing.
- There may be an imminent risk of homelessness.
- The welfare need is causing daily issues, and the applicant is not managing with the consequences.
- The applicant may where appropriate be expected to be actively addressing the welfare need and engaging with available support services.

6.14.9 Examples of urgent welfare grounds are included in Band 2 Section. They include people recovering from violence, threats of violence and abuse or sexual abuse, those moving on from supported accommodation (See Section 6.17), certain care leavers ready to move on from local authority care (see Section 6.16), foster carers, adopters and special guardians needing a larger home to accommodate a looked after child (see Section 2.13), or applicants who may be moving on from a drug or alcohol rehabilitation programme.

6.14.10 Significant Welfare or Hardship Need (Band 3)

This will be awarded where:

- There is a clear need to move, but it is not urgent or essential.
- The situation is significantly affecting wellbeing, but the applicant is managing to some extent.
- Applicants may be signposted to specialist support services.

6.14.11 If the welfare need arises from anti-social behaviour (ASB), all other options must have been pursued before priority is awarded. The Council is committed to resolving ASB rather than simply relocating victims. Applicants reporting ASB are expected to work with their landlord, the Stratford-on-Avon Community Safety Team and Warwickshire Police (where relevant).

6.14.12 In all cases circumstances will be verified, and multi-agency information sharing may be required. The Council will determine whether a housing need exists and the appropriate level of priority.

6.14.13 Assessing Particular Types of Welfare or Hardship Needs

6.14.14 Welfare needs can include the need to give or receive care. Where someone has a severe or significant welfare need related to the need for care or support, please also refer to the Section 2 on additional bedrooms for medical, health and social care needs. The level of need awarded for this category will depend on how severely someone's medical or welfare needs are affected by the lack of the bedroom.

6.14.15 When assessing the welfare need for an additional bedroom for foster carers, those approved to adopt, special guardians and holders of a residence order, or family and friend carers who have taken on the care of a child where parents are unable to provide care please see Section 2.13.

6.14.16 For assessment of welfare needs for someone with care needs needing to move to the district please see Section 6.15. For assessment in relation to welfare needs arising from care leavers needing to move on from care please see Section 6.16. For assessment of welfare needs arising from leaving supported accommodation see Section 6.17. Where applicants are needing to move on from a drug or alcohol recovery programme (e.g. drug or alcohol rehabilitation programme) where alternative accommodation is not available, the Council will assess supporting evidence from the drug and alcohol support services. Other circumstances for welfare needs may include young adults with learning difficulties not expected to find their own accommodation, who wish to move on and live independently in the community or where their ability for fend for self is restricted for other reasons.

6.14.17 Hardship needs may relate to the needs to take up particular employment, education or training opportunity that is not in a commutable distance (see Band 3). This also applies to social housing tenants who have a reasonable preference under Section 166(3). This relates to a need to move to the local authority's district to avoid hardship where they need to move because the tenant works in the district or need to move to take up an offer of work. In considering registering applications the Council's (or its agent) will take into account the Right to Move and Social Housing and Statutory Guidance March 2015 (or any relevant successor document).

6.14.18 When assessing whether an applicant is suffering financial hardship, wherever possible the actual rather than estimated income and expenditure figures for the household should be assessed to ensure the overall assessment is accurate.

6.15 Care Needs and Moving to the District

- 6.15.1 In order to consider severe or significant welfare needs of an applicant who is applying to move to the district to receive care, from another person consideration will be given to the relationship they have with the person who is providing the care and how long the person providing the care has been resident in the district.
- 6.15.2 The family member provides unpaid care due to the applicant's frailty, illness, or disability. The Council will consider:
- The extent and frequency of care required
 - The distance between the applicant and the family member
 - The availability of care in the applicant's current location.
- 6.15.3 Evidence may be required to verify the relationship, the care needs and the family members residency.

6.16 Assessment of Banding – Care Leavers – Move on

- 6.16.1 This priority status may be awarded to care leavers in local authority care assessed as ready to move on where the following criteria have been met:
- The care-leaver is ready to move to independent settled housing and is genuinely prepared for a move to independent living; and
 - The care-leaver possesses the life skills to manage a tenancy including managing a rent account; and
 - An ongoing support package has been assessed and where required, is in place; and
 - The care leaver is the responsibility of Warwickshire County Council (Band 1 Welfare Need) or the responsibility of another authority where the care leaver has a local connection or an evidenced need to access support in this district (Band 2 Welfare Need); and
 - A pathway plan must have been completed, and evidence of the above must be provided by Warwickshire County Council (or another authority) and approved by the Council in order for this to be awarded.
- 6.16.2 Applicants are awarded the Band 1 priority in accordance with the 16- and 17-year old Joint Protocol between the Local Authority and Warwickshire Children's Services Department.
- 6.16.3 Children accommodated out of area by Children's Services or Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children under the responsibility of Warwickshire County Council will be eligible for this band and will be granted a local connection with the District, where they do not have a specific connection to one Local Authority.

6.17 Assessment of Banding – Move-on from Supported Accommodation

- 6.17.1 This status is awarded where an agreement between the Council and the individual Supported Housing provider, is in place for applicants to move on from the supported accommodation in:
- the Stratford-on-Avon District area; or
 - other approved supported housing accommodation where applicants have moved out of the district because of a lack of availability of supported housing in the district.
- 6.17.2 This status will only be awarded to applicants in supported accommodation for move on where the following criteria have been met:
- The applicant is ready to move to independent settled social housing on the recommendation of the support provider;
 - An ongoing support package has been assessed and where required, is in place;

- The applicant has been housed in this accommodation with a local connection to Stratford-on-Avon District. Where there was no local connection, cases will only be accepted in exceptional circumstances with the agreement of a Housing Manager from the Council.

- 6.17.3 Applicants are expected to make full use of their banding by placing bids on all suitable properties to enable them to move on to independent accommodation. Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice officers may use their discretion to place bids on behalf of the applicant where bids are not being placed or are being inappropriately placed to facilitate move-on through supported accommodation. This will be done in consultation with the applicant and (if relevant) their support worker.
- 6.17.4 For applicants meeting this criteria, the band start date will be the date the applicant moved into the supported accommodation.

6.18 Assessment of Banding – Under Occupation

- 6.18.1 When assessing if someone is under occupying accommodation in the District, evidence may be required from the landlord to confirm the size of their current property and the current occupants.
- 6.18.2 Further information about assessing bedroom need to determine if someone is under occupying is contained in Section 2.

6.19 Assessment of Banding – Adapted Properties

- 6.19.1 Significantly adapted properties are properties within the District with substantial adaptations e.g. through-floor lifts, wet rooms or stair lifts. The applicant is required to give up vacant possession of the property to qualify for this banding. This banding does not apply where rehousing has been initiated by the Registered Provider for example as a result of possession action.
- 6.19.2 Examples of significantly adapted properties include wheelchair adapted properties.

6.20 Additional Preference – Community Contribution

- 6.20.1 To support the development of stable and sustainable communities, Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice offers additional preference to applicants who actively contribute to the community through essential work, volunteering or full-time caring responsibilities. This approach recognises the value of civic participation and encourages aspiration and engagement in communities and the value of key workers in the District.
- 6.20.2 The following criteria apply to either the applicant or joint applicant. It is the responsibility of the applicant to provide evidence to support their claim for additional preference.
- 6.20.3 Where an applicant meets any one of the eligible criteria listed below, an additional six months of waiting time will be awarded. Households may only receive one six-month award, regardless of how many categories they qualify for. All claims of community contribution may be verified at registration, during review, and again at the offer stage.
- 6.20.4 Eligible Categories

- a) Key Workers (Employment) within the District

To qualify as a key worker, applicants must:

- Be working a minimum of 16 hours per week
- Employment must be permanent and not casual
- Must have been in employment for six out of the last nine months

Key worker roles are defined as frontline roles essential to society and/or the local functioning of Stratford-on-Avon District and which cannot be performed remotely (e.g. education, health/medical, social care, utilities, food supply, tourism, hospitality, agriculture). Roles that are managerial, back-office or those that receive a salary of £35,000 or more do not qualify.

- b) Applicants Volunteering
 - Must be volunteering for a minimum of 20 hours per month
 - Volunteering must be continuous for at least six months
 - Must be volunteering for a not-for-profit organisation registered with the Charity Commission or otherwise recognised by the Council
- c) Applicants Who Are Full-Time Carers
 - Must be providing full-time care for a person due to disability or frailty
 - Must have been caring for a minimum of six months prior to applying
 - Must be in receipt of Carer's Allowance

6.20.5 Armed Forces

In addition, where applicants or members of their household satisfy the requirements for additional preference to be awarded to Armed Forces (see Section 6.7) we will award applicants an additional six months in waiting time at the point that need has been assessed or the date of registration (if the need hasn't changed over time). If applicants meet the criteria for additional preference for Armed Forces and also meet the community contribution criteria for one or more of the reasons, then they will be awarded an additional six months (up to a total of 12 months).

7. SECTION SEVEN – OUR BANDING STRUCTURE

7.1 Our Banding Structure

- 7.1.1 Stratford on Avon Home Choice operates a needs-based banding system as described below. Bands are arranged to reflect housing need, with the highest band indicating the greatest need for housing. The scheme has five bands, summarised below with a brief explanation of each band.
- 7.1.2 Please see Section 6 on assessing housing need for information about how the areas of need are assessed to determine how we place applicants in each band. Appendix 5 provides information on verification requirements.
- 7.1.3 The bands within the policy reflect the reasonable and additional preference set out within the 1996 Housing Act and the content of this policy along with local priorities.
- 7.1.4 Applicants may also receive additional preference through Community Contribution and Armed Forces provisions, which affect priority within a band rather than the band awarded.
- 7.1.5 Once registered the applicant can only be in one band and the highest banding possible will always be applied according to the policy.

7.2 Time Limited Bands

- 7.2.1 All bands are awarded on a time limited basis, i.e:
 - Band One: Those with a very urgent housing need (3 months)
 - Band Two: Those with an urgent housing need (6 months)
 - Band Three: Those with significant housing need (6 months)
 - Band Four: Reduced band (6 months)
 - Band Five: Those with general housing needs (12 months)

- 7.2.2 At the end of the time limit, if an applicant has not been successfully housed, the Council will reassess the application and may contact the applicant to confirm their circumstances and/or bidding pattern.
- 7.2.3 Where applicants do not meet the bidding requirements or turn down offer(s) of suitable accommodation they may be demoted to Band 4 Reduced Band. At the end of the time limit in Band 4 Reduced Band, the applicants' circumstances will be reviewed and where applicants have met the bidding requirements they may be placed in a higher band. Where applicants have not placed bids on any suitable properties advertised on Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice within the last 12 consecutive months their application will be closed.

7.3 The Bandings Explained – Overview

- 7.3.1 The banding structure is designed to determine the different levels of housing need of applicants and to explain how these will be prioritised.

7.4 Band One: People with very urgent housing need (review every 3 months)

- 7.4.1 This is where a household has been assessed as needing to:
- move due to very urgent exceptional circumstances that cannot be changed and remaining where they are poses an immediate high risk of harm that will have a serious, adverse and long-lasting impact on their health and welfare or that of others in the household or
 - recognise very exceptional sacrifices of members of the armed forces community with very urgent needs
 - or release properties in short supply to resolve other households very urgent needs to move
- 7.4.2 This band is time limited and will be actively managed and reviewed every 3 months. Households in Band 1 may also be considered for a direct match due to the exceptional time critical nature of their circumstances or due to the urgency of releasing the properties in short supply to resolve other households' urgent housing need.

7.5 Band Two: People with an urgent housing need (review every 6 months)

- 7.5.1 There is an urgent need to move, their current circumstances cannot be changed, and it is having a severe impact on the household wellbeing, for example a medical or welfare need where there is an imminent risk of homelessness causing daily issues, and the applicant is not managing with the consequences.
- 7.5.2 This band is time limited and will be actively managed and reviewed.

7.6 Band Three: Significant housing need (review every 6 months)

- 7.6.1 This is where the household has been assessed as having a significant need to move, their current circumstances cannot be changed and remaining where they are is manageable but will still have an adverse and long-lasting impact on their health and welfare or that of others in the household.
- 7.6.2 This band is time limited and will be actively managed and reviewed.

7.7 Band Four: Reduced Band (review every 6 months)

- 7.7.1 7.7.1 This is where households in Bands 1 – 3 have not met the bidding requirements or have refused offer(s) of suitable housing.
- This band is time limited and will be actively managed and reviewed.

7.8 Band 5: General Housing Needs (12 months)

- 7.8.1 This is where the household has been assessed as having a need to move, their current circumstances cannot be changed and remaining where they are is manageable but will still have an impact on their health and welfare or that of others in the household.

- 7.8.2 This applies to all applicants who live, work or have a local connection as defined by Section 199 Housing Act 1996, to the District and do not meet any of the reasonable preference criteria, and have low housing need.
- 7.8.3 This band is time limited and will be actively managed and reviewed.
- 7.8.4 Applications in Band 5 will be closed after one year where no suitable bids have been placed on advertised properties.

Band One: Very Urgent Housing Need

Not intentionally homeless with main housing duty

Applicants assessed as homeless and owed the main housing duty by the Council under Section 193(2), to ensure accommodation is available for occupation.

UK Armed Forces community

Those who are who are:

- Former or Serving members of the Regular or reserve Armed Forces and are suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is wholly or partially attributable to the person's service, and need to move to suitable adapted accommodation; or
- Bereaved spouses or civil partners of those serving in the Regular Armed Forces where the bereaved spouses or civil partners have recently ceased, or will cease, to be entitled, to reside in accommodation provided by the Ministry of Defence following the death of their partner whose death was attributable (wholly or partially) to that service.

Very urgent medical grounds

This relates to circumstances where there are very urgent exceptional reasons for a move due to the medical needs of the applicant or member of the household, which pose an immediate risk of harm with a serious, adverse and long-lasting impact on their health or that of others in the household.

This includes an applicant (or someone from their household) with very urgent medical grounds, with a particular need for settled accommodation on medical grounds, due to:

- Condition is expected to be terminal, and re-housing is required due to unsuitable accommodation or to provide a basis for the provision of suitable care; or
- Condition is life threatening and existing accommodation is a major contributory factor; or
- Planned discharge from hospital admission and cannot return to their permanent accommodation which is not suitable for their medical needs and the property is not suitable for relevant adaptations
- Being housebound and extensive adaptations are required.[]

Very urgent welfare or hardship grounds

This relates to circumstances where there are very urgent exceptional reasons for a move due to the welfare needs of the applicant or a member of the household with a serious, adverse and long-lasting impact on their welfare or that of others in the household.

This includes:

- Young people ready to move on from local authority care (care leavers) into an independent tenancy where they are the responsibility of Warwickshire County Council.
- Where there is an immediate and high risk of harm (threat to life) in existing accommodation. In the interests of fairness to all applicants these circumstances are kept to a minimum and apply only where very urgent rehousing through Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice is assessed as the most suitable option by the Council and recommended and supported by senior officers in the Police or a formally established multi agency meeting in the last 3 months.

Unsafe, insanitary and unsatisfactory housing conditions

Where a private sector property is subject to a Category 1 Hazard under Health Housing Safety Rating System (HHSRS) or a prohibition or demolition or clearance orders issued by the Council for disrepair **and** the Council is satisfied that because of the disrepair continuing to occupy the accommodation will pose a high risk of harm to the household's health and there is no prospect of the issues being remedied by the landlord or property owner within a reasonable time frame defined by the Council.

Overcrowded by three or more bedrooms

- People occupying overcrowded housing, lacking three or more bedrooms (by the Bedroom Standard criteria).

Release of Social Housing in short supply, within the District

- Significantly adapted properties where adaptations are not required
- Larger properties with 4 bedrooms or more where downsizing

Band Two: Urgent Housing Need

Homeless duties owed by the Council (homeless through no fault of their own)

- Applicants who are homeless and owed the Section 189(B)(2) initial (Relief) Duty (by the Council) through no fault of their own
- Homeless Prevention Duty owed by the Council (where homelessness cannot be prevented in existing home) through no fault of their own.
- Households where the Council has assessed under a Section 184 decision that they are homeless but not in priority need by the Council and they are homeless through no fault of their own (non-statutory homeless).

UK Armed Forces

- Where serving members of the Regular Armed Forces who need to move out of accommodation provided by the Ministry of Defence (e.g. where they are coming to the end of their service) or
- Divorced or separated spouses or civil partners of Regular Armed Forces service personnel or adult children of Regular Armed Forces service personnel, who need to move out of accommodation provided by the Ministry of Defence.

Urgent medical ground

This level of priority may be awarded where:

- The current accommodation is completely unsuitable and cannot be adapted.
- The applicant is unable to manage their condition in the current home.
- There is an imminent risk of serious injury or health deterioration
- A move is expected to significantly improve the applicant's health or daily living

Urgent Welfare or Hardship Need

Urgent welfare grounds include where:

- There is an urgent need to move due to a severe impact on the household's wellbeing.
- There may be an imminent risk of homelessness
- The welfare need is causing daily issues, and the applicant is not managing with the consequences.
- The applicant may where appropriate be expected to be actively addressing the welfare need and engaging with available support services.

People who need to move on urgent welfare or hardship grounds:

- Due to the need to recover from the effect of violence or threat of violence, or physical, emotional or sexual abuse (e.g. victims of domestic abuse) including those in a refuge or temporary accommodation or
- Awarded where there is an agreement in place between the Council and Supported Housing Provider and the applicant meets the criteria (See Supported Housing Move on Award)
- Young people (care leavers) assessed as ready to move on from local authority care into an independent tenancy where they have a local connection or an evidenced need to access support in this district (see Section about Move on Award for Care Leavers).
- Foster carers and adopters, special guardians, and family and friend carers (who have taken on the care of a child because their parents are unable to provide care), who have an essential need for a larger home in order to accommodate a looked after child, approved by or being assessed by Warwickshire County Council
- A person who is moving on from a drug or alcohol rehabilitation programme who does not have suitable accommodation to return to build a stable life
- Downsizing, from a property within the District, to a smaller property (where does not qualify for band 1 award)

Overcrowded by two bedrooms

- People occupying overcrowded housing, lacking two bedrooms (by the Bedroom Standard criteria).

Band Three: Significant Housing Need

Homeless or served Section 8 Notice and at risk of homelessness

Applicants who are experiencing homelessness (within the meaning of Housing Act 1996 Part VII Homelessness), who have either not made an application for homelessness assistance to the Council [VR4.1] or have withdrawn their application for homelessness assistance.

Applicants who remain homeless following the ending of any homelessness duty owed by the Council (including prevention or relief duties) and who do not qualify for a higher band.

Applicants owed the Section 189B(2) initial Relief Duty or the Section 195(2) prevention duty by the Council where homelessness has arisen due to their own actions or omissions.

People who are owed a homelessness duty (by the Council) under section 190(2), owed to persons becoming intentionally homeless, to ensure that accommodation is available for occupation for a reasonable period while a person finds accommodation to live in.

Applicants who have been served with a valid Section 8 notice, have received advice and assistance from the Council, are at risk of homelessness but not yet threatened with homelessness within 56 days. It has been assessed that it is not likely that their homelessness can be prevented.

Significant medical ground

Applicants (or someone from their household), with a particular need for settled accommodation on medical grounds, due to:

- The current accommodation is unsuitable and cannot be made suitable.
- The applicant is experiencing substantial difficulties, though still managing to some extent.
- A move is likely to alleviate or improve the condition..

Significant welfare or hardship ground

This will be awarded where:

- There is a clear need to move, but it is not urgent or essential.
- The situation is significantly affecting wellbeing, but the applicant is managing to some extent.
- Applicants may be signposted to specialist support services.

Significant Hardship

The applicant needs to take up or continue employment, education and/or training that is not available elsewhere and they do not live within reasonable commuting distance

People who need to move to a particular locality in the District, where failure to meet that need would cause significant hardship (to themselves or to others).

Overcrowded by one bedroom

- People occupying overcrowded housing, by one bedroom (by the Bedroom Standard criteria).
- Is pregnant over 25 weeks and when the baby is born will be overcrowded by 1 bedroom as per bedroom standard.

Band Four: Reduced Band

Applicants who have not placed bids or applicants in Bands 1-3 who are not actively bidding for suitable accommodation may be placed in this band (see Section 8 for further information).

Applicants in Band 1 for Homeless Main Housing Duty or Band 2 for Relief Duty who have refused one suitable offer or other applicants in Bands 1-3 who have refused two suitable offers may be placed in this band.

Applicants will be placed into this band for 6 months, after which their application will be reviewed. For those who continue to bid from this band, we will review their circumstances to see whether they should be placed into a higher band.

Those who have not placed any bids over a 12-month consecutive period will have their application closed.

Band Five: General Housing Needs

Need for Independent Living Schemes

Households aged 55 years or over requiring older persons housing. Only eligible to bid for Independent Living Schemes (sheltered flats and bungalows, and Extra Care housing schemes).

Low housing need

Households experiencing financial difficulties affording accommodation

Care leavers under 25 with no reasonable preference

The applicant (and members of their household) are sharing facilities with family or non-related persons (who are not part of their household) and not being rehoused with them

Households with Children

- Households with children under 5 in upper floor flats
- Households with children under 10 without access to a garden (communal or self-contained garden)

Applicants in this Band who do not place any bids in a 12-month consecutive period will have their application closed with no further notification.

8. SECTION EIGHT – APPLYING FOR A PROPERTY AND LETTINGS

8.1 Properties Advertised

- 8.1.1 Once applicants have been registered with Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice and notified of their registration number, they may begin searching for suitable properties.
- 8.1.2 Properties are advertised on a weekly basis on the Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice website.
- 8.1.3 Each property advertisement will include:
- A description of the property
 - Any categories of applicant who will be given preference
 - Details of any special facilities or adaptations
 - Minimum age requirements (if applicable)
 - Eligibility requirements
 - Landlord details
 - Number of bedrooms
 - Rent amount
- 8.1.4 If no eligible bids are received, the property may be:
- Allocated via a direct let
 - Re-advertised

8.2 How to Bid

- 8.2.1 Applicants can place bids using the following methods:
- Online: <https://www.stratfordonavonhomechoice.org.uk>
 - In Person: At the Council offices.
 - Applicants who are unable to access the internet or attend the Council offices can seek assistance via the Council's contact centre on 01789 260 861.
- 8.2.2 To place a bid, the applicant will need:
- Their Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice login reference number
 - Their password
 - The property reference number.
- 8.2.3 Properties are advertised weekly, starting every Tuesday morning. Applicants can bid at any time until midnight the following Monday. The timing of the bid during the week does not affect the applicant's position on the shortlist—this is not a first come, first served system.
- 8.2.4 Applicants may bid for up to three properties during each weekly advertising cycle. Bids must be placed before the deadline and must meet the criteria specified in the property advertisement.
- 8.2.5 Applicants may withdraw a bid and place a new one on a different property at any time during the bidding cycle.
- 8.2.6 The Council may place bids on behalf of certain applicants with urgent or high needs. Bids placed by the Council on an applicant's behalf cannot be removed by the applicant.

8.3 Multiple Bidding and Shortlisting

- 8.3.1 If applicants appear at the top of more than one shortlist during a bidding cycle:
- 8.3.2 The Registered Provider or the Council will normally match the applicant to the first property for which they can be nominated.
- Once matched to a property, applicants will be skipped on any other shortlists
 - Applicants who are matched to a property will not be able to place further bids
- 8.3.3 If the Registered Provider of the property that applicants are matched to does not offer the property, applicants will be informed directly and may continue bidding for other properties.
- 8.3.4 For further details, please refer to the section below titled “Reasons Why an Applicant May Not Be Offered a Property”.

8.4 General Bidding Requirements

- 8.4.1 Applicants should only bid for properties that are suitable for their household size and circumstances, meet the advertised criteria, and take account of any special considerations.
- 8.4.2 Special considerations include where there are risk or safety concerns. Applicants must disclose any legal orders that prevent them from residing in or visiting certain areas. Applicants are not permitted to bid for properties located in areas they are prevented from going. In such circumstances any bids placed may be removed or disregarded.
- 8.4.3 Applicants in Bands 1, 2 and 3 are required to actively bid for suitable properties. The Council may use its discretion to place bids on behalf of applicants where bids are not being placed or are being inappropriately placed (in Bands 1-3). This will be done in consultation with the applicant and, where appropriate, their support worker.
- 8.4.4 Applicants must place at least one bid for a suitable property within any 12-month period.

8.5 Bidding Requirements for Homeless Households

- 8.5.1 Once the applicant receives a Section 184 decision letter confirming they are owed the main housing duty by the Council (under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996), or notification that the Council has accepted a Relief Duty, they are expected to begin bidding for suitable properties immediately. This includes placing up to three bids per week on properties that meet their assessed housing needs.
- 8.5.2 Failure to bid each week on all suitable properties may result in the Council:
- Placing bids on the applicant’s behalf to fulfil its statutory homelessness duties
 - Removing bids for properties that are unsuitable, for example where the applicant does not meet the advertised criteria, does not satisfy specific local connection requirements or where there are identified risk or safety concerns.
- 8.5.3 8.5.3 If the applicant chooses to bid for fewer suitable properties than are available to bid for, the Council may place additional bids on their behalf.

8.6 Not Meeting Bidding Requirements

- 8.6.1 Where applicants are not actively bidding for suitable properties, the Council may reduce their priority to Band 4 – Reduced Band when their application is reviewed. Examples include repeatedly bidding for properties where they do not meet the advertised criteria, restricting bidding to a very limited area without good reason, bidding for properties of an unsuitable size, bidding for properties that do not meet their assessed needs or repeatedly withdrawing bids for suitable properties.
- 8.6.2 Applicants in Bands 1, 2 and 3 will be demoted to Band 4 if they place no bids on suitable properties in the time limited period prior to the review.
- 8.6.3 Where applicants have placed no bids on suitable properties in a 12-month consecutive period their application will be closed.

8.7 Offers and Discharge of Duty – Homeless Cases

- 8.7.1 When a successful bid is made, the applicant will be notified. Any offer made to an applicant owed a homelessness duty may, where permitted Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, be treated as a suitable offer capable of bringing a homelessness duty to an end.
- 8.7.2 Where the applicant owed the Relief Duty (Band 2) or Main Housing Duty (Band 1), refuses one suitable offer of accommodation (which may include an offer of private rented accommodation), that brings the homelessness duty to an end, the applicant will be placed in Band 4 – Reduced Band.
- 8.7.3 Where the applicant requests a review of the suitability of an offer and they have been placed in Band 4 - Reduced Band as a result of refusing that offer, they will remain in Band 4 pending the outcome of the review. The decision may be revised following the review.
- 8.7.4 If the applicant is rejected by the Registered Provider under its own lettings policy or allocations criteria, the Main Housing Duty (under homelessness legislation) or Relief Duty will not be discharged, and the applicant will remain eligible for a further offer.
- 8.7.5 Please note that where a homelessness duty has been discharged, the applicant's application will be reassessed including whether the applicant qualifies to remain on the Housing Register (including local connection criteria).

8.8 Selection Process

- 8.8.1 Applicants should note that individual Registered Providers apply their own allocation policies, and the suitability and affordability of the property will be assessed by the Housing Association at the point of allocation.
- 8.8.2 All eligible bids for each property are placed in order of housing need, with priority determined by:
1. Band
 2. Band start date
 3. Community contribution (see Section 6.20)
- 8.8.3 A bid will not be considered if the applicant's household does not meet the size, household, type, age, or disability requirements for the property, unless exceptional circumstances apply.
- 8.8.4 Bids may also be skipped if:
- The applicant is not eligible or does not qualify to remain on the Housing Register, or their application has been non-qualifying, suspended, disqualified or excluded.
 - The property is deemed unaffordable or unsuitable
 - The applicant does not meet the Local Lettings Plan or Section 106 Local Connection criteria or specific requirements in the Registered Providers Allocation Policy.
 - (See the section below on Reasons Why an Applicant May Not Be Offered a Property)
- 8.8.5 Successful applicants may be invited to view the property prior to signing the tenancy agreement.
- 8.8.6 If the applicant refuses the offer, the reason will be recorded by the Council or advertising Registered Provider, and the applicant's banding may be reassessed.
- 8.8.7 Once an applicant is matched to a property, they will not be able to bid for other properties until they have accepted or refused the offer.
- 8.8.8 Before confirming an offer, the Council or Registered Provider will review the application to ensure the banding and bedroom need is correct and that no changes in circumstances affect the offer.

8.9 Reasons Why an Applicant May Not Be Offered a Property

- 8.9.1 Registered Providers will have regard to their own allocation policies and will assess whether the applicant can sustain a tenancy and afford the property. This may result in a decision not to allocate a property to an applicant. The Registered Provider will explain to the applicant the reasons that they are not offered the property. For more information, applicants should refer to the bidding outcomes on Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice website or contact the relevant Housing Association directly.

8.10 Restrictions on Offers

- 8.10.1 Some properties may be advertised with specific restrictions, which will be clearly stated in the advert. These may include:
- Section 106 agreements under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, restricting bids to households with a local connection, or giving preference to such households
 - Local Lettings Plans adopted by Registered Providers to address specific issues and promote balanced communities[

Where restrictions apply, the property will be offered to the highest priority applicant who meets the criteria.

8.11 Refusing Offers of Accommodation

- 8.11.1 Applicants are expected to bid only for suitable properties that meet their needs. If an offer is refused:
- The property will be offered to the next suitable applicant
 - The Council may consider the suitability of the property and the reasons for the refusal
 - The refusal may affect the applicant's priority in accordance with Section 8.12.

8.12 Refusing Suitable Offers and Reduced Band

- 8.12.1 If applicants are owed under homelessness legislation the Main Housing Duty (Band 1) or the Relief Duty (Band 2) where they do not accept one suitable offer they will be placed in Band 4 – Reduced Band. For other households in Bands 1-3, they will be placed into this band after the refusal of two suitable offers.

8.13 Local Lettings Plans (LLPs)

- 8.13.1 Stratford -on-Avon Home Choice reserves the right to apply additional criteria—such as specific local connection requirements, prioritisation of smaller households for family-sized accommodation, or employment-based preferences—while continuing to meet statutory obligations for Reasonable Preference.
- 8.13.2 Where there is a new housing development, there will be a local lettings plan prior to the occupation of any affordable homes.
- 8.13.3 The Council may agree LLPs with participating Registered Providers for specific areas, estates, or blocks.
- 8.13.4 LLP's aim to promote balanced and sustainable communities, tailored to the needs of the local area and protecting the interests of existing residents.

8.13.5 **Principles for Applying LLPs** are stated below:

- LLPs may be developed to address the specific needs of a local area
- There must be a clear rationale for implementing an LLP (e.g. new affordable housing development, recurring anti-social behaviour, high child density, or a concentration of older residents)
- LLPs must be developed and approved through an agreed procedure, with specific aims and subject to regular review
- LLPs must consider equal opportunities and ensure the Council continues to meet its obligations to those owed Reasonable Preference

8.13.6 The decision to implement an LLP will be made jointly by a Housing Manager from the Council and a Senior Manager from the Housing Provider.

8.13.7 Where a property is advertised under an LLP, it will be offered to the highest priority applicant who meets the eligibility criteria of the plan.

8.13.8 **Examples of LLP Criteria:**

- Age restrictions
- Restrictions on lettings to vulnerable households where there is already a high concentration of supported tenants
- Lettings to childless households in areas with high concentrations of children and young people
- Employment-related preferences where permitted by law and justified by the aims of the Local Lettings Plan

8.14 **Direct Matching for Urgent Cases with Reasonable Preference**

8.14.1 Where possible all lettings should be made through Stratford on Avon Home Choice to ensure fairness and transparency in the system and to give our customers confidence.

8.14.2 Where applicants have a reasonable preference, but their circumstances mean they have an urgent housing need, they may require a direct match. Examples of this would be those with critical health or social needs where an immediate move is necessary for their health and wellbeing; or those in fear of extreme incidences of domestic abuse, harassment, hate crime or extreme neighbour nuisance/antisocial behaviour where there is a genuine risk to their health and wellbeing; and these can only be achieved through direct matching.

8.14.3 The direct match might also occur because of the type of accommodation needed e.g. because it has adaptations and requires a specific applicant, or to support a move through witness mobility schemes or similar.

8.14.4 There may be direct matching that takes place for tenants with the Registered Providers which are outside of this allocations scheme known as management moves. This would apply in circumstances such as tenants who are required to decant from their property due to re-designations, demolition or refurbishment or where successors left in a property too large for their needs or where a non-successor has exceptional needs/would be deemed to be owed a duty under homelessness legislation for example.

8.14.5 There may also be a requirement to direct match an existing Registered Provider tenant to a larger property to facilitate their approval as a registered foster parent.

8.14.6 If the Council implements any new housing system, the Council may, in exceptional circumstances, make allocations through direct matching where necessary to maintain service delivery and minimise delays to applicants. Such decisions will be authorised, recorded, and made in accordance with the principles of this Policy.

8.14.7 Before direct matching can take place it must be approved by a Housing Manager.

- 8.14.8 Occasionally, certain properties may be hard to let through the standard bidding process. Where a property has been advertised and the shortlist has been exhausted without a successful allocation, the Council may use a direct matching approach.
- 8.14.9 Direct matching will only be used after all reasonable efforts to allocate through the normal process have been completed. Any direct match will comply with the principles of fairness and suitability set out in this policy, ensuring that the property meets the applicant's assessed needs and that the allocation is recorded transparently.

9. SECTION NINE - ADMINISTRATION OF THE SCHEME

9.1 Delegation of Authority

- 9.1.1 The Council will retain all legal duties and powers under housing legislation. Delegation does not constitute a transfer of statutory responsibility.
- 9.1.2 The administration of the scheme is carried out by the Council. The Council is responsible for:
- Updating and improving the scheme in line with legislation and good practice
 - Consulting with partners and customers
 - Ensuring the scheme is consistently applied
- 9.1.3 Certain functions within the scheme may only be undertaken by a Housing and Communities Manager. Where applicable, this requirement is highlighted throughout the Allocations Policy.

9.2 Reassessment of Bandings

- 9.2.1 Bandings will be reassessed:
- Applicants may provide additional information to support their housing application; however, we will only consider significant changes in circumstances or new evidence that may affect priority. Minor updates or repeated submissions of similar information will not normally result in a reassessment. Where applicants submit frequent updates without material changes, we may limit reviews to a set frequency.
 - At regular intervals, in line with the timescale associated with the applicant's current band
- 9.2.2 The applicant will be notified of any change. If the applicant fails to respond to correspondence regarding reassessment within 28 days, the application may be closed.
- 9.2.3 If, upon review, it is accepted that the failure to respond was due to good reason, the application may be reinstated with the original band start date.
- 9.2.4 When a reassessment is due, the Council will contact the applicant via letter, telephone, or email to confirm current circumstances. Further information may be requested or expert opinion sought by the Council to inform any decisions that are made. If changes are identified, the application will be re-banded accordingly.
- 9.2.5 If the Council determines that the applicant has not used their priority appropriately (e.g. by failing to bid in the time limited period), an officer will review the application. The banding may be changed to the Reduced Band 4, unless the applicant can demonstrate a valid reason for not bidding.

9.3 Decisions – Reduced Banding, Suspension, Non-qualification, Disqualification Exclusion

- 9.3.1 If an applicant's banding is reduced, or the application as a whole is non-qualifying, excluded, disqualified or suspended, the applicant will receive written notification detailing the reasons for the decision in writing, and their right to request a review.
- 9.3.2 Where applicable, the Council will also explain how long the suspension, non-qualification, disqualification or exclusion will last, and what the applicant needs to do for the Council to review their banding, lift the suspension, or allow them to join the Stratford on Avon Home Choice scheme.

9.4 Closing of Applications

- 9.4.1 An application to the Housing Register will be closed under the following circumstances:
- The applicant requests that their application be closed
 - The applicant has failed to respond to a request for further information within the stated timescale.
 - The applicant has not placed any bids over a 12-month consecutive period in accordance with the requirements of this policy
 - The applicant is no longer eligible or no longer qualifies to join the Housing Register.
 - The applicant moves to a new settled address, unless this is temporary accommodation provided by the Council as part of its homelessness duties
 - The applicant has failed to renew their housing application.
 - The applicant has given false information on their application or withheld relevant information.
 - The applicant has been re-housed through Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice so their application will be automatically closed.
- 9.4.2 If the registration has been closed and applicants want to re-join Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice, they will need to submit a new application. The new application date will be the date they re-register. The Council will assess their application to see if they are eligible and qualify to join and to award their banding.

10 SECTION TEN - REVIEWS AND MONITORING STRATFORD-ON-AVON HOME CHOICE

10.1 Rights to Information and Review

- 10.1.1 Applicants have the right to information under Section 166 (including Section 166A) and Section 168 of the Housing Act. Reviews of decisions will be conducted in accordance with the Housing Act 1996, associated regulations and this Allocation Policy.

10.2 Reviewable Decisions

- 10.2.1 Applicants may request a review of decisions including:
- a) Ineligibility due to immigration status
 - b) Non-qualification or disqualification or exclusion
 - c) Removal from the Housing Register, suspension or reduction in priority
 - d) Banding placement
 - e) Property type eligibility
 - f) Decisions about the facts of the case affecting allocation
 - g) Determination that the applicant has deliberately caused overcrowding
 - h) Being overlooked or skipped on a bid

10.3 How to Request a Review

- 10.3.1 In order to request a review:
- 10.3.2 Requests must be made in writing, by email or via the online form, within 21 calendar days of the decision notification
- A representative may submit the request on the applicant's behalf
 - The applicant must explain the purpose of the review and provide any additional information not previously considered.
- 10.3.3 The Council may use its discretion to seek further information or expert opinion to inform any decisions that are made.
- 10.3.4 A Reviewing Officer appointed by the Council will assess the request and the original decision. The outcome will be communicated in writing within 56 calendar days, including the reasons for the decision.
- 10.3.5 Once the review has been determined there is no further right of review on the same matter, unless there is a material change of circumstance.
- 10.3.6 Service-related concerns should be raised through the Council's Complaints Policy. Where a complaint is submitted about a decision, it will be redirected to the review process to avoid duplication.
- 10.3.7 Applicants also have the right to:
- Seek judicial review
 - Contact the Local Government Ombudsman.
- 10.3.8 Information will be provided on how to access support from Citizens Advice, Shelter, or legal representatives.

10.4 Complaints

- 10.4.1 Complaints relate to the quality of service provided, such as delays, staff conduct, or communication issues. They do not cover decisions made under this policy.
- 10.4.2 If the Council determines that a complaint should be treated as a review request, the applicant will be informed, and the complaint will be processed under the review procedure outlined above. The date of referral to the Reviewing Officer will be treated as the date of the review request.
- 10.4.3 Complaints should be submitted in accordance with the Council's Policy for Customer Comments and Complaints.
- 10.4.4 Where a complaint relates to the letting of a property, the applicant should contact the relevant Registered Provider and follow their internal complaints procedure.

10.5 Feedback on Let Properties

- 10.5.1 Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice will publish feedback on let properties via its website, including:
- The number of bids received for each property
 - The band of the successful applicant
 - The band start date of the successful applicant
- 10.5.2 This feedback helps applicants understand their prospects of success and make informed decisions when bidding.
- 10.5.3 Lettings are monitored by property type and household composition to ensure the scheme meets its aims and objectives. This data is shared with the Full Partnership annually and published on the Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice website.
- 10.5.4 The Council also monitors lettings across different ethnic groups to ensure fair and equitable access to housing across all communities.

10.6 Monitoring and Governance

- 10.6.1 The Council will regularly monitor the outcomes of the scheme and provide an annual report for Registered Providers as part of its ongoing monitoring responsibilities.

10.7 Changes to the Allocation Scheme

- 10.7.1 The Council reserves the right to expand, change or alter any element of the scheme, as and when required, to meet changes in housing need, capacity, resources and legislation. The routes to enable the amendments would depend on whether the change is major or minor. An Equality Impact Assessment will define whether the changes and their impact constitute a major or minor change.
- 10.7.2 The routes for making amendments are set out in the table below:

Major Change	Minor Change
i. Internal Management	Internal Management Only
ii. Stakeholders including partner landlords and members	
iii. Management Team	
iv. Legal checking	
v. Stratford-on-Avon Housing and Communities Team	
vi. Stratford-on-Avon Council Cabinet	

- 10.7.3 The Council will ensure the changed scheme is then made available to the public via its website: <https://www.stratfordonavonhomechoice.org.uk>.

Appendix 1 - Glossary of terms

Term	Definition
Additional preference	Additional preference to particular groups of people who have a reasonable preference, if they have urgent housing needs.
Affordable housing	Housing let at a social or affordable rent or a low cost home ownership property let to a specified eligible household whose needs are not met in the market. Also known as social housing.
Allocation	An offer of housing from a Registered Provider either directly or via a nomination from the Council.
Band start date	The date the household is awarded the banding applicable to their housing need.
Banding/bands	The prioritisation of households on the Stratford-on-Avon Housing Register based on their housing need.
Bid	Households' expression of interest in an available / vacant property.
Council	Stratford-on-Avon District Council.
Council Contact Details	Stratford-on-Avon District Council Elizabeth House, Church Street, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warks, CV37 6HX 01789 260861/2 housingadviceteam@stratford-dc.gov.uk https://www.stratford.gov.uk
Direct matching	An allocation outside of the Home Choice Policy/Scheme. Please see the policy for more details.
District	The Stratford-on-Avon District area.
Homelessness	The legal definition of homelessness in the Housing Act 1996 Part VII / Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 is that a person is homeless if they have no accommodation available to them in the UK or anywhere which would be reasonable for them to continue to occupy. They would also be homeless if they have accommodation but are not able to gain access to it, or if it is a moveable structure but they have nowhere to place it. A person is threatened with homelessness if they are likely to become homeless within the next 56 days.
Housing Register	A database/list of households who have applied for affordable housing.
Local connection	A household's connection to a local area or district including residency, family connections and employment.
Personal Housing Plan	A personal housing plan is a document created by the Council with homeless applicants outlining the steps to be taken to prevent or relieve homelessness.
Persons from abroad	People subject to immigration control and any other persons from abroad where the secretary of state makes regulations.
Prevention Duty	Prevention Duty requires an authority to take reasonable steps to help a person secure that accommodation does not cease to become available.
Qualification Criteria	To join the Housing Register the applicant must meet the eligible qualification criteria which in our allocation scheme relates to 16 and 17 year olds, local connection, housing need, financial resources and household income limits, disqualification criteria where people own a home, and behaviour that means that they are considered unsuitable to be a tenant.

Reasonable preference	Categories of housing need which are defined by the Housing Act 1996, Part Six that are required to be included in an allocations policy.
Registered Provider	A Registered Provider of Social Housing is registered with and regulated by the regulator of Social Housing. This includes nearly all housing associations who are not-for-profit organisations providing social housing.
Registration / Effective date	The date of registration of the Housing Application.
Relief Duty	Where a homeless applicant is assessed as homeless and eligible for assistance and the Relief Duty requires an authority to take reasonable steps to help a person relieve their homelessness.
Section 106 Agreement	A section 106 agreement is a legally binding agreement between a local authority and a developer under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 that outlines the specific obligations to mitigate the impact of a development project. This primary objective is to secure affordable housing and can include local occupancy conditions that ensure that local residents have preference when bidding for homes.
Section 106 Property	A Section 106 property is a property which has local occupancy conditions attached to it that have been defined in the Section 106 agreement.
Statutorily homeless	This policy document provides a broad framework of the general principles and guidance for allocating housing. that determines how housing is allocated to households. It is known as “the allocation policy” in the document. This term describes those households who have made a homeless application to the Council and where the Main Housing Duty has been accepted. This means the household has been determined to be eligible, homeless, in priority need, unintentionally homeless and having a local connection and has been issued with a written decision which confirms this.
Stratford-on-Avon Allocations Policy	This policy document provides a broad framework of the general principles and guidance for allocating housing. that determines how housing is allocated to households. It is known as “the Allocation Policy” in the document.
Stratford-on-Avon Allocation Scheme	Stratford-on-Avon Allocation Scheme (known as “the allocation scheme” in this document) determines how the Council will prioritise households and allocate housing on the Housing Register. It is Stratford-on-Avon District Council’s statutory allocation scheme issued under section 166A of Part VI of the Housing Act 1996.
Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice Scheme	The scheme including the software, the policy and the processes involved for allocating housing to households. https://stratfordonavonhomechoice.org.uk
Weekly bidding cycle	The period of time available for households to place bids on properties they are interested in.

Appendix 2 - Legal and Regulatory Framework

Legislation and statutory guidance relating to allocation includes but is not limited to the following:

Statutory Provisions

- Housing Act 1996
- Housing Act 1985
- Homelessness Act 2002
- Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- Localism Act 2011
- Immigration Act 1971
- Immigration Act 1988
- Asylum and Immigration Act 1996
- Asylum and Immigration Act 2002
- Immigration Act 2016
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Children Act 1989
- Children Act 2004
- Family Law Act 1996
- Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Equality Act 2010
- Welfare Reform Act 2012
- European Union Withdrawal Agreement Act 2020

Regulatory Provisions

- The Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012
- The Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Armed Forces) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2024
- The Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Right to Move) (England) Regulations 2015
- Allocation of Housing (England) Regulations 2002
- Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (England) Regulations 2006 (SI 2006/1294)
- Allocation of Housing (England) (Amendment) (Family Intervention Tenancies) Regulations 2008 (SI 2008/301587)
- Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 (Consequential Provision) (No.2) Order 2010 (SI 2010/671)
- The Persons Subject to Immigration Control (Housing Authority Accommodation and Homelessness) Order 2000
- The Persons Subject to Immigration Control (Housing Authority Accommodation and Homelessness) (Amendment) Order 2008 SI 2008/1768
- Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (England) and Persons Subject to Immigration Control (Housing Authority Accommodation and Homelessness) (Amendment) Regulations 2024/647
- The Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Victims of Domestic Abuse and Care Leavers) (England) Regulations 2025

Statutory Guidance

Regard has also been given to all relevant statutory guidance including:

- Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local authorities (updated 10 July 2025) (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government)
- Providing Social Housing for local people (updated 18 December 2024 Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities)
- Improving Access to social housing for members of the Armed Forces (updated December 2024)
- Improving Access to Social Housing for victims of Domestic Abuse in Refuges or Other Types of Temporary Accommodation 2018

Appendix 3

Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice Bedroom Eligibility for Property Allocation and Under Occupation				
Household Make-up	Suitable Property Size:			
	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed	4 Bed
Single Person	✓			
Couple without children in the household	✓			
Parent(s) & 1 child		✓		
25+ weeks pregnant woman with or without partner and no other children		✓		
Parent(s) and 2 children of same sex aged between 0 and 16		✓		
Parent(s) and 2 children of same sex over 16			✓	
Parent(s) and 2 children of different sex under the age of 10		✓		
Parent(s) and 2 children of different sex when the oldest reaches 10			✓	
Parent(s) and 3 children – 2 of same sex aged between 0 and 16. Plus 1 other child			✓	
Parent(s) and 3 children - 2 of different sex under the age of 10. Plus 1 other child			✓	

Appendix 4 - Definition of household types

An Applicant(s) household type determines the size and type of housing they may be eligible for.

Household Type	Household type definition	Property types eligible for
Single person	One person households with no resident children. A woman who is less than 25 weeks pregnant.	One bed houses and flats and two bed upper floor flats (with regard to the two bed flats, while applicants would be able to bid for these, it is likely that they would need to be able to evidence a two bedroom need in order for one of the housing associations to offer applicants a property of this size).
Couple	Married, cohabiting, civil partnership and same sex couples without resident children or with a woman who is less than 25 weeks pregnant.	One bed houses and flats and two bed flats (with regard to the two bed flats, while applicants would be able to bid for these, it is likely that they would need to be able to evidence a two-bedroom need in order for one of the Registered Providers to offer them a property of this size).
Family	Single parent or couple (as defined above) with minimum of one dependent child, who lives with parent (s) as the main or principal home. A woman who is 25 weeks pregnant or more.	Houses, flats and maisonettes with two or more bedrooms.
Ground floor need	Households with an essential medical need for a ground floor property.	Households with an essential medical need for a ground floor property.
Other	Any other household group including siblings, families with non-dependent children or applicants with live in carers	Flats and maisonettes with two or more bedrooms and houses (where the Registered Provider or lettings policy allows for this).
Older Adults	All household members aged over the age of 55 who are eligible for Independent Living and Extra Care Schemes only. All households members over the age of 60 are also eligible for general needs bungalows.	Independent living, extra care properties and general needs bungalows* * over 60 years only Please note that older adults who do not satisfy the qualification criteria for home-owners, financial resources and household income limits may be considered through an exemption exclusively for Independent Living or Extra Care Schemes but will not be able to bid for other types of properties including bungalows.

** In order to reflect applicants housing requirement for a particular property type or size the Council may need to put the applicants into a different category in order to achieve a correct allocation.

For example – if the applicant is a single person with a medical need that means they require a larger property for a resident carer, their household type may be amended to “other” to enable them to bid for suitable properties.

Appendix 5 - Verification Requirements for the Stratford-on-Avon Home Choice

Supporting Evidence applicants may be asked to provide. Please note that this list is not exhaustive and other information may be requested if required.

Type	Who / when evidence is required	Documents Required
Photo ID	All adults in the household who are moving with applicants	One photo ID, we accept: • Current Passport • Current UK photocard driving license If they do not have one of the above, they need to provide their birth certificate Where appropriate provide divorce or separation papers
From abroad	Evidence of British Nationality or to confirm Immigration Status in the UK and Habitual Residence (when required)	• Current Passport • eVisa share code (where appropriate) • Habitual Residency Test document (where moved or returned to the Common Travel Area, which is the UK, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man and the Republic of Ireland in the last 2 years)
Address ID	For all adults in the household who are moving with applicants For all adults in Household Residence and proof of current address	For adults who are not applicants – A signed written statement confirming they are part of the household and are moving with applicants on a permanent basis Other information if required We require: • Tenancy agreement for their current or last settled address (where appropriate) • Contact details for their current/ previous landlord One current proof of address (issued within last three months): • Utility bill (gas, electric, satellite television, landline phone bill) • Council Tax Bill • Original notification letter from Benefits Agency • HMRC letter • Bank or Building Society statement • Gas/ Electric/ Water bill letter

Type	Who / when evidence is required	Documents Required
Proof of ID	All children in the household	We require : • A birth certificate for all children in the household • Any Court decision/settlement setting out the arrangements for children (where appropriate) • Child Benefit notification letter and recent bank statement showing payment of Child Benefit (unless special cases) • Other information if required • For special case such as where fostering or kinship care arrangements or special guardian or child arrangement orders other proof maybe acceptable as they may not qualify for Child Benefit
Details of pregnancy	If the applicant or their partner, or a member of their household is pregnant	We accept: • The page from their maternity records which shows their estimated due date or • Maternity pregnancy certificate (MATB1 form)
Employment and Income	Local connection through Employment, and Community Contribution we require the information from the applicants. To determine the household income for eligibility requirements we will need the information from all adult household members	We require a full breakdown of the household income, including any benefits. We require: • Any proof of earnings including for those who are self-employed – contract of employment, P60 and at least the last 6 months wage slips. • Bank statements showing current/other income. • Confirmation of address of workplace. • State benefit income award letters and recent bank statement showing payments. • Tax Credit, Pension Credit or Universal Credit award letters or statements. • Pension information and statements
Family Connection	Evidence of Family connection	Details of family member(s) Evidence of address Statement to confirm the ongoing close relationship(s) Evidence of relation to applicant (e.g. marriage or birth certificate) Contact details of family members so the relationship(s) can be confirmed
16 or 17 year old	Requirements to be included	Evidence regarding trustee and that over 18 or that Care Leaver

Type	Who / when evidence is required	Documents Required
Savings and assets	Evidence of savings and assets so can assess if qualifies	Most recent 3 months statements for all bank account and any assets including explanations for any transfers between your accounts • Bank/building society statements showing any transactions relating to capital and the last 3 months statements • A savings book showing the current amount. • Current proof of assets including any shares and any bonds. • Any property or land owned • Evidence of all accounts held in their names, including joint accounts. • A full breakdown of the household's income, showing any savings or income of adults who are part of the household.
Home Ownership	Evidence of home ownership	Copy of title register from Land Registry Mortgage statements
Behaviour	Evidence for reassessment for qualification criteria	This may include • Behaviour references from landlords • Rent statements from landlords • Supporting information from the police, probation internal teams, or external agencies confirming behavioural improvement.
Orders	Evidence of any orders to monitor or restrict movement	• Bail conditions. • Any orders restricting movement or imposing conditions e.g. restraining order, injunction. • License conditions. • Unspent convictions.
Armed Forces	Evidencing armed forces service and housing need	It may include: • Veterans ID card (if appropriate, MOD form 90, MOD pay slips or pension statement or Service number • Confirmation of Service History, Cessation of service documentation • Marriage or civil partner certificate (where appropriate) • Evidence of former/current living arrangement • Notice to Vacate MOD accommodation (where appropriate) • Medical or discharge reports including injuries or illness are wholly or partly attributed to their service.

Type	Who / when evidence is required	Documents Required
Homelessness	Where person homeless or threatened with homelessness	Documentation may include: • Copy of tenancy or licence agreement • Letters or emails written by landlord • Rent statements • Notice to leave • Court paperwork • Possession Order • Eviction Warrant
Medical Need	Medical Need	• Health and Disability questions answered • Any supporting medical documentation, letters and reports
Welfare or Hardship Need	Young person leaving local authority care Leaving supported housing in district	Letter from Warwickshire County Council Move on check list Supporting evidence from other agencies
Harassment or domestic abuse	Any relevant documentation	Copies of any Police reports Any letters/ emails Legal documents that have been obtained e.g. injunctions Letters or emails from the agency providing support (where appropriate) Solicitors' letters (where appropriate)
Additional Bedroom on medical grounds	Evidence around need for additional bedroom	Supporting medical evidence We will also request benefit notification letter(s) and recent bank statement(s) showing that the relevant household member is in receipt of any of the following: • Attendance Allowance • Middle or higher rate of the care component of Disability Living Allowance • the standard or enhanced rate of the daily living component of Personal Independence Payment • Armed Forces Independence Payment • Standard or enhanced rate of the daily living component of Adult Disability Payment • Middle or highest rate of the care component of Child Disability Payment • Middle or highest rate of the care component of Scottish Adult Disability Living Allowance • Highest rate of the care component of Child Disability Payment • Pension Age Disability Payment

Type	Who / when evidence is required	Documents Required
Require ground floor accommodation	Evidence for ground floor accommodation need	Supporting medical evidence. Relevant disability benefit award letters, showing the full breakdown of the award and recent bank statements showing payments.
Volunteering	Evidence of volunteering for Community Contribution	Supporting evidence Letter from the not-for-profit charity organisation confirming when the voluntary work started, and the number of hours each month spent volunteering
Full time carers	Evidence that Full-time carers for Community Contribution	Carers Allowance award letter and bank statement showing payments Supporting Medical Evidence
Disrepair	Evidence of disrepair	Evidence that you have reported this to your landlord Any letters or notices from the Private Sector Housing Team



STRATFORD-ON-AVON
HOME CHOICE



**Housing Team
Stratford-on-Avon District Council**

Elizabeth House
Church Street
Stratford-upon-Avon
CV37 6HX

Telephone 01789 267575
Email housing@stratford-dc.gov.uk
Website www.stratford.gov.uk