

Housing Committee

Wednesday 9 June 2021 at 7.30pm

**Council Chamber
Runnymede Civic Centre, Addlestone**

Members of the Committee

Councillors J Gracey (Chairman), J Hulley (Vice Chairman), A Balkan, J Broadhead, M Cressey, S Mackay, I Mullens, M Nuti, P Snow, and S Whyte.

Mrs J Hill (co-opted non-voting member) for the purposes affecting Council housing tenants

In accordance with Standing Order 29.1, any Member of the Council may attend the meeting of this Committee, but may speak only with the permission of the Chairman of the committee, if they are not a member of this Committee.

AGENDA

Notes:

- 1) **The following Measures to comply with current Covid guidelines are in place:**
 - **restricting the number of people that can be in the Council Chamber to 24**
 - **temperature check via the undercroft for Members/Officers and Main Reception for the public**
 - **NHS track and trace register, app scan is next to the temperature check**
 - **masks to be worn when moving around the offices**
 - **masks can be kept on whilst sitting in the Council Chamber if individuals wish**
 - **use of hand sanitisers positioned outside and inside the Council Chamber**
 - **increased ventilation inside the Council Chamber**

- 2) Any report on the Agenda involving confidential information (as defined by section 100A(3) of the Local Government Act 1972) must be discussed in private. Any report involving exempt information (as defined by section 100I of the Local Government Act 1972), whether it appears in Part 1 or Part 2, may be discussed in private but only if the Committee so resolves.

- 3) The relevant 'background papers' are listed after each report in Part 1. Enquiries about any of the agenda reports and background papers should be directed in the first instance to
Andrew Finch, Democratic Services Section, Law and Governance Business Centre, Runnymede Civic Centre, Station Road, Addlestone (Tel: Direct Line: 01932 425623). (Email: Andrew.Finch@runnymede.gov.uk).
- 4) Agendas and Minutes are available on a subscription basis. For details, please ring Mr B A Fleckney on 01932 425620. Agendas and Minutes for all the Council's Committees may also be viewed on www.runnymede.gov.uk.
- 5) In the unlikely event of an alarm sounding, members of the public should leave the building immediately, either using the staircase leading from the public gallery or following other instructions as appropriate.

6) **Filming, Audio-Recording, Photography, Tweeting and Blogging of Meetings**

Members of the public are permitted to film, audio record, take photographs or make use of social media (tweet/blog) at Council and Committee meetings provided that this does not disturb the business of the meeting. If you wish to film a particular meeting, please liaise with the Council Officer listed on the front of the Agenda prior to the start of the meeting so that the Chairman is aware and those attending the meeting can be made aware of any filming taking place.

Filming should be limited to the formal meeting area and not extend to those in the public seating area.

The Chairman will make the final decision on all matters of dispute in regard to the use of social media audio-recording, photography and filming in the Committee meeting.

LIST OF MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

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PART II

Matters involving Exempt or Confidential Information in respect of which reports have not been made available for public inspection.

a) Exempt Information

(No reports to be considered under this heading)

b) Confidential Information

(No reports to be considered under this heading)

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

TERM	EXPLANATION
1-4-1 receipts	A proportion of retained RTB sale receipts that must be used by the authority to help provide new social housing.
Affordable Housing	Affordable Housing is the generic term which includes social rented, affordable rented and products such as shared ownership and rent-to-buy and is provided by local authorities and registered providers such as housing associations.
Affordable Rent	Affordable Rent must be no more than 80% of market rent
Benefit cap	A Government limit on the total amount of benefit, including Housing Benefit, payable to people aged 16 to 64 who are not working.
CBL	Choice Based Lettings system allows Housing Register applicants to 'bid' for available council and housing association properties online.
CHaRMM	Community Harm and Risk Management Meetings
Decent Homes Standard	A Decent Home meets the criteria for statutory minimum standard, state of repair, provision of facilities and services and thermal comfort required by MHCLG.
DFG	Disabled Facilities Grants are mandatory, means tested grants to provide adaptations such as shower rooms, ramps and stair lifts to disabled people who can be owner occupiers or private or social tenants.
DHP	Discretionary Housing Payments can top up the housing costs of Housing Benefit and UC claimants, for example to make up a rent shortfall due to the 'benefit cap' or 'spare room subsidy'. Awards are made in accordance with the Council's DHP policy. Payments are subsidised by Government with additional funding from the HRA.
DWP	The Department for Work and Pensions.
FRA	Fire Risk Assessment
H-CLIC	Homelessness Case Level Information Collection
HMO	House in multiple occupation.
HQN	Housing Quality Network
HRA	Housing Revenue Account. The statutory account that sets out expenditure and income arising from provision of social housing by the local authority as a landlord and is ring fenced from other council activities.
IRL	Independent Retirement Living is the brand for Runnymede's sheltered accommodation for older people.
LHA	Local Housing Allowance is the Housing Benefit entitlement for private sector tenants, based on a household's bedroom requirements. It is applied to areas known as Broad Rental Market Areas and determined by calculating the 30 th percentile of market rents for each area (i.e. 3 in 10 properties should be at or below the LHA level).
MHCLG	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

New Homes Bonus	The New Homes Bonus has been paid each year by Government, based on the number of new homes within an area when the Council Tax extract is submitted in October with additional payments for new affordable homes and a reduction for long term empty properties.
PSL	Private Sector Landlord.
PRC	Pre-reinforced concrete (non-traditionally built) properties.
RCRA	Runnymede Council Residents Association.
RP	Registered providers of social housing including; local authority landlords and housing associations
RTB	Right to Buy legislation and regulations giving secure tenants of councils and some housing associations tenants the right to buy the home they are living in, at a discount.
S. 106	Section 106 agreements are a legally binding agreement between the Planning authority and a landowner or developer in association with the granting of planning permission, often requiring a contribution to infrastructure and sometimes affordable housing – which can be on site or by way of a commuted sum.
SHMA	The Strategic Housing Market Assessment provides an evidence base for assessing the need and demand of future housing supply.
Shared Accommodation Rate	The level of LHA (Housing Benefit) that applies to single people in the private rented sector who are aged under 35 years.
Social Housing	Social rented housing is owned by local authorities and private registered providers
Social Sector Size Criteria	Also colloquially known as “the bedroom tax” which was introduced in 2013 and which reduces Housing Benefit to working age claimants who are assessed as having a spare room.
Universal Credit	This benefit is gradually replacing a number of benefits including Job Seekers Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit etc. and in most cases is paid four weekly in arrears direct to the applicant.

1. **FIRE PRECAUTIONS**

The Chairman will read the Fire Precautions, which set out the procedures to be followed in the event of fire or other emergency.

2. **NOTIFICATION OF CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

3. **MINUTES**

To confirm and sign the Minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 10 March 2021 (Appendix A) and 6 April 2021 (Appendix B) as a correct record.

Appendix A

Runnymede Borough Council

HOUSING COMMITTEE

10 March 2021 at 7:30pm via MS Teams

Members of the Committee present	Councillors J Gracey (Chairman), S Lewis (Vice-Chairman), J Hulley, I Mullens, M Nuti, A Neathey, P Sohi, P Snow and S Whyte Mrs J Hill (Runnymede Council Residents' Association Representative – co-opted non-voting member)
Members of the Committee absent	Councillor S Mackay
Non Members of the Committee present	Councillors D Clarke, C Howorth and J Olorenshaw

479 NOTIFICATION OF CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

None.

480 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 6 January 2021 were accepted as a true record.

481 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None received.

482 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

483 HOUSING STRATEGY STATEMENT 2021-2026

The Corporate Head of Housing advised that a series of documents would be presented to Members during the meeting, adding that the Housing Strategy Statement was the highest-level strategic document, and linked in to the Council's Corporate Plan. Other documents presented later in the meeting all fed into the strategy statement.

The objectives of the strategy statement were to:

- Ensure good quality housing was available to local people.
- Support local people to access appropriate housing.
- Increase the provision of affordable housing.
- Identify local housing needs to plan effectively for the future.

These objectives would be reported to Committee annually, and involved a number of other Council services, such as Environmental Health and Community Services.

Furthermore, there would be a strong emphasis on cross-departmental working, and the strategy statement would be presented to Planning Committee to ensure Planning Committee members were aware and supported the strategic housing objectives for the next five years.

In response to a Member's concern, the Corporate Head of Housing confirmed that profiling data would be studied to ensure that services were being delivered in a non-discriminatory way. Both a development strategy and revised adaptations policy would be brought to future Committee meetings to further support this.

Furthermore, all S106 affordable developments had a requirement for wheelchair access. The Housing team were constantly scanning the register and considering how properties would be built to the adaptations they require rather than retrofitting them after build.

RESOLVED that –

Housing Committee supported the strategic aims outlined within the Housing Strategy Statement and noted the delivery mechanisms for a number of the aims can be identified within the Housing Business Centre Plan.

484 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN 2021-2051

The Head of Housing Services and Business Planning explained that the two functions of the HRA Business Plan was to enable Members to approve the objectives and aspirations for the Housing landlord service and to set out and seek approval for the financial plan that will underpin these services.

Furthermore, whilst legally the Council was required to publish a 30 year Business Plan there could only be confidence in some of the assumptions for the first five years due to financial elements such as inflation and the Government's ability to set rents which could significantly impact future finances.

The Head of Housing Services and Business Planning added that the plan included £42m to improve the quality of the Council's properties over the next five years and £25 million to deliver additional affordable homes.

The planned activity has been detailed under 5 themes with the broad operational approach to these, the detail will be incorporated into the annual Business Centre Plan.

- Optimising Income and Efficiencies
- Good Quality Housing
- New Council owned homes
- Review and modernise provision for older tenants
- Well managed neighbourhoods

Resources had been identified within the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan to support two additional posts, for tenant and leaseholder engagement and the development and review of housing policies.

It was felt that the two roles would be sufficient and were accurately graded. The appointments would be joining an existing team who already perform some of the roles in their job description rather than coming into a brand-new role.

The Corporate Head of Housing admitted that the fire safety work might require additional resources in future, however with an abundance of new upcoming legislation the position was currently unclear. The Committee would be kept informed of the need for any additional resources.

In response to a query around providing a minimum of C-grade energy efficiency, a review would be undertaken as part of the Asset Management Plan. The Council could potentially benefit from Government grants that would mean the work could be delivered as part of the Decent Homes standard and not included in the identified £42m.

Responding to queries about what a co-operative approach with residents would look like, the Head of Housing and Business Services confirmed that a large number of events would be held and surveys conducted. An older person's strategy would soon commence, which would be done very much in consultation with residents and be presented to Committee in September 2021.

RESOLVED that –

- i) Housing Committee approved the HRA Business Plan, the objectives identified for the Housing service and noted the assumptions within the plan around rent income growth, bad debt provision, void levels, interest rates etc;**
- ii) Members approved an annual review of the plan, including performance to date and continued validity of its financial assumptions; and**
- iii) Members approved an HRA Supplementary revenue estimate of £84,800 to cover the additional staffing resources.**

485 HOUSING ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Corporate Head of Housing advised that the Asset Management Plan expressed the Council's investment plans over the next five years, and was set into six themes.

- Good quality homes
- New Council homes
- Environmental sustainability
- Properties that are safe where risks are managed
- Investment into retirement living accommodation
- Wider review into assets

Within those themes there would be the development of a Runnymede Quality Standard, which would reflect the decent homes standard, the government's emerging homes standard, along with the Council's aspirations.

Additional resources might need to be identified to support investment into areas not yet mentioned in the plan, such as estate paths and communal walls. However, the plan would be reviewed on an annual basis and Members kept appraised. An update would be provided to Members at Housing Committee in September 2021.

A Member felt that the map for the prudential borrowing limit still had capacity for more building of housing, and whilst the asset management plan was welcomed, there still needed to be more aggression with the Council's plans for building more social housing.

Officers pledged to research the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI), which was a government financial incentive to promote the use of renewable heat and had attractive payback opportunities.

In response to the Council Residents' Association Representative, the Head of Housing Services and Business Planning advised that the initial work planned for IRLs a year ago involving redecorating that was halted due to the pandemic was now expected to be superseded by more structural and wiring work to maximise the technology available. However this remained subject to consultation, and officers would be writing to IRL residents advising them on next steps.

RESOLVED that –

- i) Housing Committee supported the aspirations set out within the Asset Management Plan and the investment identified to support delivery; and**
- ii) Members identified the actions contained within the plan and recognised that they had been translated into actions within the Housing Business Centre Plan 2021/2022.**

486 APPROVAL OF HOUSING UNIT BUSINESS PLAN

The Corporate Head of Housing set out details of the work plan, highlighting aspects of the plan discussed under separate agenda items such as the review of the HRA business plan and asset management plan.

Furthermore, the proposed Corporate key performance indicators were put forward. A new indicator would be introduced advising Members on the length of time to re-let empty Council homes. There would also be additional service indicators around support planning, anti-social behaviour and case management in order to expose more areas of the service to Member scrutiny.

RESOLVED that –

- i) The 2021/22 Housing Business Unit Plan was approved; and**
- ii) Members recommended indicators H1-H8 inclusive and the associated targets were included in the corporate set of KPIs.**

487 STEPDOWN ACCOMMODATION PILOT

The Head of Housing Services and Business Planning advised that the proposed pilot would see the Council participate in a scheme to provide interim accommodation for patients who were “bed blocking” and could be moved to a “step down” situation prior to returning home.

The pilot was fully funded for a year by the ICP, and the proposal would see the Council utilise two self-contained, fully furnished one bed flats within the Floral House Independent Retirement Living scheme.

The Committee was very much in favour of the pilot, although there was slight disappointment that only two beds would be made available as part of the pilot. The

Head of Housing Services and Business Planning confirmed that the intention of the pilot was to confirm the need for the service, and should it be successful there would be the opportunity to increase the number of properties once the pilot concludes.

RESOLVED that –

Members approved either the leasing of two Independent Retirement Living properties to Spelthorne Council or an RBC company as part of a one-year pilot partnership with the Integrated Care Partnership to create “step down” accommodation for patients who no longer need acute medical care and can be discharged to an interim bed in the community with support.

488 UPDATE ON COMMUNICATION WITH THE REGULATOR OF SOCIAL HOUSING

The Head of Housing Technical Services reported that monthly meetings with the Regulator continued, and there was acknowledgment from the Regulator at the previous meeting of the effort put in to achieve compliance with the notice.

Furthermore the compliance monitoring IT had now been fully implemented, providing officers with key information such as asbestos surveys, lift maintenance and electrical certification, which was now over 80%. All outstanding cases had now been issued to contractors. Fire prevention works at Surrey Towers had now commenced.

Members were pleased with the progress made, and following a question from the Committee the Corporate Head of Housing confirmed he would raise the issue about lifting the Notice at the next meeting with the Regulator.

489 KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS, Q3 RESULTS AND CORPORATE KPIs FOR 2021/22

The Head of Housing Services and Business Planning provided the performance information for the quarter ending 31 December 2020, revealing that void performance remained a concern and would continue to be closely monitored.

Whilst rent arrears figures was slightly above target, it was clear that the vast majority of residents had prioritised rent payments despite the impact of the pandemic.

The Head of Housing Services and Business Planning went on to praise the contribution of the Salvation Army in supporting vulnerable adults, and their emergency homeless pods were now in situ for temporary use.

A number of actions relating to FRAs remained outstanding, which were being managed through the day-to-day contractors or tenders for packages of specialist works. The Regulator of Social Housing had been kept informed of developments and was supportive of the timescales involved.

RESOLVED that –

Q3 KPIs results noted, and agreed Corporate Key Performance Indicators for 2021/22 to be reported to Corporate Management Committee.

490 AMENDED DECANT POLICY

Following Housing Committee’s approval of a new Decant Policy in September 2020, the Head of Housing Services and Business Planning reported that a proposed amendment

was required that enabled the use of licences and subsistence payments in order to facilitate major works programmes where some residents may need to leave their homes temporarily.

In response to a Member's concern about whether the subsistence allowance was sufficient, it was confirmed that the figures would be reviewed annually and uplifted where appropriate. It was added that it would be extremely rare for a resident to be decanted to a location that did not have cooking facilities.

RESOLVED that –

- i) The amended Decant Policy enabling the use of Licences to occupy for short term decants was approved by Committee;**
- ii) the daily subsistence allowances of £15 per day per adult and children over 13, and £7.50 per child aged 1 to 12 where a temporary decant accommodation has no cooking facilities were approved; and**
- iii) The level of subsistence payments to be within the Decant Procedure and to be kept under review by the Corporate Head of Housing to ensure they are in line with inflation.**

491 **PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENT WITH REGISTERED PROVIDER**

The Head of Housing and Business Services advised that the HRA required a strategy to manage void homes on part of an estate in New Haw which will facilitate the Council's development plans.

Officers recommended a proposal to lease a tranche of 3-bedroom houses on the estate to a Registered Provider who would carry out the necessary works and then manage and maintain the properties until such time as the Council required vacant possession.

There was currently no strategy for the development of the location, and all options on the future use of the site would be subject to resident consultation.

All occupants of the properties would go through the same process as those who would apply for social housing elsewhere in the borough, meaning that the process would only benefit Runnymede residents.

RESOLVED that –

Members approved the lease of a portfolio of 3-bedroom houses to a Registered Provider to facilitate long term development plans and ensure continued use of family homes for local people until vacant possession is required.

(The meeting ended at 9:47pm)

Chairman

Appendix B

Runnymede Borough Council

HOUSING COMMITTEE

6 April 2021 at 6pm via MS Teams

Members of the Committee present	Councillors J Gracey (Chairman), S Lewis (Vice-Chairman), C Howorth, I Mullens, P Snow and S Whyte Mrs J Hill (Runnymede Council Residents' Association Representative – co-opted non-voting member)
Members of the Committee absent	Councillors M Nuti, A Neathey, P Sohi, S Mackay
Non Members of the Committee present	Councillors J Broadhead, D Cotty, M Cressey, M Kusneraitis, M Maddox, J Olorenshaw, D Whyte and J Wilson were also present.

524 **NOTIFICATION OF CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

The Group mentioned below had notified the Chief Executive of their wish that the change listed below be made to the membership of the Committee. The change was for a fixed period ending on the day after the meeting and thereafter the Councillor removed would be reappointed.

<u>Group</u>	<u>Remove</u>	<u>Appoint instead</u>
Conservative	Cllr J Hulley	Cllr C Howorth

The Chief Executive had given effect to the change to Committee membership in accordance with section 16(2) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

525 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M Nuti.

526 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None declared.

527 **PURCHASE OF LAND**

By resolution of the Committee, the press and public were excluded from the meeting during the consideration of this matter under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that the discussion would be likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information of the description specified in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to Part 1 of the Act.

The Corporate Head of Housing and the Head of Housing Services and Business Planning provided details to Members of an offer accepted for a parcel of land within the

borough that was proposed to be utilised for a combination of affordable rent and shared ownership, the exact specification of which would be worked out further down the line in consultation with tenants.

The offer had been accepted with the caveat that it remained subject to Member approval.

A series of viability assessments had been undertaken, looking at payback, build cost and length of payment.

Outline planning permission had already been approved for the site, and whilst a set number of units had been earmarked, there was potential for this number to be increased as part of the second phase of planning.

Members considered the offer and site to be very good value for money, were grateful for the work undertaken by officers and were pleased to recommend the proposed purchase to Corporate Management Committee.

RESOLVED that –

- i. Members approved the proposed purchase of the site and recommended the same course of action to Corporate Management Committee, which would include a Capital Supplementary Estimate in the HRA budget to cover the purchase and all fees including Stamp Duty and conveyancing costs;**
- ii. Members approved the progression to a Reserve Matters Planning application enabling additional units on the site; and**
- iii. Corporate Management Committee were also requested to note that subsequent amendments to the Capital Programme, the Treasury Management Strategy and the Council's Prudential indicators would be needed to reflect the proposed purchase, and these would be submitted to a future meeting following the closure of the 2020/21 accounts.**

(The meeting ended at 6:59pm)

Chairman

4. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

5. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

If Members have an interest in an item please record the interest on the form circulated with this Agenda and hand it to the Legal Representative or Democratic Services Officer at the start of the meeting. A supply of the form will also be available from the Democratic Services Officer at meetings.

Members are advised to contact the Council's Legal section prior to the meeting if they wish to seek advice on a potential interest.

Members are reminded that a registrable interest includes their appointment by the Council as the Council's representative to an outside body. Membership of an outside body in their private capacity as a trustee, committee member or in another position of influence thereon should also be declared. Any directorship whether paid or unpaid should be regarded as a disclosable pecuniary interest, and declared.

Members who have previously declared interests which are recorded in the Minutes to be considered at this meeting need not repeat the declaration when attending the meeting. Members need take no further action unless the item in which they have an interest becomes the subject of debate, in which event the Member must leave the room if the interest is a disclosable pecuniary interest or other registrable interest and/or the interest could reasonably be regarded as so significant as to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest.

6. PROPOSED CHANGES TO HOUSING ALLOCATIONS SCHEME (HOUSING, ANDY KEFFORD)

Synopsis of report:

To present a reviewed Housing Allocations Policy to replace the existing scheme to ensure that the Council are legally compliant with legislation, make the best use of social housing stock and ensure best practice.

Recommendation:

To approve the new Housing Allocations Policy and timeline for implementation.

1. Context of report

- 1.1 The current Allocations Scheme by which social housing within the local area is accessed was approved by Housing Committee in June 2016. This was amended in February 2017 and this document is the current live policy.
- 1.2 There have been significant changes in legislation, government guidance and housing demographics since 2017, such as the commencement of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The current scheme is out of date and it therefore needs to be reviewed and updated. The current policy does not comply with our legal duties.

2. Report

The Scheme:

- 2.1 Every local authority in England is required to have a Housing Allocations Scheme, this is to meet our statutory obligations, to be fair and transparent, whilst making the best use of limited social housing stock. The Council have a degree of flexibility in how we frame the allocations scheme, so long as it is in accordance with the legislation, government guidance and applies reasonable preference to specified groups.
- 2.2 A report outlining the proposed changes to the Allocations Scheme was presented to this Housing Committee on 6 January 2021 and a Members' workshop was held on 11 February 2021 to discuss these proposals. A period of public consultation took place, and this influenced the decisions made in the new scheme. For example, the proposal to make 'one offer only' to all applicants has not been included within the new scheme because of the consultation. The new Allocations Scheme is attached at Appendix C.
- 2.3 The changes made in the new scheme, as well as the rationale for change, consultation feedback and background statistical data are attached at Appendix D. The changes to the scheme have been made to ensure the Council's new scheme reflects changes in legislation, guidance, and good practice. The new scheme will ensure that we have a comprehensive allocations scheme which reflects how the authority will assess and prioritise high demand from applicants for the limited supply of social housing, to make best use of stock available and deal with urgent housing needs, for example homelessness.

The System:

- 2.4 The implementation of the new Allocations Scheme was targeted for implementation with the commencement of the modules within the Northgate system. The relevant Northgate modules will not be available immediately and are not expected to be ready until the Autumn due to the work required to configure and test the online application and Choice Based lettings system. The Locata system is configured to assess applications under the current scheme and would require significant time and cost to be amended for temporary use.
- 2.5 It is therefore proposed that the new scheme is approved, but with a delayed implementation date so that that the scheme can be configured and tested within the new system prior to “go live” with a reregistration of all applicants
- 2.6 There are parts of the new scheme that can be implemented immediately in the existing system, these are:
- One review
 - Increase from 10 working days to 56 calendar days for reviews
 - Removal of social housing tenant who are ‘adequately’ housed
 - Include a banding for prevention and relief duties
 - All references to homelessness within 28 days, extended to 56 days
 - Qualification for work can be extended to 3 years from 12 months
- 2.7 The Improving Access to Social Housing for Members of the Armed Forces was published on 27 June 2020 in which the Secretary of State strongly encouraged local authorities to exempt from any local connection requirement, divorced or separated spouses or civil partners of Service personnel who need to move out of accommodation provided by the Ministry of Defence. Runnymede implemented this guidance with immediate effect so whilst it has now been incorporated within the new scheme it has been operationally implemented and will continue to be until the full scheme is rolled out within the new IT system.
- 2.8 Whilst it would have been preferable to have implemented the new scheme at the same time as the Northgate system, this delayed approach does have some benefits. For example, anyone that no longer qualifies, such as social housing tenants with no housing need, will be notified that they no longer qualify and have now been removed. This will reduce the volume of work and reviews at the point of a full re-registration once the new system is available.
- 2.9 By implementing the changes above now, we will ensure that the allocations scheme is legally compliant. Delaying the whole implementation of the scheme until the system is ready would leave us open to legal challenge.

3. Policy framework implications

- 3.1 The development of the new Allocations Scheme has been carried out in accordance with the Council’s Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy as well as the Tenancy Strategy, Decant Policy and Equality Strategy.

4. Resource implications

- 4.1 The adoption of the new scheme will require a review of all the current applicants registered. As of 26 May 2021, there are 1175 households waiting for social housing. A

re-registration process will be required to establish if these households remain eligible, to determine if they qualify under the new terms of the policy and to determine what banding they meet in accordance with the new scheme.

- 4.2 The re-registration may require additional resources and a slight shift in priorities across the housing solutions team to ensure the successful re-assessment and registration of these. This has been factored into the housing budget in the event of a small number of overtime requests to achieve this task.

5. **Legal implications**

- 5.1 The legislation governing the provision of an allocation scheme is predominantly defined within the Housing Act 1996 (as amended). A full set of legislation, government guidance and case law that has been considered as part of the new scheme is attached within the scheme at section 2: The Legislative Framework.

6. **Equality implications**

- 6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment Screening has been completed and will be reviewed by the Council's Equalities Group.

7. **Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications**

- 7.1 None

8. **Conclusions**

- 8.1 The current Allocation Scheme is out of date and does not reflect recent legislative changes and needs to be updated.
- 8.2 It is recommended that the new scheme is approved by Housing Committee with a phased implementation in line with the move to the new Northgate system.

(To Resolve)

Background papers

None

Appendix C

Housing Allocations Scheme

July 2021

Runnymede Borough Council
Runnymede Civic Centre
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1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Housing Act 1996 (as amended) requires every local authority to develop and publish an allocation scheme. This document sets out Runnymede Borough Council's Housing Allocation scheme.
- 1.2. In view of this demand for social housing in the Borough of Runnymede, the Council believes that priority should be given to those applicants who have a real and enduring commitment to the Borough and that this will also help build a stronger local community. The Council believes that having a local residence connection, whether this is achieved through residing in the Borough, working here or by reason of some other circumstance provided for in this Scheme, will help achieve those aims.
- 1.3. The scheme is designed to outline who is eligible and qualifies to register for an allocation of social housing. There is significant demand for social housing in Runnymede and not everyone will be entitled to a social home.
- 1.4. We have developed our scheme to give preference to those groups with the greatest level of need to move, as set out in legislation. The scheme defines the priority awarded based on each individual case and sets out the procedure we will follow when allocating social homes to applicants.
- 1.5. Acceptance onto the register is not an immediate housing solution and does not guarantee an offer of accommodation. If urgent housing assistance is required, the applicant will need to contact the Council's Housing Solutions Team.

Aims of the scheme

- 1.6. This Allocation scheme has been devised to ensure that access to social housing supports the corporate strategic aims of the Council, reflects current legislation and takes into account the limited supply of social housing in the borough.
- 1.7. The Allocation Scheme aims to treat all applicants for social housing in a fair, equitable and transparent manner. The scheme is designed to offer most applicants some degree of choice in the accommodation that they express a preference for, such as the location. However, this must be balanced with the needs of all applicants, the need to create mixed communities and the need for the Council to make the best use of the limited social housing stock.
- 1.8. The specific aims of the scheme are to:
 - Meet statutory obligations
 - Ensure the best use of social housing stock
 - Ensure social housing fraud is addressed and dealt with robustly
 - Meet the aims of the Council's Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Strategy

- Provide housing applicants with a fair and transparent system by which they are prioritised for housing
- Promote successful and sustainable tenancies
- Ensure that priority is given to those with the greatest need for social housing
- Promote and develop sustainable communities

2. The Legislative Framework

2.1 The main pieces of legislation underpinning the allocation of social housing is the Housing Act 1996, Part VI (as amended), the Equality Act 2010 and the Localism Act 2011. The legislation requires Local Authorities to publish an allocation scheme for determining priorities and defining the procedures to be followed in allocating social housing. The Council may allocate housing in such a manner as it considers appropriate, subject to the specific provisions in Part VI of the Housing Act 1996.

2.2 In accordance with S.159 (4B) of the Act (as amended by the Localism Act 2011) the allocation scheme includes transfer tenants with reasonable preference. The scheme has been written with consideration for the legislation as well as the Government's code of guidance 'Allocation of Accommodation: Guidance for Local Housing Authorities in England (2020)' and 'Providing social housing for local people: Statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England (2013)'.

2.3 In accordance with S.166A (3) to (8) Housing Act 1996, the Council will give 'Reasonable Preference' to people with high levels of assessed housing need. The scheme has been developed with regards to these provisions, as well as the following statutory regulations:

- Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002, Housing and Regeneration Act 2008, Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and other relevant legislation.
- Allocation of Housing (Procedure) Regulations 1997
- Allocation of Housing (England) Regulations 2002
- Children's Act 2004, sections 10 and 11
- Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (England) Regulations 2006
- Housing Allocations – Members of the Armed forces 2009
- Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012
- Housing Act 1996 (Additional Preference for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012
- The Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Right to Move) (England) Regulations 2015

- Improving access to social housing for victims of domestic abuse in refuges or other types of temporary accommodation statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England, 2018
- Improving access to social housing for members of the Armed Forces Statutory Guidance 2020
- The Immigration and Social Security Coordination (EU Withdrawal) Act 2020
- Domestic Abuse Act 2021

2.4 In framing and reviewing this Scheme, arrangements have been made under which the views and recommendations of Surrey County Council have been sought, considered and where appropriate implemented having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young persons.

2.5 The Council has also had regard to existing case law, the Council's Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Strategy, the Council's Tenancy Strategy and the Armed Forces Corporate Covenant when devising this scheme.

Definition of an Allocation

2.6 For the purposes of Part VI of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended), a housing authority allocates accommodation when it:

- Selects a person to be a secure or introductory tenant of accommodation held by that authority
- Nominates a person to be a secure or introductory tenant of accommodation held by another housing authority
- Nominates a person to be an assured tenant of accommodation held by a Private Registered Provider

2.7 The term 'assured tenant' includes a person with an assured shorthold tenancy. 'Secure tenant' includes a person with a flexible tenancy granted under s.107A of the Housing Act 1985¹.

Additional Preference

2.8 The Council can give additional preference to particular groups of people who have a reasonable preference, if they have urgent housing needs. The Code of Guidance for the Allocation of Social Housing sets out examples that the authority should consider, for example those who need to move urgently because:

- of a life-threatening illness or sudden disability
- they are severely overcrowded, and this poses a serious health hazard
- they are homeless as a result of violence or threats of violence

¹ Inserted by s.154 of the Localism Act 2011

Deciding between applicants

- 2.9 When prioritising between applicants who fall within reasonable or additional preference categories, legislation sets out three factors that may be considered by the local authority when creating its allocation scheme. These are:
- a) the financial resources available to a person to meet her/his housing needs - for example the Council can give less priority to an owner occupier or an applicant who is financially able to secure alternative accommodation
 - b) any behaviour of a person or a member of her/his household which affects her/his suitability to be a tenant – for example the Council could give less priority to an applicant who has breached their tenancy agreement through their antisocial behaviour.
 - c) any Local Connection (within the meaning of the homelessness legislation (s. 199 of the Housing Act 1996))

3. Who is Eligible for Social Housing

- 3.1 The Council must consider if the application is 'eligible' for an allocation of social housing in accordance with the legislation. Eligibility will be assessed at both the initial application stage and again when considering an applicant for an allocation of housing.

Ineligible

- 3.2 Any applicant regarded by the Council as ineligible to join the Housing Register because they are subject to immigration control or not habitually resident, will be given written notification of the decision, outlining the reason for it and the facts on which the decision was made. The applicant has the right to request a review of this decision, see section 14.
- 3.3 The statutory provisions of the legislation set out that the Council must exclude from their allocation scheme people who are ineligible for social housing. A person may not be allocated accommodation under Part VI if he or she is a person from abroad who is ineligible for an allocation under s.160ZA of the Housing Act 1996. There are two categories for the purposes of s.160ZA:
- i. a person subject to immigration control - such a person is not eligible for an allocation of accommodation unless he or she comes within a class prescribed in regulations made by the Secretary of State (s.160ZA(2)), and
 - ii. a person from abroad other than a person subject to immigration control - regulations may provide for other descriptions of persons from abroad who, although not subject to immigration control, are to be treated as ineligible for an allocation of accommodation (s.160ZA(4)).

3.4 Persons from abroad are not eligible to join the Housing Register who are:

- Subject to immigration control and have no resource to public funds; or
- Excluded by regulations made by the Secretary of State; or
- Not habitually resident in the United Kingdom (UK); or
- Who are required to leave the UK by the Secretary of State

3.5 Specifically, the Secretary of State has determined that the following groups are not eligible to join the Council's Housing Register because of their immigration status:

- A person registered with the Home Office as an asylum seeker
- A visitor to the UK (including overseas students) with limited leave to enter or remain in the UK granted on the basis that they will not have recourse to public funds
- A person who has a valid leave to remain in the UK, which carries no limitation or condition and who is not habitually resident in the Common Travel Area. The Common Travel Area is the UK, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man and the Republic of Ireland.
- A sponsored person who has been in this country less than five years (from date of entry or date of sponsorship, whichever is the later) and whose sponsor(s) is still alive.
- A person who is a national of a European Union (EU) country that is subject to immigration control.
- A person who is a national of a non-European Economic Area country that has ratified the European Convention on Social and Medical Assistance (ECSMA) and/or the European Social Charter, but is not lawfully present in the UK (i.e. does not have leave to enter or remain or is an asylum seeker 11 with a temporary admission) and/or is not habitually resident in the Common Travel Area.
- A person who is in the UK illegally or who has overstayed their leave to remain.

Habitual Residence Test

3.6 Applicants who have been resident in the Common Travel Area continuously for the two years prior to their housing application are likely to be habitually resident. The term 'habitual residence' is intended to convey a degree of permanence in the person's residence in the Common Travel Area. Where two years continuous residency have not been established (visits abroad for holidays or to visit relatives may be disregarded), the Allocations Team will need to make further enquiries to determine whether the applicant is habitually resident.

3.7 **Where two persons apply jointly for housing, at least one of the applicants must be eligible.**

Eligible

- 3.8 The regulations setting out which classes of persons from abroad are eligible for an allocation of social housing are the [Allocation of Housing and Homelessness \(Eligibility\) \(England\) Regulations 2006 \(SI 2006 No.1294\)](#) ('The Eligibility Regulations').

The following categories of persons do not require leave to enter or remain in the UK:

- i. British citizens
- ii. Certain Commonwealth citizens with a right of abode in the UK
- iii. Irish citizens, who are not subject to immigration control in the UK because the Republic of Ireland forms part of the Common Travel Area with the UK which allows free movement
- iv. EEA nationals, and their family members, who have established citizens' rights in accordance with Part 2 of the Withdrawal Agreement, i.e. those who were residents and exercised a right to reside in the UK derived from European Union law or any provision under section 2(2) of the European Communities Act 1972, and those who were frontier working, before 31 December 2020. Whether an EEA national (or family member) has exercised a particular right to reside in the UK or rights to be treated as a frontier worker will depend on their circumstances, at that particular time. For example, whether the EEA national is, for the purposes of the [Immigration \(European Economic Area\) Regulations 2016](#) ('The EEA Regulations') (as preserved by the savings provisions) a jobseeker, a worker, a self-employed person and so on.
- v. Persons who are exempt from immigration control under the Immigration Acts, including diplomats and their family members based in the UK, and some military personnel.

Joint tenancies

- 3.9 Under section 160ZA (1)(b), a housing authority must not grant a joint tenancy to two or more people if any one of them is a person from abroad who is ineligible. However, where two or more people apply and one of them is eligible, the authority may grant a sole tenancy to the person who is eligible. In addition, while ineligible family members must not be granted a tenancy, they may be taken into account in determining the size of accommodation which is to be allocated.

Existing Social Housing Tenants

- 3.10 The eligibility provisions do not apply to applicants who are already secure or introductory tenants or assured tenants of a Private Registered Provider.

4. Qualification

- 4.1 This section sets out the criteria that must be met for an applicant to qualify for social housing. The decision on whether a person is a qualifying person will be made by the Allocations Team. Any decision as to whether a person is a qualifying person has a statutory right of review, see section 14.
- 4.2 To be a qualifying person to join the Housing Register, the applicant must:
- i) Be eligible for an allocation of social housing (see Section 2)
 - ii) Be over 16 years of age (and, in the case of 16 or 17 year olds, non-dependent)
 - iii) Have a local connection to Runnymede, as defined in section 4.3
 - iiii) To not be disqualified, as defined in section 4.36

Qualifying persons

4.3 Local Connection

- 4.4 An applicant can only join the Housing Register if they have a local connection to the Borough of Runnymede. A local connection means that the applicant meets one of the following groups:

a) Residence

Those where any permanent member of the applicant's household has a local connection with the Borough of Runnymede because s/he has lived in the Borough for the last three years consecutively

In calculating 3 years, the Council may disregard any period or periods together not exceeding 3 months in total at the date of application if it has reasonable grounds for believing that such period or periods of absence were forced upon the applicant through no fault or choice of their own.

b) Working

Those where any permanent adult member of the applicant's household is working or making some other significant community contribution, such as unpaid or voluntary work equivalent in terms of hours to paid work (as defined below), or being a recognised carer for an elderly or disabled adult or child, in the Runnymede Borough, which means that s/he:

- i) has been and is in continuous employment for more than three years (although not necessarily with the same employer), or

ii) has been and is in continuous self-employment for more than 3 years

Employment and self-employment mean in paid full-time or part-time employment for 16 hours per week or more. Where working hours fluctuate, an average will be taken over the last 12-month period. The main place of employment and activity must be within the Borough of Runnymede. It is not sufficient for example for only the head office to be based in Runnymede.

c) Unique health or welfare need

Where any permanent member of the applicant's household has a connection with the Borough of Runnymede because they have a current and ongoing unique welfare and/or health reason for living in the Borough which can be evidenced by professionals supporting the household currently.

Unique means that the care/support is unique to specific health services in the Borough of Runnymede, and cannot be provided anywhere else, including where the applicant currently lives. Support from friends or relatives living in the Borough is not a ground for exceptional need if support is already, or can be, achieved where the applicant currently resides, whether through professional/statutory services, or informal support which may involve travelling. Exceptional and specific health care will have to be evidenced by health professionals currently engaged with the applicant and will be assessed by the Independent Medical Advisor. This ground is meant for exceptional and unique circumstances only.

4.5 In 4.4 (a-c) above, a permanent member of the household means someone who can evidence that they reside with an applicant on a full-time basis, as set out in section 9, and has no legal interest in another property, either in the private or social sector. This will need to be evidenced through required verification, and where not supplied will result in the household member not being included on an application until such time that they fulfil the requirements of being a permanent member.

Situations where no local connection will be established

4.6 An applicant will not establish a Local Connection with the Borough of Runnymede if s/he is in one of the following classes:

i. Where the applicant has been placed in temporary accommodation in the Borough of Runnymede by another Local Authority in exercising their duties under homelessness legislation, or in discharging their homelessness duty. This includes all types of tenure, including bed & breakfast accommodation for any length of time.

ii. Where an applicant has been placed in a bail hostel or other offenders' interim supported scheme in the Borough of Runnymede.

- iii. Where an applicant is a full or part-time student studying in the Borough of Runnymede, from out of area, and without any other Local Connection qualification.
- iv. Where an applicant has been placed into supported accommodation within the Borough of Runnymede from another local authority/agency, where no Local Connection to this borough existed at the time of the placement. A Local Connection to the Borough of Runnymede will not be established during the supported placement.
- v. Where an applicant has a court order for a child residency arrangement with a parent or other responsible adult, but where they do not fulfil the Local Connection criteria in this scheme. The Council is not bound by court orders made in respect of child residency orders.
- vi. Where an applicant has been admitted to hospital within the Borough of Runnymede, and where no other Local Connection qualification criteria is met. This includes where an applicant is discharged from the Abraham Cowley Unit at St Peter's Hospital.
- vii. Where an applicant is in any other interim accommodation that is not a recognised supported accommodation scheme operated by partners working with the Council under contracted arrangements.
- viii. Where an applicant is residing in any type of holiday let, for example a bed and breakfast or temporary let for holiday purposes.

Exceptions to local connection qualification

- 4.7 Exceptions may include, but not exhaustively, the situations described below. Individual cases will be considered by the Allocations Team and documentary evidence may be required.

British Armed Forces

- 4.8 British Armed Forces personnel who fall into categories below are exempt from the local connection qualifying criteria:
- Armed Forces personnel who are currently serving in the armed forces and those who have served in the armed forces in the five years preceding their application for an allocation of social housing, except for those who have been dishonourably discharged.
 - Bereaved spouses or civil partners of those serving in the regular forces where the bereaved spouse or civil partner will shortly no longer be entitled to reside or is no longer entitled to reside in Ministry of Defence accommodation following the death of their service spouse or partner.

- Existing or former members of the reserve forces who are suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is attributable (wholly or partly) to their service.
- Divorced, separated spouses or civil partners of those serving in the regular forces living in armed force accommodation provided by the Ministry of Defence who will shortly be no longer entitled to reside or are no longer entitled to reside in accommodation.

4.9 The Council requires proof of Armed Forces status. This proof should be official confirmation of current employment, discharge papers, or other proof such as confirmation provided by the Royal British Legion.

4.10 The definition of 'regular' and 'reserve' forces will reflect the definition set out in section 374 of the Armed Forces Act 2006.

Applicants seeking Independent Retirement Living/Sheltered Housing

4.11 Some applicants seeking independent retirement living accommodation may be exempt from the local connection qualifying criteria.

4.12 Single applicants aged 55 and over, and couples where the youngest person is aged 55 and over, who do not meet the qualification criteria as set out in section 8.25 – 8.35, but who have a family member that has lived in the borough for the last three continuous years, will be able to join the Housing Register. These applicants will only be considered for independent retirement / sheltered housing and will not be considered for any other accommodation. The age to qualify for most Independent Retirement Living properties in the borough is 60 with a small number of properties accessible at 55.

4.13 A family member for these purposes means a mother, father, brother, sister or adult son or daughter. Other family members such as step-parents, grandparents, grandchildren, aunts or uncles may be considered where there is evidence of a sufficiently close link in the form of frequent contact, commitment or dependency. This will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

4.14 All applicants who are accepted onto the Housing Register under this criterion will be placed into band E, regardless of individual housing need. An applicant will only qualify for a different banding once they satisfy the local connection criteria as set out in section 4.3

The Right to Move

4.15 The Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Right to Move) (England) Regulations 2015 states that Local Connection criteria must not be applied to existing social tenants who seek to move from another local authority district

in England and who have a need to move for work related reasons to avoid hardship.

- 4.16 Applicants without a qualifying local connection as set out in 4.3, that wish to join the Housing Register in Runnymede are able to do so, if they can evidence that they are a social tenant that needs to move (as opposed to a wish to move) and that failure to meet that need would result in hardship.
- 4.17 The work undertaken (or offered) cannot be short-term, marginal in nature or ancillary to work in another district. Voluntary work is also excluded. The Council will need to consider whether work is regular or intermittent. Contracts of less than 12 months may be considered to be short term and therefore excluded. Work of less than 16 hours a week would be considered marginal in nature. The level of earnings is also relevant. An apprenticeship undertaken as part of an Apprenticeship Agreement will qualify as 'work' so long as the contract is for at least 12 months.
- 4.18 The Council will consider the following factors when establishing if there is a need to move:
- The distance and/or travel time between work and home
 - Is the applicant able to take up an offer of work within Runnymede, or continue to work in Runnymede from their existing home
 - The availability of transport
 - Any medical condition or childcare affected if the applicant could not move
 - The nature of the work and whether similar opportunities were available more locally
 - The length of the employment contract
 - If failure to move would lessen opportunities to improve the applicant's employment circumstances e.g. promotion
 - Evidence of contract and genuine intention to take up an offer of work
 - The type of hardship and significant negative impact if the applicant were not to take up the offer of work or continued work
- 4.19 Verification will be required to evidence that the work or job offer is genuine and therefore, the following documents will be required:
- Employment contract
 - Formal offer letter
 - Acceptance letter
 - Wage slips and bank statements
 - Tax and benefit information
 - Location of work i.e. homebased/office based
- 4.20 The Council also reserves the right to remove an application with Right to Move priority. This would apply where the applicant has either not bid for a property within three months of the priority being awarded or has unreasonably refused an offer of accommodation following a successful bid within three months of priority being awarded.

Care leavers

- 4.21 Care leavers who have lived in the borough continuously before they were provided with accommodation by Surrey Children Services. Some of this residency must have occurred before the age of 16 years. Supporting documentation must be provided.
- 4.22 Applicants who are young people, aged 16 to 21 years old, who have been placed in supported housing outside of the Borough of Runnymede, will retain their Local Connection in order to assist them with 'move-on' rehousing options. The placement will have been made by the appropriate agency and cannot be an informal arrangement. This must be notified to the Council at the start of the placement and any changes notified also.

Homeless Prevention

- 4.23 Where an applicant has a defined local connection as set out in section 4.25 and they have been assisted by the Council with privately rented accommodation outside of the borough, through a rent deposit / rent in advance scheme endorsed by the Council (to prevent homelessness), they will be assessed as retaining a local connection whilst they remain in that accommodation.
- 4.24 Where an applicant is placed in supported housing (to prevent homelessness), either in borough or not, by the Council and/or other public agencies such as the Community Mental Health Team, they will be assessed as having a local connection only where they met the following local connection qualification at the time of placement.
- 4.25 The local connection qualification at time of placement is:
- The applicant has resided in the Runnymede Borough for six out of the last 12 months or three out of the last five years
 - Or the applicant has a mother / father / brother / sister resident in the borough continuously for the last five years and still resident
 - Or the applicant is employed in the borough.
- 4.26 Any rehousing options will be determined by the outcome of the Part VII homelessness enquiries and will not automatically result in the offer of social housing. Where no housing duty arises under Part VII, the Housing Register application will be removed. Where a housing duty arises under Part VII, the application will be handled under the Assisted Choice for Homeless Households Scheme detailed under section 12.1 -12.10 of this scheme.

Domestic Abuse

- 4.27 The Council recognises that victims of domestic violence and abuse often suffer physical and/or mental health issues as a result of their experiences and the medical assessment will take these fully into account.
- 4.28 Where, for example, applicants are fleeing domestic abuse or other serious violence for whom returning to their area of origin would place them at serious risk, and there is third party evidence that can be verified of the risk for example from a statutory agency such as the Police, Probation, Adult Social Care and Children's Services. The information will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and a decision made on whether the exemption on the Local Connection rules should be granted.
- 4.29 Domestic violence and abuse include any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to, psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional abuse.

Witness Protection Scheme

- 4.30 Applicants referred through the Witness Protection Scheme do not need to fulfil the local connection criteria. Proof is required to show compliance with other local qualification criteria on income, rent, Council Tax and anti-social behaviour.

Exceptional Circumstance

- 4.31 Where the applicant provides documentary evidence (that can be verified) that they have an exceptional circumstance which establishes a local connection to the borough. The decision and reasons on whether a local connection has been established will be recorded.

Assessing Reasonable Preference without fulfilling the Qualification Criteria

- 4.32 The Council's Allocations Scheme must give Reasonable Preference to applicants who fall into the categories as set out under the Legal Context section at the beginning of this document, for example those owed a part VII duty by any local authority. The Council cannot automatically reject an applicant who does not qualify under Local Connection criteria but who may still fall into a Reasonable Preference group for housing need.
- 4.33 Applicants who apply to Runnymede without a local connection but consider that the reasonable preference criteria may apply, can indicate this on the application form.
- 4.34 Applicants who are owed a reasonable preference but who otherwise have no particular housing need, or who are statutorily homeless and have been

provided with suitable temporary accommodation, will generally be awarded Band E but may be considered for a discretionary uplift.

4.35 A Senior Officer has the power, to be exercised on a case-by-case basis, to award a discretionary uplift by which an applicant normally falling within Band E is to be placed in a higher band. This power may only be exercised:

(a) where the Senior Officer is satisfied that it is in the Council's financial or other strategic interests to award a discretionary uplift, or

(b) otherwise in exceptional circumstances. Exceptionality is to be judged for these purposes by comparison with the circumstances of others applying to the Council for rehousing and any other factor the Senior Officer considers relevant.

Disqualified Persons

4.36 Subject to exceptions (granted by a Senior Officer on the basis of exceptional or unforeseen circumstances), only an applicant with a local connection, or where a local connection exemption applies, can be a qualifying person.

4.37 This section sets out the criteria that will apply to all applicants, regardless of whether they had previously met the qualification criteria above. This could result in the applicant not being considered a qualifying person and therefore unable to join or remain the Housing Register. This may in exceptional circumstances be waived by a Senior Officer.

Applicants living outside of the UK

4.38 Applicants living outside of the UK will not qualify to join the Housing Register. Applicants who are eligible by virtue of their immigration status who are seeking accommodation in the UK, and who are likely to qualify for housing in Runnymede should seek advice on their housing options prior to their arrival in the UK.

Financial resources

4.39 Only applicants with a net income that does not exceed the thresholds below will be allowed to join the Runnymede Housing Register:-

i. Single or couple households with a household net income of £30,000 or more per year

ii. Family households with a household net income of £50,000 or more per year

- 4.40 For the avoidance of doubt, a family household is defined as a household that is not a single person or a couple. A household income will take into account the income of all household members, including non-dependents. The Council wishes to recognise the difference in applicants supporting dependents and those not supporting dependents within their households. Income will also include all sources of income for the household, including (but not limited to) benefits, grants, student finance and earned income.
- 4.41 These income ranges will be reviewed periodically in line with Central Government Directive and legislation.

Property ownership

- 4.42 The Code of Guidance for Allocations recommends that local authorities should avoid allocating social housing to people who already own their own homes. This will apply and only in exceptional circumstances will a Senior Officer exercise their discretion to allow an applicant onto the Housing Register.
- i. Applicants, either jointly or solely, who own property either in the UK or abroad which they could reasonably be expected to reside in or liquidate to resolve their own housing difficulties.
- ii. Applicants who have exercised the Right to Buy and have disposed, gifted, sold the property, will be disqualified for five years from the date of disposal, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Assets / capital / savings

- 4.43 All applicants regardless of tenure, with capital / savings / investments in excess of £16,000. This is in line with DWP criteria for eligibility for Housing Benefit. An exception will be made for transferring tenants downsizing their current accommodation in circumstances where such accommodation would become available to the Council for reletting.
- 4.44 Separate procedures apply for applicants seeking Independent Retirement Living who are over 60 years of age. Applicants who are over 60 years of age are able to have assets of up to £55,000.
- 4.45 Those applying for extra care housing are exempt from the £16,000 assets threshold as they can have up to £23,250 in savings. An applicant with this amount in savings or less is eligible to receive financial support towards their care.

Social housing tenants without an identified housing need / on a probationary tenancy

- 4.46 Applicants who are already suitably housed in social housing without an identified housing need according to this scheme will not be able to join the Runnymede Housing Register. This applies to Runnymede Council tenants and tenants of Registered Providers of social housing.
- 4.47 All applicants who are on probationary or introductory tenancy are disqualified from joining the Housing Register except in exceptional circumstances.

Behaviour – deception and fraud

- 4.48 Those where the applicant is seeking, or has previously sought, to obtain accommodation by making a false or misleading statement or by withholding relevant information or by failing to inform the Council of any material change in circumstances. These applications will be referred to the Council's Corporate Fraud Team for full investigation and may lead to prosecution.
- 4.49 Those where the applicant has an unspent conviction (under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974) for housing or welfare benefit related fraud.
- 4.50 Those where the applicant has obtained any tenancy by deception and/or tenancy fraud i.e. subletting a social home without permission. All applications will be referred to the Council's Corporate Fraud Team who will undertake investigations, which may lead to prosecution.
- 4.51 In all cases, applicants will be excluded for a minimum period of 5 years. Applicants who have been convicted of fraud or deception will be disqualified from the Housing Register indefinitely.

Behaviour – anti-social or criminal behaviour

- 4.52 Applicants, including members of their household, who are engaging in anti-social behaviour (ASB) or criminal activity or where there is evidenced ASB or criminal activity in the last 12 months from the date of application and where improvement cannot be evidenced by professionals engaged with the applicant or applicant's household. There is no time limit for disqualification on ASB grounds and the Council will seek evidence of continuing behaviour improvement before considering a new application.
- 4.53 Applicants who have an unspent conviction (under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974) where the Council assesses that the nature of an ex-offender's conviction may make them unsuitable to be a tenant. The Offender Manager will be required to provide information, including offence details and engagement with probation services, so that an assessment can be made. All applications will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Where the Council assesses that an applicant is unsuitable to be a tenant, the applicant will be disqualified from the Housing Register until their conviction is spent.

- 4.54 Applicants, including members of their household, who have engaged in unacceptable housing related conduct that makes the applicant unsuitable to be a tenant. The following is a non-exhaustive list of examples:
- a. Anti-social behaviour
 - b. Illegal or immoral behaviour, including involvement in substance misuse
 - c. Threats of and / or use of violence
 - d. Racial abuse / violence
 - e. Domestic abuse / violence
 - f. Hate crime
- 4.55 There is no time limit for disqualification on these grounds and the Council will seek evidence of continuing behaviour improvement before considering a new application.

Behaviour – poor housing related conduct

- 4.56 Applicants who have been served a formal warning or a notice due to breaching the terms of a tenancy, whether social housing or private rented, within the past five years. Evidence from previous landlords / agencies will be considered. Applicants will be disqualified from the Housing Register for five years from the date of the breach.

Housing-related debt

- 4.57 Applicants who have a housing-related debt of over £100, whether under a social housing or private tenure. A non-exhaustive list of debt includes:
- i. any outstanding rent owed to a current or former landlord
 - ii. any sundry debt owed to Runnymede Council, for example rechargeable repairs or funds issued to applicants for former rent bond deposits and rent in advance
 - iii. any debts owed due to an overpayment of Housing Benefit
 - iv. any arrears of Council Tax owed to any Local Authority
- 4.58 Applicants will be disqualified until the debt is satisfied, except in the most exceptional circumstances that can be evidenced and will only be approved by a senior officer.

Households under a duty from another Local Authority

- 4.59 Applicants placed in the Borough of Runnymede by another Local Authority in exercising their duties under Part VI or Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, except where reasonable preference must be given to those owed a Part VII duty under s.166A(3) by any local authority.

Worsening of circumstances

- 4.60 Applicants who give up a home that they owned, rented, shared, or had rights to but chose to leave or dispose of within 5 years of an application being made. This includes 'gifting' a home to friends and/or relatives, both within and outside the UK, where they could have reasonably been expected to reside, or to sell, using the proceeds to resolve housing difficulties. Housing advice should always be sought before giving up a property or rights to a property. Applicants will be disqualified from the Housing Register for five years from the date that the applicant gave up their home.
- 4.61 Applicants who have given up a social housing tenancy within the past five years. This was not due to unaffordability / violence / threats of violence / harassment / anti-social behaviour / domestic abuse / hate crime, or any other similar danger to life and welfare. If the applicant does give such a reason for giving up their tenancy, this will need to be clearly evidenced by bank statements and/or professionals engaged with the applicant. Evidence from the previous social landlord will also be considered. Applicants will be disqualified from the Housing Register for five years from the date that the applicant gave up their social tenancy.
- 4.62 In sections 4.60-4.61, this includes giving up accommodation due to relationship breakdown.
- 4.63 Applicants who have disposed of capital, savings or an asset in value in excess of £16,000 within 5 years of the date of their application which could reasonably be expected to use to resolve their housing difficulty. This includes transferring money into children or a family members bank accounts or gifting.
- 4.64 Applicants who deliberately overcrowd their home, either with or without the objective of obtaining priority for social housing. Applicants will be disqualified from the Housing Register for five years from the date that the applicant overcrowded themselves.
- 4.65 Applicants who deliberately move to a home which was clearly unaffordable, either with or without with the objective of obtaining priority for social housing.
- 4.66 Applicants will be disqualified from the Housing Register for five years from the date that the applicant moved into the unaffordable home.

5. Who can apply

Applicants aged 16 or 17 years

- 5.1 Applicants need to be at least 16 years of age, and not dependent on a parent or other guardian, to be accepted onto the Housing Register, provided that they are eligible and qualify. However, their application will need to be jointly assessed by the Council and Surrey County Council's Children's Services or Youth Support Service before an offer of accommodation can be made. A

suitable guarantor will need to be identified if the young person is offered a tenancy who will hold the tenancy in trust until the applicant is 18 years of age.

Joint applications

- 5.2 Joint applications can be made by married couples or partners or civil partnerships. Siblings who are over 16 years of age can also apply jointly if the Council decides this to be a reasonable household, see section 9.2 – 9.7. The Council will not accept any other form of joint application.

Applications from Members of the Council, staff members and their relatives

- 5.3 Any application to the Housing Register from Members, employees of the Council or associated persons must disclose their status/relationship on the application form. These applications will be assessed in the usual way, but allocation of housing will require specific approval from the Head of Housing.

One application only

- 5.4 Applicants can only be part of one household and will only be accepted on one application.

6. Fraud

- 6.1 The Council takes its responsibility to make proper use of public resources very seriously and all applications are investigated to ensure assessments and decisions are accurate. The Council will therefore verify applications and the supporting information that has been submitted.
- 6.2 The Council takes a strong approach to dealing with fraudulent applications and works in partnership with the National Fraud Initiative (NFI) to identify illegitimate applications.
- 6.3 Applicants who own property and who rent that property out will be expected to reclaim the property under lawful process so they can re-occupy. This will apply to properties that are owned outright, gifted to an applicant or still under a mortgage loan process and to properties where an applicant's family may currently be residing.

False or misleading information

- 6.4 It is the duty of the applicant to bring any material change in their circumstances, which might affect either their entitlement to rehousing by the Council, or their priority for rehousing, to the attention of their Housing Officer. If the applicant is unsure whether a change in circumstances is material or not, they should discuss this with their Housing Officer.

- 6.5 It is a criminal offence if an applicant or anyone acting on their behalf, knowingly or recklessly makes a false statement, withholds information or fails to disclose a change of circumstances relevant to an application.
- 6.6 Where an applicant is found to have given false information, their application will be removed, and they will be disqualified from re-joining the Housing Register for a minimum of 5 years. In addition, where an applicant has been convicted of fraud, they will be disqualified indefinitely. Where a fraudulent application is detected, the Council may consider initiating criminal proceedings to prosecute.
- 6.7 If an applicant obtains social housing by deception, the Council or registered provider landlord may seek possession of a tenancy granted as a result of a false statement.

Notifying the Council of a suspected fraudulent approach

- 6.8 If a member of the public is aware or suspects that an applicant may have withheld information or provided false or misleading information, then they should notify the Council's Fraud Team by:

Email: fraud@runnymede.gov.uk

Phone: 01932 830821

7. How to apply

- 7.1 Applicants must be eligible (section 3) and qualify (section 4) in order to be accepted onto the Housing Register. For information on how social housing tenants can apply for a transfer, please see section 7.7 – 7.15.

Registration process

- 7.2 All applications to join the Housing Register must be made online through the Council's Housing Online Portal with no exception. Advocates can apply on an applicant's behalf with their permission.
- 7.3 The Council will assist those who are unable to complete the online application form, either over the telephone, by helping the applicant use the computer in the Civic Centre reception area or making a home visit in exceptional circumstances.
- 7.4 Online registration will include a pre-assessment process. If an applicant is ineligible to access the Housing Register or if they do not qualify in line with this scheme, they will be signposted to alternative housing options.
- 7.5 Once pre-assessment is complete, should the applicant be eligible and a qualifying person, they will be asked to watch a **Housing Register video** and then continue with the rest of the form. Applicants can complete the Medical

Self-Assessment Form at the end of the application form if there is a medical condition or disability the applicant would like considered.

- 7.6 At the point of application to the Housing Register, applicants do not need to provide any documentation unless requested to do so. See section 11.37-40 for further details.

Options for existing Social Housing tenants

Runnymede Borough Council Tenants

Applying for a Transfer

- 7.7 Existing tenants of the Council can apply to the Housing Register for a transfer by creating a new application through their housing online portal, where their needs for re-housing will be considered.
- 7.8 Tenants cannot apply for a transfer if they have an introductory/starter tenancy. Discretion may be used in exceptional circumstances, with the decision taken by a Senior Officer.
- 7.9 To be accepted onto the register, tenants will need to demonstrate that they have an identified housing need and therefore a need to move. As with all other applications to the register, the Council will assess whether the application falls into one of the reasonable preference categories. If the tenant does not, then the application will be refused, and advice will be given on other housing options.
- 7.10 Tenants applying to the Housing Register for a transfer will not need to meet the qualifying criteria set out in Section 4. This means that no assessment of local connection will be made.
- 7.11 Tenants will be subject to the disqualification criteria as set out in Section 4, exceptional circumstances will be considered by a Senior Officer. Therefore, tenants who have housing related debt or who have significantly breached the terms of their tenancy may be disqualified from joining the register. For further detail on the disqualification criteria, please see section 4.
- 7.12 Tenants who are accepted onto the Housing Register can bid for suitable properties advertised in the Council's Choice Based Lettings Scheme. There may be occasions when a direct offer of accommodation will be made, for example if the tenant requires a specific type of property i.e. due to their disability.
- 7.13 A request for a transfer can also be refused if the Council considers that the tenant has not satisfactorily maintained their current accommodation or has caused significant damage to it as evidenced by formal warnings and/or notice. The Council may make this decision as part of the initial assessment of the application, following information provided by the Housing &

Neighbourhood Services Team. The tenant will therefore be disqualified from joining the register.

- 7.14 The decision to refuse a transfer can also be taken following a property inspection visit to the tenant's home, after the tenant has placed a shortlisted bid on an advertised property. The tenant will then be by-passed for this accommodation if their home is in poor condition. The application will be placed on hold for an initial period of three months, to allow time for the tenant's home to be brought up to standard.
- 7.15 In all cases, the Council will consider the vulnerability of the tenant and work in partnership with other services to offer support.

Local letting plan

- 7.16 Tenants may be invited to join the register if there is a local lettings plan in place which could be relevant to them. See section 11.15 for local letting plans.

Tenants under-occupying their homes

- 7.17 Priority will be given to those tenants on the Housing Register who are under-occupying their home and would like to transfer to smaller accommodation. These tenants are referred to as 'downsizers' and are placed into Band B.
- 7.18 Available family sized properties are in short supply, so giving priority to downsizers will free up this accommodation and make best use of the Council's stock. These tenants may also be adversely affected by the under-occupancy charge or would find a smaller property easier to manage.

Mutual Exchange

- 7.19 Existing Council tenants will be encouraged to consider moving by mutual exchange as a means of resolving their housing difficulties. Tenants can register with Home Swapper <https://www.homeswapper.co.uk/> to look for other social housing tenants in the UK to swap their homes with.
- 7.20 The Council has a separate Mutual Exchange Policy. Moves facilitated via a mutual exchange scheme do not fall within Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 and therefore are not part of the Allocations Scheme.

Emergency Management Transfers

- 7.21 Existing tenants who believe they have an emergency reason to move can apply to the Council's Housing & Neighbourhood Services Team for

assistance. The team will assess whether such a move is necessary. A decision on the transfer request will be made by the Housing Services Manager in agreement with the Allocations Team.

- 7.22 The tenant will need to apply to the Housing Register if they have not already done so. The applicant will be placed into Band A and the household's housing needs assessed so that a direct offer of suitable accommodation can be made. There will only be one suitable offer of accommodation and will be based on the household's needs at the time.
- 7.23 If the tenant refuses the offer, they are entitled to request a review of the suitability and the Housing & Neighbourhood Services Team will undertake the review to determine if this is a suitable offer. If the decision is that the offer is found to be suitable, the emergency management transfer status will be removed, and the application returned to their original banding.

Tenants who need to decant their property

- 7.24 Tenants may need to move either temporarily or permanently for the following reasons:
- Whilst major works are undertaken to the property
 - Their home is due for demolition
 - There is a Compulsory Purchase Order for refurbishment or development of their home
- 7.25 These moves are referred to as 'decants'. Temporary decants do not fall within Part VI of the Housing Act 1996. Temporary decants will therefore be managed by the Housing & Neighbourhood Services Team and so an application to the Housing Register is not required.
- 7.26 Applicants that are required to permanently decant from their home will be dealt with under the Council's Decant Policy. This requires the applicant to join the Housing Register where a band A will be awarded. Applicants who have been accepted for a permanent decant will be made one offer of accommodation.

Options for other social housing tenants

- 7.27 This section refers to social housing tenants who are not Runnymede Borough Council tenants.
- 7.28 These tenants can apply to their landlord for a transfer. They can also apply to the Council's Housing Register and will be treated as a 'home seeker'.
- 7.29 Such tenants cannot apply for a transfer if they have an introductory/starter tenancy. Discretion may be used in exceptional circumstances, with the decision taken a Senior Officer.

- 7.30 As with Runnymede Council tenants, other social housing tenants will need to demonstrate that they have a need to move. If no such housing need is identified, then the application will be refused, and advice given on other housing options.
- 7.31 These social housing tenants will be subject to all of the qualification and disqualification rules. To clarify, this includes the thresholds on income and savings. Information will be sought from the landlord regarding the conduct of the tenancy.
- 7.32 These tenants are expected to satisfactorily maintain their home in order to be made an offer of accommodation. If information from the landlord confirms the property is in poor condition or has been significantly damaged, the tenant would be disqualified from the Housing Register or their bid on a property bypassed. The application could be placed on hold for an initial period of three months. This will allow time for the property to be brought up to standard.
- 7.33 In all cases, the Council will consider the vulnerability of the tenant and work in partnership with the landlord and other services to offer support.
- 7.34 A tenant with an emergency reason to move will need to apply to their landlord, who will assess whether a management move can be granted. The landlord will also be responsible for decanting any tenants who need to move on either a temporary or permanent basis.
- 7.35 Priority Band B may be given to social housing tenants who are under-occupying their home if their landlord agrees to offer the Council the resultant vacancy, over and above the nomination's agreement.

8. Assessment of Applications

Initial Assessment of application

- 8.1 The online registration process will assess an applicant's housing need according to the information electronically input by the applicant. A banding priority will be awarded on this basis, in line with this Scheme. The Council can override any automated assessment if there is an exceptional need to do so.
- 8.2 Applicants who do not have a local connection but submit an application for a reasonable preference assessment, will be assessed in the usual way. Please see section 2 for a definition of reasonable preference.
- 8.3 If the Council is satisfied that the application meets the eligibility/qualification criteria and the information provided appears accurate, then the application will be approved and placed into a priority band. The applicant will receive written notification of this, together with the application reference number and

details of how the Choice Based Lettings Scheme works. The applicant will then be able to place bids on suitable properties.

Providing information and documentation

- 8.4 If the Council is not fully satisfied with the application, then it will not be approved until further requested information or documents are provided. Applicants have 28 calendar days to provide the requested documents. A decision will then be made on whether the application can remain on the register or be removed.

At the time of applying to the register

- 8.5 At the initial assessment stage of the application, applicants may be asked to provide additional information or documents. Examples of this include:
1. To establish if local connection should be awarded due to exceptional circumstances. The applicant will need to provide relevant and current documentation from health and/or social care professionals.
 2. To establish a local connection to the borough with regards to residency. The applicant may need to provide a more accurate address history.
 3. To establish a local connection to the borough by employment or self-employment. The applicant may need to provide payslips, the most recent P60 and/or bank statements. Those who are self-employed will need to provide business accounts and/or tax returns.
 4. To establish who is reasonably considered to be part of the household. Applicants may be asked to provide further detail as well as official documentation, such as to confirm the long-term residency of children if this is unclear.
 5. To assess whether there is a need to move on health/disability/welfare grounds if the Medical Self-Assessment Form has been completed. Applicants will need to provide recent documentation from health professionals to support their current medical or disability related needs. Documents should be dated within the last six months. More information regarding this can be found in Section 8.12 – 8.16.
 6. Any other information the Council deems is necessary to make an assessment of need.
- 8.6 Failure to respond to a request for information within 28 calendar days will result in the application being removed. This decision will be notified to the applicant in writing, advising of the right to request a review.

At the verification stage of the process

- 8.7 Applicants will need to provide further documents at the later verification stage, if the Council is actively considering them for an offer of

accommodation. This is to verify the applicant's identity, address and particular circumstances so that the Council can be satisfied that the applicant fulfils the criteria as set out in this Scheme. See Section 11.37 – 11.41 for more information.

Other documents and information that may be required

- 8.8 The Council may request supporting information and documentation from other services to confirm the type of accommodation that might be suitable for an applicant.
- 8.9 Written professional opinion may also be sought on whether the applicant is able to live independently and to enquire if there are any known risk issues. This information will be considered before any offer of accommodation is made.
- 8.10 The Council will also need to be informed if there are any on-going support needs and how these will be addressed, to ensure that any tenancy offered is sustainable.
- 8.11 Examples of these requests include:
1. Information from the Care Leavers Service to confirm that an applicant is ready to move to independent accommodation
 2. Information from housing support providers to confirm that an applicant is ready to move-on from supported accommodation into independent accommodation
 3. Information from Occupational Therapy Services recommending the type of accommodation that would meet an applicant's needs
 4. Risk assessments

Medical and Welfare Assessment

- 8.12 Applicants who would like their medical needs, disability or welfare to be considered will need to complete a medical/welfare-self assessment form. The Council may contact the applicant to request supporting information from health/social care professionals which is required within 28 calendar days.
- 8.13 Supporting medical and/or welfare information needs to be current and less than six months old. It is the applicant's responsibility to obtain this information. The Council will not contact health professionals to seek this information and nor will it pay for reports or letters to be provided.
- 8.14 The Council may seek the opinion of an Independent Medical Advisor. This opinion or recommendation will be used to help the Council decide whether any priority can be awarded to an application on the basis of a medical need, including grounds relating to a disability. This opinion can also be obtained to

recommend the type of accommodation that would meet an applicant's needs. The Council makes the final decision on all such cases.

- 8.15 The Council, in its assessment, will decide whether an applicant, or one or more members of the household, has a need to move. This is on the basis that their current accommodation is unsuitable on the grounds of ill health, welfare concerns, disability where the housing conditions are directly contributing to ill health and well-being. The Council will need to decide how urgent the need to move is on this basis and award the appropriate banding for the application.
- 8.16 The Council will notify the applicant in writing of the decision made in relation to the assessment of their health/welfare needs or needs relating to a disability. There is a right to a review of this decision.

Change of circumstances

- 8.17 Applicants will need to complete an online Change of Circumstances form if there is any material change in circumstances that could affect priority for housing. For example:
1. A change in address either for the applicant or any other household member
 2. Any additions to the family or any other person joining the application
 3. Anyone included on the application who has now left the household
 4. Any change in income and/or savings for the applicant and any non-dependents included on the application
 5. Any medical or mobility needs which could affect the type of accommodation needed
 6. Any welfare need which could affect the type of accommodation needed.
- 8.18 If the Council is aware of a change in circumstance but a change of circumstances form has not been submitted, then the applicant will not be considered for an offer of accommodation.
- 8.19 Failure to declare a change in circumstance could lead to the application being removed from the Housing Register. The Council will decide if any non-declaration is an attempt to knowingly withhold information in order to obtain social housing. The Council will take appropriate action as outlined in Section 6.
- 8.20 If the Council is satisfied that the applicant has genuinely forgotten to provide updated information, then the applicant will be considered for an offer of accommodation subject to their reassessed priority.

Annual review

- 8.21 The Council carries out automated reviews of Housing Register applications on an annual basis, from the initial date of application. The applicant will be asked to confirm whether there are any changes in their circumstances and if they would still like to remain on the Housing Register.
- 8.22 The applicant is expected to respond to this request by logging into their online Housing Register application. If the applicant fails to do so within 21 days, then a reminder will be sent. If this is also not responded to within a further 28 days, then the application will be removed from the Housing Register.
- 8.23 If the applicant later decides they would like to remain on the Housing Register, then they will need to complete a new Housing Register application form which will be assessed from the new date of application.
- 8.24 Applicants will be notified in writing of the decision to remove their application from the Housing Register. They will be informed of their right to request a review of this decision.

Independent Retirement Living

- 8.25 The Council has Independent Retirement Living Schemes, otherwise known as sheltered housing. The Council also nominates to retirement schemes managed by Registered Providers in the borough.
- 8.26 To be considered, an applicant will need to apply to the Council's Housing Register. This also applies to council tenants wishing to transfer. Only those over the age of 55 will be considered for Council owned schemes, while some Registered Providers may accept those over the age of 50. Applicants under retirement age will need to demonstrate that they have a health or welfare need for this type of supported accommodation.
- 8.27 Applicants aged 55 and over, without a local connection to the borough, will only be considered for Independent Retirement Living accommodation, if they can demonstrate that a close family member has a local connection to the borough. A family member for these purposes means a mother, father, brother, sister or adult son or daughter. Other family members such as step-parents, grandparents, grandchildren, aunts or uncles may be considered where there is evidence of a sufficiently close link in the form of frequent contact, commitment or dependency. This will be assessed on a case by case basis.
- 8.28 Following an offer of Independent Retirement Living at a Council owned scheme, a referral will be made to the Independent Retirement Living Manager and the relevant scheme manager.

Extra Care Housing

- 8.29 There is one Extra Care Housing Scheme in the borough, which is managed by a Registered Provider. The scheme comprises 56 self-contained flats with access to an on-site care team and a 24-hour emergency response call system.
- 8.30 As part of the nomination's agreement, there is a local lettings plan which sets out the specific qualification criteria for this scheme.
- 8.31 To be considered, an application will need to be made to the Housing Register, which will be assessed in the usual way. The applicant will need to demonstrate a need for this supported accommodation and therefore a referral from Adult Social Care will be required. The Council will alert the multi-agency Allocations Panel of the application.
- 8.32 The panel will meet regularly to recommend on the suitability of applicants for the scheme. The panel will comprise representatives from the Registered Provider, Adult Social Care and the Council. It is envisaged that there will be assessed applicants waiting for a vacancy to arise.
- 8.33 Following the recommendations of the panel, the Registered Provider will make an offer of accommodation if the nomination is accepted or provide reasons for rejecting the nomination. Any appeals or disputes will be dealt with by the Registered Provider and any negative decisions put in writing to the applicant.
- 8.34 The Council may advertise vacancies on its Choice Based Lettings Scheme if it is decided to let the property as sheltered housing. This will only arise if there are no suitable applicants and the panel have made every attempt to identify applicants with a care need.
- 8.35 The above processes is likely to apply to any future Extra Care Housing Schemes that are developed within the borough.

9. Property Size

- 9.1 The size of accommodation that an applicant requires will depend on the size and composition of the applicant's household, based on those deemed reasonable to be counted as part of the household. The Council will need to be satisfied that any such person is likely to be a long-term member of the household and therefore included into the bedroom need calculation.

Assessment of household composition

- 9.2 The Council will assess who should be treated as part of the applicant's household. This would normally be members of the applicant's immediate

family who usually reside or could be reasonably expected to reside with the applicant. Any other person or persons will only be accepted as part of the applicant's household in circumstances in which it is reasonable for that person or persons to reside with the applicant. This will normally exclude lodgers or anyone subletting from the applicant. A person may not appear on more than one Housing Register application at the same time.

9.3 It is unlikely that an adult child or parent wishing to return to live together would be considered as a reasonable household where they have lived independently and are able to continue to do so. Where a parent or child wishes to live together, consideration of medical evidence why this is appropriate will be required.

9.4 When a decision has been reached on who can be included as part of the applicant's household, there will be a further test to assess whether this residency will be ongoing, and the person or persons treated as permanent household members.

Permanent members of the household

9.5 Except in exceptional cases, the Council defines a permanent member of the household as someone who has resided as part of the household for at least the last 12 months and this has been their sole residence. The applicant will need to provide evidence of this which will be considered by the Council. In conjunction, the Council also needs to be satisfied that this residency is permanently on-going and that it is reasonable for this person or persons to be residing with the applicant. Where children have joined a responsible adult and have been included onto their application, please see section **Children placed with responsible adults** for more detail.

9.6 A written decision will be provided if it is deemed that a person is not a long-term member of the household or reasonably expected to reside with the applicant. The letter will advise of the right to request a review.

9.7 Exceptional circumstances where the 12-month residency criteria may not be required, are likely to constitute exceptional health or welfare needs and will be determined by a Senior Officer. These will need to be evidenced by independent professionals working with the household.

Bedroom need calculation

9.8 The Council will allocate bedroom need as follows:

Size of Household	Bedroom Need Requirement
Single applicant over 18 years of age, including those who are pregnant	Studio or one bedroom

Couple (including those who are pregnant) with no children as permanent members of the household	One bedroom
Every other adult couple included as part of the household, including those who are married, in a civil partnership or cohabiting	One bedroom
Any other person aged 16 years and over, who is a permanent member of the household	One bedroom
Any two children of the same sex aged under 16 years (both permanent members of the household)	One bedroom
Any two children of the opposite sex aged under 10 years (both permanent members of the household)	One bedroom
Carers who do not live with the applicant but provide overnight care to a permanent member of the household	One bedroom

9.9 The Council will not offer accommodation which contravenes the above allocation of bedrooms, unless there are exceptional reasons to do so. This means that the Council will not knowingly under-occupy or overcrowd a property.

Bedroom needed for carers

9.10 An applicant may request that an additional bedroom is needed for support from carers who do not reside with them but may need to stay overnight. The applicant will need to provide evidence of this, including medical information from a health professional involved in their care, evidence of carers benefits being received and written information from Adult Social Care stating that regular overnight care is essential. The Council will consider this information and provide the applicant with a written decision, which will advise of the right to request a review.

Need for separate bedrooms

9.11 An applicant may request that a separate bedroom is needed for a household member who would normally be expected to share a bedroom. The applicant will need to provide independent, supporting information from professionals which the Council will consider. The Council will assess the extent of the

health, disability and/or welfare needs and how this affects day to day activities and sleep. Opinion may be sought from an Independent Medical Advisor, but the Council will ultimately make the decision. If a decision is made that separate bedrooms are needed, then the Council will advise of the possible housing costs implications.

Fostering and Adoption

- 9.12 The Council will consider an applicant's request for an extra bedroom to accommodate a prospective foster or adoptive child. The Council will weigh up the risk that the application to foster or adopt may be unsuccessful (which could lead to any offered property being under-occupied). The Council will not include a prospective child as part of the long-term household unless there is a formal agreement in place with Surrey County Council. This would need to be for an imminent placement that will be on-going for 12 months or more. Written confirmation of this will be required from a senior officer at Surrey County Council's Fostering Service.
- 9.13 The Council will not accept informal or interim placement arrangements as an adequate reason to award an extra bedroom. The Council will offer full housing options and advice to the applicant as appropriate.
- 9.14 A foster child who is already part of the applicant's household will be taken into account when assessing the number of bedrooms, the household needs. We may be able to consider an additional bedroom for foster children who cannot share with children from the family unit. If the foster child has not resided with the applicant for 12 months, then evidence will need to be provided to confirm that this is a formal arrangement and will be on-going for 12 months or more. Written information will be required as set out above.

Shared parental care

- 9.15 An applicant may include a child in their Housing Register application who does not reside with them all the time. The care of the child may be informally shared between separated parents, meaning that they stay with each parent on a regular basis. The Council will assess these applications to determine where the child's prime residence is. For example, where does financial dependency lie (including which parent claims child benefit), who is the child dependent upon for daily care, as well as social factors such as where the child goes to school.
- 9.16 If it is determined that the child's prime residence is not with the applicant, then the child will not be considered a long-term member of the household and so not included in the bedroom need calculation. There is a shortage of social housing, so the Council needs to ensure it makes the best use of any accommodation it offers.
- 9.17 The Council will consider any court directives with regards to shared custody arrangements for children. However, it should be noted that a family court order which refers to residence and accommodation arrangements is not

binding upon the Council with regard to provision of accommodation. It is for the Council to determine whether priority or additional bedroom entitlement should be given in respect of shared custody.

- 9.18 Only in the most exceptional circumstances, would the Council consider a child to need accommodation with more than one parent for the purposes of Housing Register applications. Specialist advice may be sought in reaching this decision, which will be made by a Senior Officer.

Children placed with responsible adults

- 9.19 The Council will not recognise additional bedroom need for applicants where placements have been made informally by Surrey County Council's Children's Services. Under section 27 of the Children Act 1989, the Council will work in partnership with partner agencies in these matters.
- 9.20 The Council will only recognise additional bedroom need where it is satisfied that permanent arrangements are formally in place and where Children's Services have notified the Council of the case in advance.
- 9.21 Permanent arrangements can be demonstrated by a court order, defining who the child/children will reside with as a responsible adult and under what circumstances. If this is not in place, then the Council will consider formal correspondence from a senior officer at Surrey County Council's Children's Services (to include their contractors or any other authority with responsibility for children under a statutory duty or otherwise), stating the current situation and likely long-term arrangements. In making its decision, the Council will also consider how long the children have resided with the applicant and the evidence that has been provided of this. Consideration will also be given to whether the children have accommodation available to them with the other parent. Only in the most exceptional circumstances, would the Council consider a child to need accommodation with a second parent when they already have access to social housing with their other parent as it is not for the local authority to provide two social homes to children. Applicants in these circumstances will be offered full housing options and advice.
- 9.22 The Council does not offer a respite service whereby it facilitates accommodation placements for assessment of Children's Service's service users, pending a decision to place a child/children in an applicant's care or not. It is the responsibility of Children's Services to find suitable placements for this function.
- 9.23 The Council is not bound by court orders made in relation to the residence of children and expects Children's Services to work in partnership with the Council in all cases.

10. Banding

Determining Priority

- 10.1 Following assessment, an applicant will be placed into the highest band which reflects their need for housing. The bands are A, B, C, D and E, with Band A being the highest priority for housing and Band E being the lowest.
- 10.2 The banding assessment does not allow for movement between bands unless there is an assessed change of circumstances that meets the criteria for a higher or lower band. It is not possible to move from one band to another simply through time accrued on the Housing Register.
- 10.3 When an application is re-assessed to a higher or lower band, the priority registration date will be the date on which the new banding assessment is made. Accrued time in other bands will not be recognised and applicants will be prioritised by the date they have been placed within a band.
- 10.4 In exceptional circumstances, a Senior Officer may alter the applicant's banding and priority within a band.
- 10.5 If an applicant's banding assessment is to be altered following a review decision, then it will be backdated to the date of the review decision.
- 10.6 Where there is more than one applicant within the same band for an offer of accommodation, priority will be determined by the priority registration date. The applicant with the earlier priority registration date will have the greatest priority. If this date is the same, a Senior Officer will decide which applicant has the greatest priority.

Banding	Criteria	Housing Need – Full description
Band A: Emergency need to move	Emergency medical or disability	a) Where an applicant's medical condition is expected to be terminal within a period of twelve months and re-housing is required to provide a basis for the provision of suitable care. b) The applicant's health is so severely affected by the accommodation that it is likely to become life threatening. c) The applicant is unable to access their accommodation due to reasons relating to the medical or disability needs of the applicant and requires re-housing into accommodation suitable for their use. d) The applicant's accommodation is directly contributing to the serious deterioration of the applicant's health and the condition of the property cannot be brought up to a

		required standard within a reasonable period of time – usually 6 months.
	Statutory Overcrowding	a) The applicant has been assessed by the Council's Environmental Health Team as statutorily overcrowded (as defined by the Housing Act 1985), provided that any overcrowding is not a result of deliberate actions or failure to adhere to housing advice.
	Welfare & Hardship	a) Emergency need to move determined by the Council and authorised by a Senior Officer. b) Applicants who need to move due to domestic abuse / actual violence or threats of violence / extreme harassment / intimidation / hate crime. This may include where a move is necessary to protect a witness to criminal acts and would normally be recommended by the Police and must be authorised by a Senior Officer. c) Exceptional circumstances due to significant problems associated with an applicant's occupation of a dwelling, and there is a high risk to them or their household's safety if they remain in the dwelling / area.
	Statutory succession	a) Where an applicant has succeeded to a Runnymede Borough Council tenancy but is required to move to a smaller property.
	Release of an adapted property	a) Where a social housing tenant releases an adapted property where the tenant does not require adaptations and is willing to transfer to a suitable non-adapted property. The released adapted property or designated older persons property will then be available for re-letting by the Council or through a nomination, to an applicant in need of this accommodation.
	Private rented sector properties unfit or unsanitary	a) Applicants in the private sector living in dwellings where all three of the following criteria are met: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Council has determined that the property poses a Category 1 Hazard under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System, and • the Council is satisfied that the problem cannot be resolved by the landlord within six months, and • as a result, continuing to occupy the accommodation will pose a considerable risk to the applicant's health. b) Applicants in the private sector living in dwellings where a statutory notice has been issued by the Council's Environmental Health Department that the property is unfit and is to be demolished under the provisions of the Housing Act 2004.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This assessment does not include mobile homes unless there is a composite need on medical and / or welfare grounds and is evidenced by health professionals. • The Council operates a procedure for assessing the applications of mobile home owners whereby an inspection is required by the Council's Private Sector Housing team followed by a full housing options appraisal of the applicant's financial circumstances including their ability to buy or rent in the private market. This must happen before consideration is given to qualify to join the Housing Register. If there is a financial capability to buy or rent an applicant will not qualify for the Housing Register and the financial qualification criteria will apply.
	Major works or demolition	<p>a) Where a Council tenant has to move permanently, as a result of major works to their current property, or where their property is due for demolition or Compulsory Purchase Order for refurbishment or redevelopment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These applicants are referred to as 'decants' and the Council has a separate Decanting Policy • Applicants will be offered rehousing options suitable for their housing needs under this Scheme and this may be different in size to their current property. This will be based on their current and permanent household and will not include lodgers or any other non-permanent members of the household.
	Emergency Management Transfers	<p>a) Where an emergency transfer is approved for a Council tenant, where approval has been agreed by the Housing Solutions Manager or Homelessness, Housing Advice & Allocations Manager.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full details of why a transfer is needed must be provided by the Housing Services section, and authorised by the Housing Services Manager in the first instance. • Applicants will be offered rehousing options suitable for their housing needs under this Scheme and this may be different in size to their current property. This will be based on their current and permanent household (see section 9) and will not include lodgers or any other non-permanent members of the household. • The applicant will be made one suitable offer of accommodation, and refusal will result in a reassessment to their original band if there was an existing live transfer application at the time of the management transfer request
Band B:	Overcrowding	<p>a) Where a household is lacking two bedrooms in their home assessed against their assessed housing need, unless the overcrowding was deliberate.</p>

Urgent need to move	Applicants living in unsatisfactory housing lacking basic facilities	<p>a) Applicants without access at all to any of the following facilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kitchen • Bathroom • Inside WC • Hot or cold water supplies <p>b) Applicants who occupy a private property which is in disrepair or is unfit for occupation and is subject to a Prohibition Order and recovery of the premises is required in order to comply with the Order as defined by s. 33 of the Housing Act 2004.</p> <p>c) Where an authorised officer from the Council has determined that a private rented property contains one or more serious Category 1 hazards as defined by the Housing Health & Safety Rating System and there is no prospect of the issues being remedied in a period of time that the Council consider reasonable</p>
	Urgent medical or disability Welfare & Hardship	<p>a) Where an applicant's housing is unsuitable for urgent, but not life threatening, medical reasons, or due to their disability, who do not qualify for Band A assessment, but whose housing conditions directly contribute to causing serious ill health.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting evidence will be required from relevant and qualified health professionals and is the responsibility of the applicant to provide. It must be current, relevant and specific to an applicant or a member of their permanent household's condition, who is currently living with them. The Council will not request or pay for any supporting evidence. • The Council will consider all recommendations from health professionals but will make the final decision as to the assessment of an application. • Supporting evidence must be less than 6 months old at the time of any request submitted. <p>a) Where an applicant's current accommodation is causing hardship and an urgent move is required in order to receive care or support.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This needs to be exceptional whereby the health care is unique to a specific health service in the Borough of Runnymede and cannot be provided anywhere else including in the area where the applicant currently lives. • Support from friends or relatives living in the Borough is not a ground for welfare if support is already or can be achieved in the current Borough the applicant resides in, whether through professional services or informal support which may involve travelling.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exceptional and specific health care will have to be evidenced by health professionals currently engaged with the applicant and will be assessed by the Council's Independent Medical Advisor. • This ground is meant for exceptional and unique circumstances only.
	Under occupation	a) Where a social housing tenant living in the Borough of Runnymede is under occupying their home and by moving will release a home for re-letting and their landlord agrees that their vacated property will be offered to the Council for nomination by the Council, outside of established Nominations Agreements. This is a discretionary process and authorised by a Senior Officer, and there is no automatic assessment.
	Qualification under the Homelessness Reduction Act	Applicants where it has been determined that they qualify for a Section 195 Prevention duty or a Section 189B Relief duty, in accordance with the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. Applicants will only remain in this band for the duration of the duty owed and if they are fully engaged with their personalised housing plan to explore all avenues to resolve their housing difficulty.
	Non-successor with a priority need	Where a person is living in an RBC property as a non-successor and is considered to be in priority need as defined by the Housing Act 1996 (as amended). This is a decision for the Housing Solutions Team to make and the applicant is expected to fully engage with the Housing Solutions team to explore all housing options to move.
Band C: Medium priority to move	Homeless households	Homeless households owed the full homeless duty by Runnymede Council under section 193(2), will not be able to bid and one suitable direct offer of accommodation will be made.
	Armed forces	a) Serving Armed Forces Personnel occupying Service Living Accommodation, who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. have already engaged with the Council's Housing Advice team, and ii. have been served with a Certificate of Cessation of Entitlement to Occupy Service Living Accommodation (usually six months prior to discharge), and iii. have failed to secure alternative accommodation and face potential homelessness within 56 days.
	Rough Sleepers	Applicants where it has been verified by the Council that they are sleeping rough in Runnymede and meet the local connection rules for homeless purposes.

	Parental eviction – at home for over 12 months	A priority need household as defined by Part VII of the Housing Act, as amended (section 189) who was at threat of homelessness but has been able to remain in the parental home for over 12 months since the initial threat of homelessness. Applicants will need to complete a change circumstances form to have the case reviewed.
	Move on from Care (Surrey County Council)	<p>a) A care leaver (LAC) is ready and prepared to move to independent settled housing, which may be in the social or private sector, and both of the following criteria apply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The care leaver possesses the life skills to sustain a tenancy including managing a rent account, and ii. The care leaver has been assessed for a support package, and one is in place. <p>It is the responsibility of Surrey County Council (SCC) to ensure that a Housing Register application has been completed with / on behalf of the LAC / Formerly Relevant Child, and to obtain the agreement with the Council at least six months prior to move-on, in order to re-assess the application from Band E, and to ensure that the relevant information is submitted to the Council on a regular basis, in order to prevent a homeless approach by a LAC to whom SCC have a continuing duty towards and to ensure the best opportunities for rehousing options are available within set timescales. SCC are also required to adhere to the current SCC Young Person (YP) Protocol.</p>
	Move on from supported accommodation	<p>a) Applicants from supported accommodation, under contracted arrangements, who are ready to move-on following a satisfactory move-on report being submitted by the care provider / landlord.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The report will need to satisfy the Council that the applicant is ready to move onto general needs housing and sustain a tenancy independently. If the Council is not satisfied that the applicant is ready to move to independent general needs housing, then further supported housing must be considered. If the applicant is not ready to move on, the application will remain in Band E, and no offers of accommodation will be made.
	Medium medical or disability or welfare need	<p>a) Where an applicant or a permanent member of an applicant’s household (currently residing with the applicant) is assessed as having an identified health or welfare need to move and whose housing is unsuitable for non-urgent medical reasons, or due to their disability, and whose housing conditions directly contribute to causing ill health.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting evidence will be required from relevant and qualified health professionals and is the responsibility of

		<p>the applicant to provide. It must be current, relevant and specific to an applicant or a member of their permanent household's condition, who is currently living with them. The Council will not request or pay for any supporting evidence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The Council will consider all recommendations from health professionals but will make the final decision as to the assessment of an application. • Supporting evidence must be less than 6 months old at the time of any request submitted.
	Hardship	<p>a) The applicant has some other compelling (but not urgent) need to live in Runnymede which, if not met, will cause on-going hardship.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting evidence will be required from relevant and qualified health professionals and is the responsibility of the applicant to provide. It must be current, relevant and specific to an applicant or a member of their permanent household's condition, who is currently living with them. The Council will not request or pay for any supporting evidence. •The Council will consider all recommendations from health professionals but will make the final decision as to the assessment of an application. • Supporting evidence must be less than 6 months old at the time of any request submitted.
	Overcrowding	<p>a) Where a household is one bedroom short of the Runnymede Bedroom Standard. Consideration will be given to how the applicant became overcrowded, whether an applicant is able to afford a larger home, either in the private rented sector, or through a shared ownership scheme, and whether the space within the dwelling is being used effectively.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Applicants in the social sector will receive an automatic banding assessment but may be requested to provide further evidence to support their claim. This may also involve credit referencing and tracing.
	Reasonable preference – no local connection, exceptional need	<p>a) Applicants who do not meet the qualification criteria and have no Local Connection but who have been assessed as having an exceptional or emergency need to move, as authorised by a Senior Officer</p>
Band D: Identified priority to move	No priority need and/or intentionally homeless	<p>a) Applicants who are intentionally homeless, within the meaning of Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) following the negative decision under s.184 Housing Act 1996 is issued by the Runnymede Housing Solutions team</p>

		b) Applicants who have been assessed as homeless but not in priority need within the meaning of Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, as amended
	Adult children / siblings sharing family home	a) Adult children (aged 16 years and over) living with parents / guardians / family members sharing the family home, or adult siblings living together in overcrowded accommodation or where there is inadequate space and they need to move <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration will not be given to how a family chooses to use the space within a property.
	Low medical or disability need or welfare	a) Where it is identified that there is a need to move on the grounds of health or disability. This need is deemed to be low, meaning that although the housing situation could certainly be improved, the accommodation is still considered to be suitable.
	Shared facilities – unique welfare need	a) An applicant is living in accommodation where the facilities are shared with non-relatives, and there is a unique and/or exceptional welfare need. This does not include adult children living in family homes or adult siblings living in a family home or shared home. (Note - sharing facilities does not count as a factor in deciding if an application should be moved to a higher band).
	RBC Non-successor with no priority need	Where a person is living in a RBC property as a non-successor and is not considered to be in priority need as defined by the Housing Act 1996 (as amended). The applicants should seek housing assistance from the Housing Solutions team to explore all available housing options, including the private rented sector.
Band E: Low priority to move	Move on from Care	a) Applicants who are Looked After Children who are currently in a residential or foster placement or other supported placement, whereby Surrey County Council has the statutory duty towards and where no agreement is in place with the Council to plan move-on accommodation. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The originating area can only be Surrey for the purposes of rehousing. • Offers of accommodation in the private rented sector will be offered as move-on accommodation where available. • Once agreement is in place for move-on accommodation, which should be at least six months before, an application will be reassessed to a Band C. • It is the responsibility of Surrey County Council to provide up to date information for the purposes of applications and move-on accommodation for those young people in their care. • Applicants will not be able to bid whilst in this band

	Armed forces	<p>a) Serving Armed Forces personnel who are not due to be discharged for the foreseeable future. These applicants will not need a Local Connection to the Borough.</p> <p>b) Separated spouses of Serving Armed Forces personnel who have not been asked to leave military of defence accommodation</p>
	Move on from supported accommodation	<p>a) Applicants from supported accommodation, under contracted arrangements, where the Council has not received a satisfactory move-on report by the care provider / landlord.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This banding assessment applied to both YP and adult supported housing. • Applicants, who have been placed in supported housing outside of the Borough of Runnymede, will retain their Local Connection in order to assist them with ‘move-on’ rehousing options. • The applicant must have been referred to the supported placement outside of the Borough by a Housing Options Officer at Runnymede Borough Council. • If an applicant bids and the Council remains unsatisfied with the applicant’s ability to live independently, the bid will be bypassed until further evidence can be provided by the care provider / landlord.
	Refusal of offers / failure to view	<p>a) Applicants who, having successfully bid for a property, refuse to accept it, twice for no evidenced reason and assessed as an unreasonable refusal by an Allocations Officer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An application will have reduced priority for 12 months from the date of the last refusal. • The reassessment to Band E will also mean a new registration date for that applicant and the loss of accrued time on the Housing Register while in a previous higher band. • It is the responsibility of the applicant to complete a change of circumstances online to request reassessment after 12 months and the Council will not be responsible for any extended time in this banding due to an applicant’s failure to request a reassessment. <p>b) Emergency Management transfers in Band A who refuse one suitable offer of rehousing where they have an existing transfer application live at the time of the management transfer request.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reassessment after 12 months to Band A does not apply to this applicant group and an application will remain in Band E

		<p>c) Applicants who, having successfully bid for a property, fail to view a property without a reasonable cause and as assessed by an Allocations Officer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An Application will have reduced priority for 12 months from the date of failure to view. • The reassessment to Band E will also mean a new registration date for that applicant and the loss of accrued time on the Housing Register while in a previous higher band. • It is the responsibility of the applicant to complete a change of circumstances online to request reassessment after 12 months and the Council will not be responsible for any extended time in this banding due to an applicant's failure to request a reassessment.
	Right to move	Applicants applying under the Government's Right to Move initiative, assessed on a case by case basis following authorisation from a Senior Officer.
	Independent Retirement Living	Applicants aged 55 years and above, who do not have a local connection in their own right but a family member does meet the qualification criteria set out in section 4 and the applicant wishes to access independent retirement living only.
	Private Rented Sector	Applicants living in private rented sector accommodation, whether with friends or as a lodger, or on an Assured Shorthold Tenancy or similar, and is adequately and suitably housed.
	Reasonable preference – no local connection	Applicants assessed as falling into one of the Reasonable Preference groups; who have no Local Connection to the borough of Runnymede (as defined in this Scheme, Section 3) and either no particular housing need or are statutorily homeless and have been provided with suitable temporary accommodation, unless approved for a discretionary uplift.
	Adult children seeking to leave the family home	<p>a) Adult children (aged 16 years and over) living with parents / guardians / family members sharing the family home, or adult siblings living together without any statutory overcrowding or welfare issues, other than a desire to access independent accommodation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration will not be given to how a family chooses to use the space within a property.

11. How properties are let

- 11.1 The Council operates a Choice Based Letting Scheme whereby properties are advertised, and applicants can place bids thereby affording applicants a degree of choice as to any accommodation to be offered to them. This does

not apply, however, to homeless households owed the main housing duty, who will only be eligible for one direct offer (see below).

- 11.2 All social housing properties available to the Council including Registered Provider accommodation can either be advertised through the Council's Choice Based Lettings Scheme or made as a direct offer to an applicant. A Senior Officer approves the selection of properties for direct offers.
- 11.3 Homeless households owed the main homeless duty by Runnymede Council under section 193(2) of the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, will be unable to bid on any properties. Instead, they will be made a direct offer as their final Part VI offer, under the Assisted Choice for Homeless Households Scheme. Further information can be found in section 12.1 – 12.10.
- 11.4 Homeseekers and those applying for a transfer from social housing accommodation will be able to express an interest in a property through the Choice Based Lettings Scheme by placing a bid. There may be occasions however when a property is selected to make a direct offer to an applicant. This could be for the following reasons:
1. Where the property has specific adaptations
 2. Where it will make best use of the housing stock
 3. For community safety reasons
 4. For Emergency Management Moves
 5. For reasons of public protection
 6. Where the move will facilitate a chain of lets releasing another property which the Council has a particular need of (usually involving under occupiers)
 7. Where the property is deemed to be hard to let or to minimise the time that the property is empty
 8. Any other reason as authorised by a Senior officer.

Local Lettings Plans

- 11.5 From time to time, the Council will adopt Local Lettings Plans for new housing developments or for other new schemes. A Local Lettings Plan could also be applied to an existing scheme or to an area of the borough.
- 11.6 Section 166A(6)(b) of the Housing Act 1996 enables housing authorities to allocate particular accommodation to people of a particular description, whether or not they fall within the reasonable preference categories. This is on the basis that overall, the authority is able to demonstrate compliance with the requirements of s.166A (3), in that the allocations scheme gives additional preference to those in the reasonable preference categories.
- 11.7 The aim of a Local Lettings Plan is to ensure the new residents integrate well to form a cohesive, safe and sustainable community;

- Promote residents' satisfaction with their homes and neighbourhood.
- Minimise the time that properties are empty
- Ensure that the needs of local residents and the wider community are reflected within the development.
- to create mixed, balanced sustainable communities.
- or where schemes are aimed at applicants with particular needs, for example, the Extra Care Housing Scheme or Independent Retirement Living Schemes

- 11.8 Local Lettings Plans for developments/existing stock of up to 50 units will be agreed by a Senior Officer.
- 11.9 Local Lettings Plans for developments/existing stock of over 50 units will be considered and approved by a Council Committee. An Equality Impact Assessment Screening will be compiled as part of the plan.
- 11.10 Local Lettings Plans will state whether they apply only to initial lettings, or also to subsequent lettings.

Letting properties through the Choice Based Lettings Scheme

Advertising Properties

- 11.11 An advert will be placed on the Choice Based Lettings Scheme on the Housing Online portal on the Council's website, for those properties that are selected for advertising. This will comprise a photograph of the outside of a property on the road or of a comparable property but not the actual property. The number/name of a property will not be provided.
- 11.12 Information will be provided about the property to enable the applicant to make an informed decision. This will include:
- The type of property
 - The rent
 - Any adaptations that have been carried out
 - The floor level
 - Whether there is a lift
 - If there is level access
 - The number of bedrooms
 - The minimum and maximum number of people in the household that the property is suitable for
 - Whether there is use of a communal or enclosed garden
 - If pets are permitted

- 11.13 Some properties may be restricted to certain groups of applicants and this will be stated in the advert. For example, if the property is within an Independent Retirement Living Scheme and there is a minimum age requirement.
- 11.14 The Council will make every effort to include all appropriate information on the property adverts but cannot be held responsible for any inaccuracies or omissions. It is the responsibility of the applicant, to satisfy themselves at the point of viewing a property, that they wish to accept the offer.
- 11.15 The Council may withdraw an advert if at any time it becomes aware of certain property features that may affect who the property is suitable for. For example, if it becomes known that the property is adapted and suitable for someone with limited mobility. The property will then be re-advertised with the correct information. If the Council chooses not to re-advertise the property in such an instance, then it will filter the shortlist to prioritise bids from applicants who would benefit from these special features.

Bidding

- 11.16 Applicants who are able to bid on advertised properties in the Choice Based Lettings Scheme will be able to have up to three live bids at any one time. There is a detailed guidance on how applicants can place bids available online at [Being offered a social housing tenancy - Runnymede Borough Council](#).
- 11.17 Applicants are expected to place bids on properties that they believe meet their needs and in areas where they are prepared to live. If a bid leads to an offer of accommodation, the applicant will be expected to accept the offer unless there are valid reasons not to do so.
- 11.18 The length of time a property is advertised can vary but this will be for a minimum of 48 hours. Properties may be advertised on any day of the working week. The closing date and time will be clearly marked on the advert. Applicants should regularly visit the Choice Based Lettings Scheme website to search for recently advertised properties.
- 11.19 Applicants can set up an alert to be notified when a property becomes available in the area of choice that they have specified, and an email will be sent to their specified email address. Applicants are required to be proactive and apply for all properties that may be suitable for their needs. An applicant can be set up to auto-bid where failing to do so would result in hardship for the customer. The applicant will not be able to bid themselves when auto-bid is in place.
- 11.20 Bids logged through auto-bid will be considered as an offer so applicants must clearly specify the areas where they are able to live and any evidenced reasons why they cannot live in specific areas of the Borough.

Requirement to bid

- 11.21 Applicants are required to place bids on suitable properties within a given timeframe.
- 11.22 The Housing Register's aim is to provide housing to those in the greatest need. If applicants do not bid on suitable properties that meet their needs, then their need for housing is questionable. Waiting for the ideal property to become available does not suggest a strong need to move.
- 11.23 Therefore, where properties have been advertised that would meet the applicants housing needs but a applicant fails to place a bid on a suitable property within a six-month period, they will automatically be set to auto-bid. Preference for a particular property type will not be considered for auto-bidding. Auto-bid will be set up for all areas in the borough that are suitable as well as all property types. Applicants who then fail to take up a suitable offer following an auto-bid, will be treated as refusing the offer if there are no valid reasons to refuse.

Considering the bids for a property

- 11.24 Once the bidding deadline on a property has ended, the Council will consider those bids on a shortlist to determine who to offer the property to.
- 11.25 As a general rule, applicants who have placed a bid will be prioritised in band order and within each band by the effective date, subject to any other preferences or restrictions set out in the advert.
- 11.26 In some situations, the property will not be considered for the highest banded applicant who has bid. Shortlisted applicants can be by-passed/overlooked at this stage.
- 11.27 The reasons for bypassing applicants could include:
1. Where it is known that the applicant has not informed the Council of a material change in their circumstances.
 2. Where the applicant has not provided the required verification to approve their application.
 3. The applicant has bid on a property that only working households or accommodation for specific key workers can be considered for.
 4. The household size does not match the requirement detailed in the advert.
 5. The ages of the applicant or those in the household does not match that detailed in the advert.
 6. The property has adaptations that are not required by the applicant.
 7. The property is deemed to be unsuitable for the applicant. This could be for health, welfare or risk issues.
 8. If the Council considers on available information that the applicant is not ready for independent living with or without a support package in place.
 9. The applicant does not match specific criteria as set out in the advert. This could be because of a Local Lettings Plan which has been adopted for

specific areas/schemes to ensure communities are balanced. Priority will be given to those who match the criteria.

10. If it is known that the applicant or household members have a recent history of evidenced anti-social behaviour. This could lead to the application being disqualified from the Housing Register.
11. The applicant has current or former rent arrears and/or other debts with any social housing landlord and where these are not being satisfactorily re-paid. The amount owed would need to be more than £100. This could lead to the application being disqualified from the Housing Register.
12. The applicant has council tax arrears of more than £100. This could lead to the application being disqualified from the Housing Register.
13. The applicant is a social housing tenant and has not maintained their accommodation to the standard that the Council considers to be acceptable. See section 7.13 – 7.14 for more detail.
14. The applicant has an outstanding offer of accommodation available to them which has not been resolved. For example, this could be an offer of private rented accommodation or supported housing.
15. There is an indication that a fraudulent application may have been made or that accurate information was deliberately withheld. The applicant will be bypassed as further enquiries will need to be made and a decision taken about whether to remove the application
16. The applicant does not meet the specific criteria that some Registered Providers and charitable housing providers have built into their allocations policies or rules. These usually relate to ages of applicants or areas of residence. These requirements will usually be displayed in the advert.
17. In exceptional circumstances where a strategic let is required. An applicant may not be considered suitable for a property due to housing management reasons. For example, an applicant who has a history of substance dependency may not be suitable for a property in an area where the landlord is aware that there are already a number of other residents with similar issues.
18. The advert may be withdrawn because the property is urgently needed for a direct offer to a particular applicant or because it was advertised before the previous tenant had moved out of the property and they have rescinded their notice.

Enquiries into applications from social housing tenants

- 11.28 Enquiries will be made with the respective landlord as to how the applicant has conducted their social housing tenancy and evidence will be sought.
- 11.29 Enquiries will be made to establish the following:
 1. The level of any current and/or former rent arrears, including any sundry debts
 2. If there has been a serious breach of tenancy within the last five years. To include:

- Anti-social behaviour
 - Illegal or immoral behaviour, including involvement in substance misuse
 - Threats or actual violence
 - Racial abuse
 - Domestic abuse
 - Hate crime
 - Criminal conviction
 - Refusal to co-operate with essential health and safety inspections of the property, including gas safety checks.
 - Any other serious breach of tenancy, evidenced by enforcement action i.e. a notice, community protection warning and/or notice, injunction etc
3. If the property has been maintained to a satisfactory condition and has not been significantly damaged, see section 7.13 – 7.14.

11.30 We will visit Runnymede Council tenants to assess the condition of the property.

11.31 The Council will consider the vulnerability of the tenant when deciding if the applicant should be bypassed due to the condition of their current accommodation. The Council will also decide whether the housing application should be suspended, meaning that no further bids can be placed during this time.

11.32 This would allow the tenant time to bring the property up to the required standard. The Council will work with support services and the landlord to enable this. An application could be put on hold for an initial period of six months, where the condition of the property would be re-assessed. If the condition still remained unsatisfactory, then the housing application would remain suspended for a further three months and reviewed again.

11.33 If the Council decides to bypass the applicant or to suspend their application due to the condition of the property, then this will be put in writing. There will be a right to request a review of this decision.

Verbal provisional offer of accommodation

11.34 The shortlist will be reviewed following the above enquiries. The Council will then contact the top three applicants on the shortlist to determine whether they would like to proceed with the property. A greater number of applicants may be contacted in to minimise the time a property is empty or where a strategic let is needed.

11.35 Applicants will be given the property details except for the property number. The highest placed applicant on the shortlist will be informed of their status. Those that are placed second and third will also be informed of this and advised that they could be offered the property if the first applicant refuses the offer or if it is unable to go ahead.

11.36 Bids for a property will be treated as an applicant's agreement to be offered the property and a refusal of an offer at any point following the closure of the bidding cycle will be deemed as a refusal. Applicants in 2nd and 3rd for a property may be offered the property at short notice. See section 11.24-11.27

Verification of applications

11.37 If the applicants would like to proceed, then they will be asked to provide satisfactory documentation to verify their identity and circumstances. This to ensure that only those applicants who meet the terms of this scheme are offered accommodation.

11.38 Applicants will be given 48 hours in which to provide this information. Failure to do so, will result in the application being bypassed. This could be treated as a refusal if the applicant does not respond.

11.39 The documents that are required:

- Proof of identity for all members of the household including photographic identity such as passport or driving licence for those who will be the named tenants. Birth certificates will suffice for children in the household.
- Additional proof to confirm eligibility if required.
- Proof of income for the applicants and all non-dependent members of the household. Payslips for the last three months will be required.
- Certified copies of business accounts if applicant is self-employed
- Last three months banks statements for all members of the household to confirm savings amount.
- Benefit award letters (Child Benefit, JSA, Income Support, UC, PIP, DLA etc).
- Proof of address for the past five years for the applicants and non-dependent members of the household. This will need to be official correspondence such as utility bills, Council Tax bills etc.
- Employment contract or other official documentation if the applicant is self-employed to confirm that the applicant works in the borough if local connection has been awarded on this basis.
- Copy of the current tenancy agreement if applicable

11.40 All applications are then referred to the Council's Fraud Team who will carry out further checks to ensure that the applicant fulfils all requirements as set out in the scheme.

11.41 Applicants at this stage can be bypassed for the offer of accommodation due to the following reasons:

1. The applicant is not considered to be eligible for an allocation of social housing.
2. The applicant does not fulfil the local connection criteria on the basis of residence or employment/self-employment within the borough or for

exceptional circumstances. The applicant is not therefore considered to qualify for the Housing Register and the application will be removed.

3. The applicant has an income higher than the thresholds for single/couple and family households and there are not considered to be exceptional circumstances. The applicant will not qualify for the register and the application will be removed. The applicant will be given advice about other housing options, such as low-cost home ownership.
4. The applicant has savings/assets higher than that specified in the scheme and there are not considered to be any exceptional circumstances. The applicant will not qualify for the register and the application will be removed. The applicant will be given advice about other housing options, such as low-cost home ownership.
5. The applicant owns a property either in the UK or abroad, which they could reasonably be expected to reside in or liquidate in order to resolve their own housing difficulties. The applicant will not qualify for the register and the application will be removed.
6. The applicant has given up a home that they owned, rented, shared or had rights to but chose to leave or dispose of, within the last five years. The applicant will not qualify for the register and the application will be removed.
7. The applicant has disposed of significant assets within a given time frame, which could have been utilised to resolve the applicant's housing difficulties.
8. There is an indication that a fraudulent application may have been made or that accurate information was deliberately withheld. The applicant will be bypassed as further enquiries will need to be made and a decision taken about whether to remove the application.
9. The applicant has not provided the documents within the timescale and there are no mitigating circumstances to justify the delay. Without the documentation, the Council is unable to confirm the applicant's circumstances. Failure to engage will be treated as a refusal. Any other information that the Council becomes aware of as detailed in the reasons for bypassing applicants in section 11.27.

11.42 The shortlist will be reviewed following any applicants that have been bypassed.

11.43 Following satisfactory verification checks, the highest banded applicant, taking into account the effective date, will be invited to view the property. See section 13 for more information about this and section 13 for details on what happens after the viewing.

12. Lettings made directly

12.1 Not all lettings are made through the Choice based Lettings Scheme.

Homeless households who are owed a Section 193(2) main duty – Assisted Choice for Homeless Households Scheme

- 12.2 All homeless households who are owed a Section 193(2) main duty are made one suitable offer. This could be either an offer of accommodation in the private rented sector or in social housing as the final Part VI offer.
- 12.3 Accepted homeless households will not be able to bid on properties in the Choice Based Lettings Scheme. Instead, they will be made one, direct offer of accommodation under the Assisted Choice for Homeless Households Scheme.

Areas of preference

- 12.4 Homeless households accepted as owed the main housing duty, as with all applicants to the Housing Register, will be asked where they would like to live within the borough on the Housing Register application form. If the applicant is not already on the Housing Register, then they will be asked to apply at the point they are accepted as being owed the main duty and issued with their section 184 decision letter.
- 12.5 These stated preferences will be taken into account when considering the household for an offer of suitable accommodation. However, it should be noted that there is no guarantee that the Council will be able to provide accommodation in these areas unless there is an overriding reason to do so. In discharging the homeless duty under the Housing Act 1996 (as amended), in so far as is reasonably practical, we will secure accommodation within the Borough.

Considering housing needs

- 12.6 Information relating to the housing needs of the household will be assessed so that a suitable offer of accommodation can be made. This will include an assessment of medical/disability needs as well as welfare needs as set out in the Allocations Scheme. If there are restrictions on the property that can be offered, such as floor level, type of property or the location, then this will be explained to the applicant before an offer of accommodation is made.

Verification of circumstances

- 12.7 The applicant will be expected to provide documentation to verify their circumstances, which will also be referred to the Council's Fraud Team for further enquiries. These documents will be requested when the main duty is accepted. An offer of social housing will not be made until the documents have been received and verified.
- 12.8 The applicant will need to provide the following within 48 hours:
- Proof of identity for any new members of the household

- Additional proof to confirm eligibility if required
- Proof of income and savings for the applicants and all non-dependent members of the household. The last three months' bank statements would usually be acceptable.

12.9 If the applicant is not provided with settled accommodation within that three-month period, then additional, up to date bank statements will be requested.

12.10 Applicants are required to satisfactorily maintain any temporary accommodation provided and must not owe more than £100 in housing related debt or council tax.

Other households who may receive Direct Offers of accommodation

12.11 It is not only homeless households who are owed a main duty that will receive a direct offer. A direct offer could be made to other households for the following reasons:

1. Where the property has specific adaptations
2. Where it will make best use of the housing stock
3. For community safety reasons
4. For emergency management moves
5. For reasons of public protection
6. Where the move will facilitate a chain of lets releasing another property which the Council has a particular need of (usually involving under occupiers)
7. Where the property is deemed to be hard to let
8. For moves to the Extra Care Scheme
9. For certain moves to Independent Retirement Living Schemes
10. Those who are ready to move on from supported housing
11. Any other reason as authorised by a Senior Officer

12.12 In all cases, the applicant's needs will be fully assessed under the Allocations Scheme so that a suitable offer of accommodation can be made. The applicant's preferred areas for where they would like to live will also be considered but may not be able to be accommodated.

12.13 Supporting information will need to be provided for those who feel they have a health/disability or welfare need so that this can be fully assessed. If there are health issues, a recommendation will be made about the floor level and type of accommodation that will meet the household's needs.

12.14 Direct lets may be made to applicants who are tenants of Registered Providers. The Council will require the subsequent vacancy of the applicant to

be offered to the Council for nomination, outside of any existing Nominations Agreement. The Council will work flexibly with Registered Providers both within and outside of the Borough of Runnymede, to widen the choice of properties available and to address specific issues.

12.15 All decisions to make a direct offer will be made by a Senior Officer.

Those moving-on from supported accommodation

12.16 Applicants living in supported housing schemes will be unable to bid under the choice based lettings scheme and will be made a direct offer of accommodation instead. This will be one suitable offer of accommodation only.

12.17 A placement within a supported housing scheme is intended to be on a temporary basis, with a transition to more settled accommodation when the resident has been equipped with the skills required to maintain an independent tenancy. The Council will consider supporting information from the housing/support provider and will only offer accommodation to those it deems ready to move-on.

12.18 A direct offer of suitable accommodation will enable a planned move-on from the scheme. It will ensure that best use is being made of the supported housing units and that those who no longer require the support, move-on from the scheme, freeing up vacancies for those who would benefit.

13. Offers, Refusals and accepting a tenancy

Verbal provisional offer of accommodation

13.1 The shortlist will be reviewed following the above enquiries. The Council will then contact the top three applicants on the shortlist to determine whether they would like to proceed to view the property. A greater number of applicants may be contacted to minimise the time a property is empty or where a strategic let is needed.

13.2 Only the applicants that are being considered for the property will be notified. They will be given all of the property details except for the house or flat number and asked if they would like to proceed with the provisional offer.

13.3 The applicant will be notified of the documents that they are required to provide, and these must be provided within the next 48 hours except in exceptional circumstances as agreed with a Senior Officer. Failure to provide the required documents may result in the applicant being bypassed and this will be counted as a refusal of the property.

13.4 If an applicant refuses the offer at this stage, this will be considered as a refusal if the offer is considered to be suitable. See section 13.10 – 13.30.

Viewing the offer of accommodation

- 13.5 Applicants will be invited to view the offer of accommodation so that an informed decision can be made about whether to accept it. All applicants are strongly encouraged to attend a viewing. At this stage, the Council will issue a formal offer of accommodation in writing.
- 13.6 In the case of joint applicants, both should attend. The applicant cannot arrange for a representative to view on their behalf, although it is permitted for a representative or an advocate to attend with the applicant. Notice will need to be given to the Council of this.
- 13.7 The final decision to accept or reject an offer of accommodation can only be made by the applicant(s). The Council will not discuss an offer of accommodation with anyone else unless there is written permission to do so.
- 13.8 Applicants cannot informally view a property while building or maintenance works are being carried out due to health and safety implications. Viewings will only be by prior appointment and when accompanied by an officer of the Council. The Council will not be held responsible for the safety of anyone entering the property without an accompanied viewing appointment.
- 13.9 If the applicant first offered the property refuses it, then the property will be offered to the applicant with the next highest priority subject to the criteria in section 11.37 – 11.41.

Refusal of an offer of accommodation

- 13.10 Applicants who have successfully bid for a property and chose to refuse it or refuse to view the property, without a reasonable cause, will only be entitled to one further offer of suitable accommodation. This does not apply to Homeless Households who are only entitled to one suitable offer.
- 13.11 Upon viewing an offer of accommodation, the applicant will be given a reasonable period of time in which to accept or refuse the offer. This will usually be 24 hours but can be extended to 48 hours if the applicant is considered vulnerable and there are mitigating circumstances, to be agreed with a Senior Officer.
- 13.12 If the applicant does not provide their written reasons for refusing within the agreed timescale, then the Council will still deem this as a refusal.
- 13.13 Applicants are able to refuse an offer of accommodation without viewing it, but this is strongly advised against. Applicants who fail to view the property without a reasonable cause, will also be treated as refusing the offer.
- 13.14 The Council will then need to decide whether the refusal is reasonable. This is dealt with in the sections below.

- 13.15 Applicants who fail to respond to contact from Officers or those who initially engage but fail to provide the required documentation within the prescribed timescale, will also be treated as refusing the offer.
- 13.16 All of the above applies to all applicants on the Housing Register.

Homeseekers and Transfer who refuse

- 13.17 These applicants will need to provide in writing their reasons for refusing an offer of accommodation as per the guidelines above. These will be considered by the Housing Allocations Team. Applicants can provide additional, supporting information but this will need to be provided at the time of the written refusal so that it can be considered.
- 13.18 The Council may make enquiries into the reasons for refusing so that an informed decision can be made. The applicant will be verbally notified of the Council's decision where possible within 24 hours of receiving the written refusal details.
- 13.19 The Council's decision will be put in writing to the applicant, also advising that there is a right to request a review. If the offer is considered to be suitable, then the applicant will be given 24 hours in which to reconsider and accept the offer.
- 13.20 Failure to accept the offer within the time period will result in the application being placed into Band E and the property being offered to another applicant.
- 13.21 The reassessment to Band E will also mean a new registration date for that applicant and the loss of accrued time on the Housing Register when in the previous higher band. The application will remain in Band E for 12 months.
- 13.22 It is the responsibility of the applicant to complete a change of circumstances form to request reassessment after the 12-month period. The Council will not be responsible for any extended time in this banding due to an applicant's failure to request a reassessment.
- 13.23 Emergency Management transfer tenants in Band A who refuse one suitable offer of rehousing (where they have an existing transfer application live at the time of the management transfer request), will return to their original banding.

Refusals under the Assisted Choice for Homeless Households Scheme

- 13.24 Accepted homeless households have the right to accept the offer of accommodation and request a review on its suitability under section 202 of the Housing Act 1996 as amended. This would mean that if the review finds that the property is suitable, the accommodation will be available to them. These applicants will be strongly advised to take up this right.
- 13.25 Households may decide not to accept the offer of accommodation. They will need to provide in writing their reasons for refusing within 24 hours of viewing

the property. This will be considered by the Homelessness and Advice Team. Applicants are able to provide additional, supporting information but this will need to be provided at the time of the written refusal.

- 13.26 The Council may make enquiries into the reasons for refusing so that an informed decision can be made. The applicant will be verbally notified of the Council's decision within 24 hours of receiving the written refusal details.
- 13.27 The Council's decision will be put in writing to the applicant, also advising that there is a right to request a review. If the offer is considered to be suitable, then the applicant will be given 24 hours in which to reconsider and accept the offer. After this time the property may not be kept available to the applicant.
- 13.28 Failure to accept the offer within this period will result in the Council discharging its statutory homeless duty. No further offers of accommodation will be made and the application will be removed from the Housing Register. The Council will serve a notice to quit on the applicant to leave the temporary accommodation, which will result in County Court proceedings and an order of costs being pursued, should the applicant remain in the accommodation beyond the date the Notice to Quit expires.
- 13.29 The Council will owe the applicant an advice and assistance duty only and it will be the responsibility of the applicant to secure alternate accommodation.
- 13.30 Where there are dependent children in the household, the Council will inform Surrey County Council's Children's Services of the discharge of duty and work with them to assist the family.

Reviews under section 202 of the Housing Act 1996 as amended

- 13.31 Homeless households are advised in writing of the right to accept the offer and then request a review on its suitability under section 202 of the Housing Act 1996 as amended. In addition, households have the right of appeal to the County Court under section 204.
- 13.32 Applicants will be able to move into the accommodation whilst the review is being undertaken.
- 13.33 If homeless households choose to refuse the offer of accommodation and not move in, they can still request a review on suitability. **The offer of accommodation will not remain available to them however and will be offered to another household.**
- 13.34 If the review decision determines that the offer of accommodation was in fact unsuitable, then a further offer of accommodation will be made.

Accepting a tenancy

- 13.35 The applicant will be asked to confirm that they accept the offer of accommodation. At this stage, the Council will advise when the property is likely to be ready to move into and advise the applicant to make arrangements for the anticipated move. Arrangements will then be made for the tenancy agreement to be signed.
- 13.36 It is likely that there will only be a short period of time between accepting the offer and starting the tenancy, unless there are exceptional circumstances that prevent this, which have been agreed by a Senior Officer.

Rent in advance

- 13.37 In line with the Council's Rent Policy, applicants will be required to pay up to four weeks rent in advance at the sign up. This will also include the proportion of rent due for any days up to the first Monday of the tenancy, which will be detailed in the offer letter.

Applicants leaving Temporary Accommodation

- 13.38 Once an applicant has signed the tenancy agreement and has the keys for their new home, they are expected to leave their temporary accommodation and return all keys without delay. Applicants will be responsible for ongoing rent until the keys are returned.
- 13.39 Applicants are expected to leave the temporary accommodation in good condition, with all personal possessions and furniture removed. Failure to do so could result in costs being re-charged to the applicant.

Transfer tenants

- 13.40 Once a transfer tenant has accepted the offer of accommodation, the Allocations Officer will send a Tenancy Termination form to be completed. Applicants are required to give at least one weeks' notice on their current home. A longer notice period can be given but once the new tenancy has started, the applicant will be liable for rents on both properties.
- 13.41 It is expected that tenants will leave their council property in good condition, with all personal possessions and furniture removed. Failure to do so could result in costs being re-charged to the tenant.

14. Review, Complaints and Discretion

Requesting a review

- 14.1 The Council will notify an applicant in writing of any decisions that are made on their application. The decision letter will clearly set out the reasons for the decision and outline the applicants right to request a review. Applicants have the right to request a review of one or more of the following decisions:
- Ineligibility to join the waiting list
 - Disqualification
 - The banding awarded
 - Removal from the list
- 14.2 Removal from the list may include circumstances where there are reasonable grounds for believing that an applicant has been bypassed for a specific property due to a failure to consider a material factor, or consideration of an immaterial factor, or otherwise due to administrative error.
- 14.3 Applicants are encouraged to discuss their circumstances with a member of the Allocations Team in the first instance, so that we can clearly explain the reasoning for our decision in accordance with the Scheme.
- 14.4 Should an applicant be dissatisfied with a decision reached on their application, they are able to request a review which will be processed in accordance with the review procedure.

Review procedure

- a) The applicant will be notified in writing of any decisions made in respect of their application stating their right of review.
- b) If an applicant wishes to seek a review, they must request a review of a decision within 21 days of being notified of the decision. Reviews requested outside of the 21 day limit may be considered in exceptional circumstances.
- c) The review request should be made in writing and should clearly outline the reasons why the applicant considers the decision to be wrong. The applicant is invited to provide any additional information and evidence, they wish to be considered as part of the review. The review request can be submitted by a representative on the applicant's behalf, although we will need explicit consent from the applicant to discuss the case with anyone other than the applicant. If the applicant requires assistance to submit their review request in writing this will be provided.
- d) Requests for review should be sent to:

Housing Allocations Team
Runnymede Borough Council
Civic Centre

Station Road
Addlestone
Surrey
KT15 2AH

Email: housingallocations@runnymede.gov.uk

e) Should an applicant wish to make verbal representations, as well as written submissions, the applicant will be able to do so. The applicant should indicate a wish to discuss the review verbally in the formal review request.

f) The review will be carried out by an officer who is senior to the person who made the original decision.

g) The review will be considered on the basis of the Councils Allocations Scheme, any legal requirements and all relevant information. This will include all information provided by the applicant since the original decision was made and any other relevant developments, such as advice from medical or other specialist advisors.

h) The deadline for completing the review is 56 calendar days of receiving the request, however, there may be some occasions where this may take longer. Should this be the case the applicant will be notified of any extension and the reasons for this

i) Applicants will be notified in writing of the outcome of the review and will set out the reasons for the decision.

j) This review response is the final decision and there is no further internal review stage.

14.5 If the applicant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the decision, they may wish to register a complaint.

14.6 Should the applicant have any new material information, for example a new medical diagnosis or medication, they are able to submit a change of circumstances form.

Making a Complaint

14.7 Should an applicant be dissatisfied with the outcome of any decision that carries a right to a review (section 14.1), the applicant should, in the first instance, request that this decision is reviewed in accordance with the review procedure.

14.8 Applicants can use the Council's formal complaints procedure to make a complaint about the Allocations Scheme or if they are dissatisfied with the service that they have received.

- 14.9 All applicants who make a complaint will be treated fairly and objectively. A written reply to any complaint received will be sent within the timescales set out within the Councils Complaints Procedure, which is available online at <https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/comments-complaints-and-compliments>

Senior Officer's Discretion

- 14.10 Where this Scheme includes a power vested in a Senior Officer to award any additional priority, grant any benefit or waive any requirement, that power shall be exercised by the Homelessness, Housing Advice & Allocations Manager, or authorised deputy and, unless otherwise provided for in this Scheme, will be exercised having regard to all the circumstances of the case as well as the general circumstances of others applying to the Council for rehousing.

15. Right to information, Data Protection & Confidentiality

Right to Information

- 15.1 All applicants have the right to request information about their application, including whether they are entitled to any reasonable preference (Section 2) for housing and when suitable housing may be offered. This is to enable them to assess how their applications is likely to be treated and whether they are likely to secure suitable housing.

Data Protection

- 15.2 Data collected from applications for housing is processed in accordance with EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2016 and the Data Protection Act 2018. For the purpose of the Act, Runnymede is the "Data Controller" and is responsible for the information held.
- 15.3 Applicants, when making an application for housing, agree for the Council to share information with and to request information from relevant agencies and departments, both within and outside of the Council, in order to assess and verify the application. This may include credit reference agencies, current or former landlords, government departments or health and/or social care providers.

Confidentiality

- 15.4 Information received in relation to an application will be treated in confidence in accordance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2016 and the Data Protection Act 2018. Confidential information held about customers will not be disclosed to third parties apart from:
- Where it is necessary to process the application
 - Where the individual has consented to the disclosure
 - Where the Council is required in law to make the disclosure

- Where the disclosure is made in accordance with a recognised Information sharing protocol
- For reasons of public protection
- Otherwise in accordance with our Privacy Notice at <https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/article/19597/Departmental-Privacy-Notices?p=1>

16. Equal Opportunities Monitoring and Review of the Scheme

- 16.1 In line with its Equality Policy, the Council is committed to ensuring its scheme, procedures and service, in the letting of property are non-discriminatory and that all customers are able to access the service especially taking account of any vulnerability or other specific needs, and also the needs of different groups protected by Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010.
- 16.2 Applicants are invited to indicate if they wish to make use of the Council's translation and interpretation services, or if they require other special services as a result of a visual impairment, hearing difficulties or other disability. Confidential interview facilities are provided at the Civic Centre There is full access to the Civic Centre for wheelchair users. Home interview services are available for applicants who are elderly or who experience mobility difficulties or have other vulnerabilities.
- 16.3 The Council will seek to ensure that its allocation policies are being operated in a manner that is fair to all sections of the community regardless of nationality, ethnic origin, marital status, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy/ maternity and religion. The information provided will be kept confidential and treated with respect. The Council believes it is important to understand the different communities who apply for housing and it is only by asking these questions can the Council check that it is operating a fair system.
- 16.4 All applicants for housing or re-housing will be asked to provide equalities information. Provision of this information will not be obligatory and not a requirement for acceptance of an application. However, such information will help the Council monitor the number and types of equality groups seeking support and therefore applicants will be strongly advised to provide this information. Equalities records will be monitored regularly to ensure properties are being offered and allocated fairly.
- 16.5 Allocation policies and any changes to them will be reviewed regularly to ensure they do not operate in ways that discriminate against or disadvantage any particular group.
- 16.6 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed on the entirety of this scheme and a copy is available on request.

Review of the scheme

- 16.7 This Scheme is subject to regular review, and where the Scheme requires changes which are minor in nature, or where the changes are required urgently for legal reasons, or changes in government policy and / or legislation, these changes will be approved by the Chair / Vice Chair of Housing Committee.
- 16.8 Subject to the urgency of the change, any major change required to the Scheme will be subject to full public consultation.

Housing Allocations Scheme: Changes to Allocations Scheme

The table below describes the current scheme, the proposed change and the rational for that change. The document refers to background data which is attached at the end of this table. The outcome of the consultation program is also attached.

	Description and Section of <u>current</u> scheme	Proposed Change	Rational for change
1.	Whole document	Re-write, tidy up and reduce ambiguity in the scheme so that it is a clear, easy to use and understandable document.	<p>To make it clearer and easier to use, to reduce ambiguity and to ensure a clear document for the customer.</p> <p>This makes it a workable document that is easy to understand and apply, which will speed up the internal process and enable applicants to understand the reasons for our decision making.</p>
2.	Section 2: Legal context	Update this to reflect changes in legislation.	<p>Legislative changes required to reflect current law.</p> <p>The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, introduced new duties on the Local Authority to prevent and relieve homelessness. Allocations schemes will be designed to reflect local priorities and needs but must also provide reasonable preference to people who are homeless or owed specific homelessness duties as set out in section 166A(3) of the 1996 Act. This will include providing reasonable preference to people who are owed the prevention (section 195(2)) or relief (section 189B) duty. Allocations schemes need to be sufficiently geared towards preventing homelessness.</p> <p>The Immigration and Social Security Coordination (EU Withdrawal) Act 2020, changed the eligibility requirements for persons from abroad. The EU Settlement Scheme is due to end at the end of June so does not need to be included within the scheme as the anticipated commencement date for</p>

			<p>the scheme is 01 July 2021. However, changes to eligibility requirements ongoing will need to be considered.</p> <p>The Domestic Abuse Act, received royal assent on 29 April 2021. The date of commencement is yet to be announced but this will impact on the local authority. For example, those in social housing who experience domestic abuse will be able to flee their home and move to another social home so that they do not lose their security of tenure. This will need to be considered as part of the new scheme, although the existing scheme does give a high banding award (A) for victims of domestic abuse.</p>
3.	Section 4: Eligibility	The new scheme will amend the eligibility criteria requirements to ensure this is in line with government legislation.	<p>On 31 January 2020, the UK formally left the European Union (EU) and entered a transitional period, which will end at 11pm on 31 December 2020.</p> <p>The Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Act 2020 repealed the EEA Regulations, at 11pm on 31 December 2020 impacting on EU free movement of persons in UK law. The legislation introduces a new global points-based immigration system.</p> <p>Whilst the Government is committed to preserving the rights of EEA citizens and their family members who are resident or working in the UK by setting up the EU Settlement Scheme, these changes do impact on who will be considered eligible for social housing.</p> <p>The eligibility criteria are set at national level by Central Government and the new scheme will be amended to reflect the legislative changes. Local Councils are not to allocate social housing to anyone that is considered to be ineligible, so this is a very important update.</p>

4.	Section 5.3: Qualification	<p>Increase the working criteria in the scheme from 12 months to 3 years so that this matches the 3 year residency criteria.</p> <p>To remove qualification through a family member and make qualification as only through unique health/welfare need for being in the borough only.</p> <p>.</p>	<p>The Government is of the view that, in deciding who qualifies or does not qualify for social housing, local authorities should ensure that they prioritise applicants who can demonstrate a close association with their local area.</p> <p>Employment in the district – for example, where the applicant or member of their household is currently employed in the district and has worked there for a certain number of years is suggested. There are 116 households on the waiting list who have been employed in Runnymede for 12 months or more.</p> <p>There is a disparity between someone living in Runnymede for 3 years compared to someone working here for 1 year. To improve the fairness of the scheme it is proposed to increase the number of years employed in the area to be closer aligned with those who live in the area. Between 01 April 2019 and 26 October 2020, 12 households were housed having worked in the area for 12 months or more. A full Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken for the qualification criteria.</p> <p>The scheme also proposes the removal of the 10 year family residence and unique welfare criteria. Both elements of this are required to be met in order to join the list which has been confusing for applicants and triggered the greatest number of reviews. It is proposed that instead, there is no family qualification and there must be a unique welfare need for the person to live in Runnymede only, for example to give or receive care that could not otherwise be received.</p>
5.	Section: 5.13: Applicants seeking retirement housing	The current scheme accepts applications from single persons aged 55 and over who are looking for retirement/sheltered housing only and	There is a shortage of social housing available in Runnymede, yet generally a surplus of accommodation available for independent retirement living.

		<p>they do not need to satisfy the local connection requirements.</p> <p>To change this criteria so that a person over 55 must have a family member living in the borough who has met the local connection criteria i.e. lived here continuously for 3 years.</p>	<p>Currently anyone without a local connection, who is over 55 can register for a retirement property. To ensure homes are let to local people, we propose that those without a local connection are still able to register, if over 55 and only seeking retirement housing but only if they have a close connection to the area in that a family member has lived here and meets the residency criteria i.e. they have lived here for the last three continuous years.</p> <p>This change means more local people with a connection to Runcymede are able to access social housing stock.</p>
6.	Section 5.12: Armed Forces	<p>Update the armed forces qualification criteria to include separated spouses as exempt from local connection qualification criteria.</p>	<p>The Improving Access to Social Housing for Members of the Armed Forces was published on 27 June 2020 which the Secretary of State strongly encourages local authorities to exempt from any local connection requirement divorced or separated spouses or civil partners of Service personnel who need to move out of accommodation provided by the Ministry of Defence.</p> <p><i>18. The Secretary of State strongly encourages local authorities to exempt from any local connection requirements divorced or separated spouses or civil partners of Service personnel who need to move out of accommodation provided by the Ministry of Defence.</i></p> <p>Separated spouses will therefore be exempt from the local connection qualification.</p>
7.	Section 5.14: Financial Resources	<p>Currently there is a financial net limit of £30,000 per year income for single or couples and a £50,000 for families.</p> <p>These figures have been reviewed and it has been decided that these limits remain appropriate.</p>	<p>Government believes that it is appropriate, proportionate and in the public interest to restrict access in this way, to ensure that, as far as possible, sufficient affordable housing is available for those amongst the local population who are on low incomes or otherwise disadvantaged and who would find it particularly difficult to find a home on the open market. As per background data, section 7, these limits remain proportionate.</p>

		<p>There is also a £16,000 asset limit, which again has been considered and reviews and determined that it should stay the same. However, a new asset limit for those aged over the age of 60 will be introduced.</p> <p>It is proposed that over 60s will be able to have assets of £55,000 if they are registering for retirement housing only.</p>	<p>The current £16,000 asset limit was set in line with the DWP rules for housing benefit. These rules remain in place so it is proposed that we continue to keep these at this rate.</p> <p>As per section 7 of background data, applicants over the age of 60 may not be able to obtain a mortgage for a significant length. It is proposed that those over 60 who are seeking retirement housing are able to join if they have assets of up to £55,000, but will be disqualified if they have assets of a greater value or have disposed of those assets to gain social housing.</p>
8.	Section 5.14 b & j	<p>b) applicants who have ever exercised the right to buy are disqualified from joining the register. It is proposed that they are disqualified for 5 years from the date of disposal, gifted, sold the property etc unless in exceptional circumstances</p> <p>c) Introduce a higher asset limit for those who are over 60 years of age who are applying for retirement/sheltered living.</p> <p>j) To include a clause for deliberately disposing of capital or an asset of over £16,000 within 5 years of the applications, that could have reasonably be used to have resolved the housing situation</p>	<p>b) An indefinite exclusion is inconsistent with the other 5 year exclusions within the scheme. Where a person has had a change of circumstances that has resulted in the sale of a previous right to buy property, for example due to domestic abuse and they later need housing assistance, it seems harsh to permanently exclude. A 5 year exclusion from date of disposal fits with the other 5 year exclusions in the scheme.</p> <p>c) Applicants that are over the age of 60, may be unable to obtain a mortgage of sufficient length in order to resolve their own housing situation. The analysis suggests (background data, section 7) that £55,000 is what an over 60 year old would need in order to access a retirement property in the private market and therefore anyone over 60 who applies to the housing register for a retirement property only, will be able to have assets of up to £55,000.</p> <p>j) Added as point iii within deliberately worsening circumstances. There are occasions where an applicant will spend, gift, hide etc, assets in order to meet the asset limit of £16,000. In those instances, these applicants will be disqualified from joining the housing register.</p>

9.	Section 6.7: Working households	Remove the 25% quota of vacancies to go to working households.	This is not currently monitored as there are a minimal number of households on the waiting list that need accommodation and are working. Income limits restrict higher earners from joining the list and the list has been based on housing need.
10.	Section 6: Determining Priority (Banding)	<p>Currently we have Bands A, B, C1, C2, D1 and D2.</p> <p>It is proposed that we simplify the bands to be A, B, C, D, E</p>	<p>The current banding structure is illogical. For example, there is a letter for some bandings but a split between letter and number for others, there is inconsistency in this and needs to be simplified.</p> <p>As per section 1.8 of background data, there has only been 1 person housed from band C2, which was in 2016 and there are currently 0 applicants within this band. There is a high percentage of properties being let to those in Band D2 which is the lowest priority. By reviewing the banding, we can ensure that those with a slightly higher need than others are given a priority reflection in the revised structure to ensure homes are going to those in need. It is proposed that the banding structure be changed to a simplified letter structure to reduce confusion for applicants.</p>
11.	Section 6: Determining Priority (Banding)	<p>Update to who sits within each band to better reflect housing need.</p> <p>Band A: Remove welfare reform. Move Underoccupation to band B</p>	<p>As per point 3.10 background data, 37.5% of lets to home seekers went to the lowest band. Ordinarily you'd expect a much lower percentage of lets to this band as it is classed as the lowest priority. By clearly defining the banding to ensure that the right people are housed, we have reviewed the current scheme and updated the banding to a similar structure and ensured those with higher needs are given a higher banding position.</p> <p>Welfare reform in the current scheme covers a number of things such as homelessness prevention which will now be included within a Homelessness Reduction Act criteria so proposed to remove this criteria.</p>

		<p>Band B: Remove welfare reform. Move care leavers and armed forces to band C. To add Homelessness Reduction Act banding and non-successor with a priority need to move.</p> <p>Band C: Add additional band for rough sleepers, parental eviction at home for 12 months and move reasonable preference from C2 to C.</p> <p>Band D: New low priority for medical band. RBC non-successors with no priority need</p> <p>Band E: Adult children wishing to leave the family home.</p>	<p>Underoccupaton of social homes to be moved to band B. This is still a high priority but reflects that their need to move is not as urgent as some other criteria. A downsizing scheme with incentives is likely to be more successful than awarding a band A for downsizing moves too.</p> <p>As per band A, there is no requirement for welfare reform as this is covered within other qualify bands. To move care leavers and armed forces personel to band C, which is still a high band but to reflect the need of the list. To add non-successors that have been assessed as priority need within the meaning of the Housing Act 1996 to band B and to include those owed a prevention/relief duty to this banding.</p> <p>To include verified rough sleepers as a banding in accordance with the Governments commitment to end rough sleeping. To introduce a critera where a parental eviction has resulted in the adult child being able to remain in the family home for a period of at least 12 months since the initial threat of eviction (so long as it is reasonable to continue to occupy).</p> <p>New low medical band (as outlined below). A new non-successor no priority need band to support move on from a social home.</p> <p>Adult children living with parents who wish to make a planned move to alternate accommodation.</p>
12.	Section 6: Medical priority	<p>Currently medical priority is awarded as band A, B and C1.</p> <p>It is proposed that we introduce a further medical award within the</p>	<p>There are some cases where an applicant has provided evidence of a medical need but does not meet the threshold for a C1 banding award and they are therefore awarded D2 based on the rest of their application. The D2 group is significant with 854 applicants from 1131 (1.3 background</p>

		updated banding structure to reflect, Emergency (A), Urgent (B), Medium (C) and Low (D)	data) in this band. By introducing a low medical need banding, it will enable us to recognise the low medical need as a greater priority than those without these conditions.
13.	Section 6.10.3: Domestic Abuse	To update the banding criteria to reflect the changes as introduced when the Domestic Abuse Act becomes law. To consider with other local authorities a Surrey mobility scheme for survivors of domestic abuse	This will be determined by legislation.
14.	Section 6.34: Overcrowding assessments	To remove overcrowding assessments from the scheme and to move relevant wording into the actual overcrowding bands.	Overcrowding assessments are time consuming and have limited benefit to the assessment process. By strengthening the overcrowding definition, an applicant either will or will not meet the threshold for the banding award. Those that do not meet the threshold will be advised to seek further advice from other services such as the Sustainment team.
15.	Section 6.15.8: Runnymede Council tenants	Runnymede Council tenants can join the Transfer List without any identified need to move. It is proposed that these applicants will not be eligible for the Housing Register, only those in housing need will be able to register.	If an applicant is adequately housed, there is no need for them to register to move. If they did move through the scheme, this would not free up alternate stock but would cause additional void work and void periods and potentially prevent another applicant from accessing social housing. The limited social housing stock should be used for those in the greatest need only. Social housing tenants with a genuine need to move will be able to register for the list, those that would prefer to move but have no need to, will need to pursue alternate avenues such as mutual exchange.
16.	Section 8: Size of Accommodation	Add a new heading for: Assessment of a reasonable household	Introduce a new heading for reasonable household so that we have the ability to determine who actually resides or can reasonably be expected to do so. For example, an applicant that is overcrowded who then decides to invite their parent to be part of their household, either giving up existing accommodation or not, in order to increase the applicant's

		<p>Expand in the section Children placed with responsible adults</p>	<p>bedroom need, would not be considered as part of a reasonable household unless there was clear evidence of dependency and no other suitable accommodation available for that household member.</p> <p>There are occasions where an adult child will return to an elderly parent's home and apply for a 2 bedroom property in the hope of succeeding to the larger property. The scheme makes it unlikely that a parent or an adult child returning to live with one another would be accepted as a reasonable household where both have lived and could have continued to have lived separately.</p> <p>Where a child has accommodation available to them with one parent, it is unlikely that we would allocate them a second home with the other parent (Holmes-Moorehouse). Consideration to the bedspace at the parent's home will be given when determining the household size of the new applicant.</p>
17.	Section 9: Bidding	<p>Currently applicants have the choice of what to bid for (other than homeless households) and they are not penalised if they do not place a bid.</p> <p>Given that the waiting list is intended to provide housing to those in the greatest need and isn't intended for people to join and wait for their desired home. It is proposed that if an applicant has not placed a bid within any 12 month period, but where properties have been available to bid on, that they will be set to auto bid.</p>	<p>As per section 1.2 of background data, the number of applicants on the housing register has increased year on year. However, as per sections 6.1 – 6.4 of background data, there are a considerable number of candidates that join the housing register but do not bid for accommodation.</p> <p>This is not what the housing register is for, it is not intended to give applicants reassurance that they are on the housing register and that they can wait for as long as they want to in order to get their ideal property. It is a housing 'needs' register, to provide accommodation to those in the highest need groups.</p> <p>The impact of candidates waiting and not bidding until they find their ideal home has a negative impact on the process.</p>

			<p>I.e. if someone waits for 2 years without the intention of bidding, they will build up two year “wait” time compared to someone in need who would take any property who has just joined. Therefore, when the person who has waited for 2 years bids, they will always be above that same person in the same band, which cannot be correct. There are applicants with high priority who wait many years without bidding, and this means that the urgent or emergency priority they were awarded should be reviewed.</p> <p>If the system was a direct let offer for all, applicants in the higher bands (band A and B) would be successful much quicker than the statistics suggest but because they have choice of what they bid on, this takes longer where people are able to wait and choose, this does not indicate a genuine housing need.</p> <p>It is therefore proposed that all applicants are required to bid within any 12 month period if properties are available for them to do so. Failure to bid for a property within this time period will result in their application being set to auto bid. Whilst they can express a preference for the area that they want to live they will no longer be able to select and choose what they bid for as the system will do this for them. Should a subsequent offer be made and refused this will count as one of their offers (if it was indeed a suitable, reasonable offer)</p> <p>There will be a commonsense approach to this i.e. there must have been properties for someone to bid on in the first place and all offers made will have to be assessed as suitable in accordance with the Suitability of Accommodation Order 2012.</p>
18.	Section 10: Offers	Other than homeless households who are only made one suitable offer, all other applicants are entitled to two	When the Council advertise a property and subsequently shortlist the successful candidate, the team are required to ensure rigorous verification checks are carried out to ensure

		<p>offers. Refusal of two suitable offers will result in the application being moved to a lower banding.</p> <p>We are making the scheme clearer that that failure to view/refusal at viewing stage will count as refusal and that by placing the bid you acknowledge that you may be offered the property at any time.</p> <p>It is proposed that applicants living in supported housing will be made one direct offer only, see point 22 below.</p>	<p>the limited social homes available go to those who meet the criteria in the scheme. This is a time-consuming process.</p> <p>If an applicant decides to place a bid for a property it will be treated as their agreement to be offered the property and a refusal of an offer at any point following the closure of the bidding cycle will be deemed as a refusal.</p> <p>Applicants in supported housing have not been actively bidding to move and this has caused a blockage of supported housing when applicants are ready to move on and this has impacted on homeless individuals who do need supported housing. It is therefore proposed that when an applicant in supported housing is ready to move, that they will be made a direct offer.</p>
<p>19.</p>	<p>Section 13: Assisted Choice for Homeless Households</p> <p>Also, sections: 6.10.8, 6.11.7, 6.11.8, 6.12.1</p>	<p>The current scheme references homeless within “28 days” this needs to be changed to “56 days”</p> <p>To update all homelessness fields within the scheme to reflect the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.</p> <p>This includes the introduction of a criteria within the new banding for prevention, relief, main duty and limited duty cases to reflect the legislation, and an additional band for verified rough sleepers.</p>	<p>This change is a legislative requirement, the Housing Act 1996 was amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. This changed the definition of being threatened with homelessness within 28 days to 56 days. This change therefore is a legal amendment.</p> <p>Similarly, the Act introduced new duties on the Council to “prevent” and “relieve” homelessness and these new duties should be reflected within the allocations scheme. The Government’s commitment to ending rough sleeping has required Councils to develop a rough sleeper plan. Whilst the number of rough sleepers in Runnymede is low, we have included a band for verified rough sleepers (Band C).</p> <p>It is proposed that those accepted as owed a prevention or relief duty are placed into Band B for the duration of the duty owed to give them the best chance of resolving their situation.</p>

			<p>Those accepted as owed the main housing duty will go into Band C, but as per the current scheme will not be able to bid and will only be made a direct offer.</p> <p>Those that are found to be not in priority need or intentionally homeless and therefore not owed a duty will go into a lower band (D)</p>
20.	Section 14: Appeals and Reviews	<p>The current scheme has two review stages – a stage one review carried out by an officer more senior to the original decision maker and the right to progress the case to a stage two review if they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of the stage one review. The stage two review is carried out by a more senior officer than the officer at stage one.</p>	<p>The housing solutions team is relatively small and there has been occasions where the Team Leader or the Team Manager are required to make the original decision. This means that if the decision is escalated by a review, it falls to the Section Manager and subsequently the Head of Department which was not intended by the scheme. The first review should be carried out by the team leader and then stage two by the team Manager but with a small team, this isn't always possible.</p> <p>There is nothing within the statute that requires the scheme to have a two stage review process. The legislation requires one review stage and that is what is proposed in the new scheme.</p> <p>As per background data, section 2.5 – 2.6, of 60 stage one review requests, only 13 were overturned. Of the remaining 47 cases where the decision did not change, only 13 applications took their case to stage two and 0 were overturned. The second review is essentially reviewing the information in stage one again which is a duplicate of time and work and is unnecessary.</p> <p>Applicants who are dissatisfied with the outcome of their application also have the right to complain through the corporate complaints process which is also a two stage process. There is no justification for an applicant's case to be reviewed in effect on four occasions, especially when no cases have been overturned at stage two.</p>

21.	Section 14: Appeals and Reviews	<p>The current scheme gives 10 working days to complete the review. It is proposed that this time is increased from 10 working days to 56 days as per the government guidance.</p>	<p>All reviews are completed thoroughly but as quickly as possible to give reassurance to the applicant and although this proposal is to extend the time available to complete the review, if a review can be made sooner than the agreed time, it will be.</p> <p>As above, the team is small and setting a short 10 working day window for completing reviews puts undue pressure on officers to make a decision on often quite complex information.</p> <p>The government guidance on reviews sets a 56 day period for completing the review and this is in line with the review period for the homeless side.</p> <p>It is recommended that the timeframe for completing reviews is increased to 56 days.</p>
22.	Supported housing	<p>Direct offers to be made to those who are assessed as ready to move who are currently living in supported housing.</p> <p>Seperately but linked to the allocations scheme, develop a joint procedure with supported housing providers to ensure that when applicants in supported housing are ready to move, that they are supported to consider all housing options including social housing in order to ensure sufficient move on and free up voids in supported housing for others in need.</p>	<p>There are occasions where applicants are living in supported housing either for much longer than the intended two years and/or when they are ready to move on and this blocks bed spaces for others that need supported housing to move to.</p> <p>To make best use of all housing stock in the borough, a direct offer only to applicants in supported housing who have been assessed as ready to move on should support the individuals into suitable housing and free up the required bedspaces for those facing homelessness.</p> <p>The introduction of a new joint procedure will provide scope to ensure sufficient move on and enable the council to utilise vacancies for others coming through as homeless. This is a separate document to the allocations scheme.</p>

23.	Headings and layout	<p>Changes to the order of headings</p> <p>Section 3: Definition of an allocation and sections 5.19: Assessing reasonable preference and 5.23 additional preference and 5.24 deciding between applicants – all moved under Section 2 Legal Framework in new scheme.</p> <p>Section 4 Eligibility therefore becomes section 3 in the new scheme. Section 5 qualification becomes section 4.</p> <p>Section 7: Procedure in the current scheme is reworded into Section 5: Who can apply in the new scheme</p> <p>Section 18: Fraud is now section 6 to make it more prominent in the scheme</p> <p>A new How to Apply heading added at section 7 in the new scheme and a new Assessment of Applications added at section 8.</p> <p>Section 8 of the existing scheme is now section 9 in the new scheme for property size.</p> <p>Section 6: Banding, is now section 10</p> <p>Sections 9: Properties, advertising and bidding and section 10: shortlisting,</p>	<p>To make the scheme clearer and enable the document to flow better for the customer reading it.</p> <p>The Council are committed to counter social housing fraud and want to make fraud a clear heading earlier in the scheme to deter fraudulent applications.</p>
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		viewing and letting of properties are now 11,12 and 13 in the new scheme.	
24.	New: Section 7: How to apply	Introduction of a requirement to watch a pre-registration video/pre-tenancy training before completing the rest of the application. Subject to capability of the system.	<p>Once an applicant has completed the pre-assessment module and been approved to continue to complete the full application, they will be asked to watch/complete a video/questionnaire which explains what the housing register is, how it works, how to bid for properties, how long it takes on average etc. This is to better inform the applicant of what the housing register is and to manage expectations and signpost to other services as required i.e. homeless service if they have an urgent housing situation.</p> <p>This should improve customer experience and provide education of the system, the decisions we make and should empower the customer to manage their application properly.</p>
25.	New: Produce a summary document	Produce a shortened summary version of the scheme available for the public.	All local authorities should provide a shortened summary of the allocations scheme that is accessible by the public. This should make the scheme easier for the public to understand.

Housing Allocations Scheme: Background Data – Working Document

In order to understand the trends and impact of the current Allocations Scheme, it is important to analyse at least the last two years of statistics published by MHCLG via CORE and internal reporting.

The scheme must give reasonable preference to certain priority groups, such as people who are homeless within the meaning of Part VII of the 1996 Act, people occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing, people needing to move on medical, welfare or disability grounds and people that need to move to a particular locality in the district to avoid hardship. The legislation also outlines who is Eligible for social housing and provides guidance on Qualification rules. It is important that the new scheme achieves the legal responsibilities as well as the Council's aim of making best use of social housing stock and supporting local people with the greatest need.

The background data sets out who is currently on the waiting list, as well as who did not qualify and why. It looks at the current review procedure and makes recommendations for change. The background data also highlights some key reasons for amendments to the current scheme.

1. Who is on the list

- 1.1 The scheme has both an 'eligibility' and a 'qualification' criteria, both of which must be achieved in order to be able to join the list. Eligibility is set in law, for example, those that have no recourse to public funds are not entitled to social housing. We have no control over the eligibility regulations, but we are able to set out our own qualification criteria, having regard for the Localism Act 2011. Currently we require a household to have lived in the borough for the last three years continuously, or to have worked in the borough for the last twelve months or to have a family member that has lived in the area for the last 10 years and they have a unique welfare need to live here. We therefore need to consider who is on the list currently and ask the question of who should be able to join in the future scheme, in order to ensure the limited social stock is offered to local people in the greatest need.
- 1.2 There were 1,220 households waiting for social housing in 2016, however, the introduction of the 2017 Scheme reduced the number of those waiting to 788. This may have been in part due to people failing to respond to the re-registration process. It is likely that a re-registration programme for the new scheme will both restrict some current members from re-joining and others are likely to fail to return their re-registration form, this is common for a re-registration. Since the 2017 scheme was introduced there has been a steady increase per year of those waiting for social accommodation. This trend is likely to continue given the uncertainties of Covid-19 and Brexit. Our current scheme is unlawful and needs amending, however, even amending it to reflect the required legislative changes, will not curb the trend of the increasing numbers on the list. More applicants joining the current housing register will only increase the average waiting time and sets an unrealistic expectation that they may be housed. It is best practice to re-refresh the scheme so that only those with the greatest need and likelihood of being housed are able to access it.

2016	2017	2018	2019
1,220	788	937	1,125

Figure 1: CORE: Number of households on local authority waiting lists at 31 March

- 1.3 Between 01 April 2019 and 30 September 2020, there have been **1236** applications to join the housing register. As of 26 October 2020, there are **1131** households that have been accepted as meeting the eligibility and qualification criteria and were live on the list on that day, and a further **69** applications pending assessment.

Total on the waiting list by bedroom size and banding

	One	Two	Three	Four	Five+	Total
A	14	0	0	1	0	15
B	14	18	3	1	5	41
C1	31	45	81	22	0	179
C2	0	0	0	0	0	0
D1	34	5	3	0	0	42
D2	437	281	116	13	7	854
Total	530	349	203	37	12	1131

Figure 2: Total households on the waiting list at 26.10.2020 by banding and bedroom size

- 1.4 The table above, shows that 46% of households registered and 'live' on the waiting list have a one bedroom need. There is also an overwhelming number of households, 75% that have been determined as Band D2 which is the lowest banding on the waiting list. This means that their accommodation meets their needs (not necessarily their aspirations). Whilst we recognise that these households would benefit from accessing social housing with increased security and potentially lower rents, these are not elements which are given priority as they apply to everyone on the list. In most allocation schemes, the lowest band which in our case is D2, will rarely result in an offer of housing as it is the lowest priority band. In order to be realistic with applicants, strengthening the banding criteria may reduce the number of applicants on the list, especially those who have no housing need to move. This would give us more reflective list of those in identified housing need.

Total on list by type and age															
A	Homeseeker						Total	Transfer						Total	Joint totals
	One	Two	Three	Four	Five+	One		Two	Three	Four	Five+				
Over 55	1					1	2					0	2	3	
Under 55	0					0	11					1	12	12	
						1							14		
B	Homeseeker						Total	Transfer						Total	Joint totals
	One	Two	Three	Four	Five+	One		Two	Three	Four	Five+				
Over 55	1	1				2	9	5	1	0	0	15	17		
Under 55	2	5				7	2	7	2	1	5	17	24		
						9						32			
C1	Homeseeker						Total	Transfer						Total	Joint totals
	One	Two	Three	Four	Five+	One		Two	Three	Four	Five+				
Over 55	4	3	2	0		9	3	1	1	0	0	5	14		
Under 55	21	32	41	9		103	3	9	37	13	0	62	165		
						112						67			
D1	Homeseeker						Total	Transfer						Total	Joint totals
	One	Two	Three	Four	Five+	One		Two	Three	Four	Five+				
Over 55	2	0	0			2							2		
Under 55	32	5	3			40							40		
						42							0		
D2	Homeseeker						Total	Transfer						Total	Joint totals
	One	Two	Three	Four	Five+	One		Two	Three	Four	Five+				
Over 55	114	14	7	1	1	137	38	0	1	0	0	39	176		
Under 55	268	245	87	9	4	613	17	22	21	3	2	65	678		
						750						104			

Figure 3: Total on the waiting list at 26.10.2020, by type and age

- 1.5 Further analysis of those on the waiting list shows that out of **1131** applicants registered, there are **914** households that are waiting for a social home, compared with **217** that have applied to move to another social home via a transfer. Transfers

are households that already have social housing and are applying to move to another social tenancy. When broken down into those over 55 years of age and under 55 years of age it shows a very small proportion on the list are over 55:

	Over 55	Under 55
Home seeker	151	763
Transfer	61	156

Figure 4: Breakdown of home seekers and transfers by age of 55 and over

- 1.6 This is an important point to note that 7.5% of the stock is designated as Independent Retirement Living and can only be accessed by people over 60 or over 55 with a health need (other than a small number of external flats) there is generally a higher turnover of these properties due to the link between age and health frailties and they can be difficult to let.
- 1.7 Of those on the waiting list over 50 years of age but below 55 years of age (50-54), there are 76 applications on the list. Of which 60 are home seekers and 16 are transfers. Decreasing the age restriction from 55 to 50, would attribute a 35.8% increase in the number of households able to apply for IRL properties and may reduce void loss for these properties. This will be considered as part of an overall review of Independent Retirement Living.
- 1.8 The current banding is A, B, C1, C2, D1, D2. This banding structure is confusing for applicants and could be simplified, for example, A, B, C, D, E or 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. There are no legal definitions of how a banding system should be structured. As shown in figure 3 above, as of 26 October 2020, there were no applicants in Band C2 at all. A further report shows that only 1 applicant has been housed from Band C2 and that was in November 2016.
- 1.9 The information in figure 3, also shows that Band A, the highest band, has a minimal number of applicants in that band, which is not uncommon. This is the highest priority to be housed and usually is reserved for those with overwhelming emergency need to move. The majority of these are transfers, with 11 out of the 14 transfers all under occupying accommodation. Band A is awarded to under occupation to encourage applicants who live in a larger property than they need, to move to a smaller property that does meet their need i.e. if someone lives in a three bedroom home on their own, they only need a one bedroom home. Given that there are 203 households waiting for a three bedroom property, this would help the Council to ensure that properties are let to those who need them most. However, the majority of Band A transfers who are under occupying are not actively bidding and currently there is no penalty for them not bidding. They have the freedom to wait for a property that they want, rather than moving to free up much needed family accommodation.

A	Homeseeker						Total	Transfer						Total
	One	Two	Three	Four	Five+	One		Two	Three	Four	Five+			
Underoccupation	1					1	11						11	
Medical/Disability							2						2	
Welfare/Hardship											1		1	
						1							14	

Figure 5: Breakdown of band A by banding reasons

2. Who does not qualify and the number of reviews

- 2.1 Between 01 April 2019 and 26 October 2020, **1003** applications for the housing register were disqualified, of which **409** were removed due to failing to return their annual review and were removed from the housing register and were therefore, unable to access social housing. The majority of these applications were from applicants under the age of 55 and predominantly for one and two bedroom properties.

Disqualified between 01.04.2019 - 26.10.2020					
	One	Two	Three	Four	Five+
Over 55	110	23	8	1	0
Under 55	370	320	144	22	5
Total	480	343	152	23	5

- 2.2 When analysing the disqualification reasons further, this is broken down below. The majority of disqualifications are due to 'not satisfying the local connection criteria', this is also the largest reason for a stage one review. Local connection is set out in the "qualification criteria" and is essential to managing the housing register numbers. Prior to the Localism Act and introduction of the Local Connection criteria in the Runnymede Scheme there were over 3000 people on the register, most of whom had no chance of ever being made an offer. The Localism Act 2011, strongly encourages local authorities to set a residence criteria to ensure that properties go to local people, it is also more transparent for applicants than allowing them onto a list when they will never be housed.

Disqualification reason by age							
	Over 55	Under 55	Total		Over 55	Under 55	Total
Assets	8	15	23	Financial Resources	1	4	5
Behaviour, ASB	0	4	4	Household under duty by another LA	0	1	1
Fraud	0	14	14	Housing related debt	4	38	42
Housing related conduct	1	10	11	Property ownership	4	1	5
Deliberately worsened circumstances	6	13	19	Social tenant with no housing need	3	39	42
Does not satisfy qualification criteria i.e. No LC	19	290	309	Failure to return review (409) or no reason given:	96	432	528

- 2.3 When considering the number of applicants who were disqualified (**1003**) compared to the **1126** applications that did qualify, it is important to consider the equality implications and this will be set out formally in the Equality Impact Assessment. This may be difficult to fully analyse as the process of registering includes a "pre-assessment". Should you be disqualified at the pre-assessment stage, you are unable to complete the full application form and the data for these applicants is not reportable. The table below, shows the applications that have qualified compared to those that were disqualified.



- 2.4 During this same period, **409** applications have been removed due to the applicant failing to return their annual review. The annual review is an essential requirement to ensure that applicants still meet the threshold to qualify and to ensure that they still want to be on the list. Applicants are written to, sent a further reminder and if no response, their application is closed. They have 21 days to request a review of this decision, or alternatively they would need to reapply and be reassessed.
- 2.5 Between 01 April 2018 and 26 October 2020, there were **60** requests for an application to be reviewed as per the applicant's stage one review right. Of these 60 applications, 13 cases were overturned and 47 were upheld as the correct decision. The reason for overturning a decision was generally because additional evidence had been provided rather than the wrong decision being issued initially.
- 2.6 Of the **47** cases that were upheld, 13 applicants requested a stage two review and in all instances the case was upheld. Applicants have a review right for certain decisions but there is no statutory right for these to be reviewed twice. Our current two stage review process duplicates work with little benefit for the customer as no decisions have been overturned. Reviews are time consuming and often the second review is a duplication of the first as it is unlikely further information will be provided at stage two that hasn't already been considered at stage one. Should an applicant have new information, this can be submitted as a change of circumstance at any time so they are not disadvantaged if they only had one review stage

3. Who are the properties going to:

3.1 Between 01 April 2019 and 29 October 2020, there were **315** lets. Of these, **253** were made to home seekers and **62** were made to transfer tenants. No properties at all were let to Band C2.

3.2 In terms of percentages, 19.7% of lets went to transfer applicants, compared to 80.3% which went to home seekers. Given that transfers make up 19.19% of the waiting list, this appears to be an appropriate split.

Transfers

3.3 Of the **62** applications, **40** lead applicants were female, compared to **22** lead applicants being males. **None** of the applications that were housed declared that they were pregnant at the time of the offer.

3.4 Of these **62** offers, they were let to the following bandings and bedroom sizes.

Band:	Total Lets:
A	22
B	14
C1	20
D2	6
Total	62

Bed Size	Total Lets:
One	34
Two	12
Three	12
Four	4
Total	62

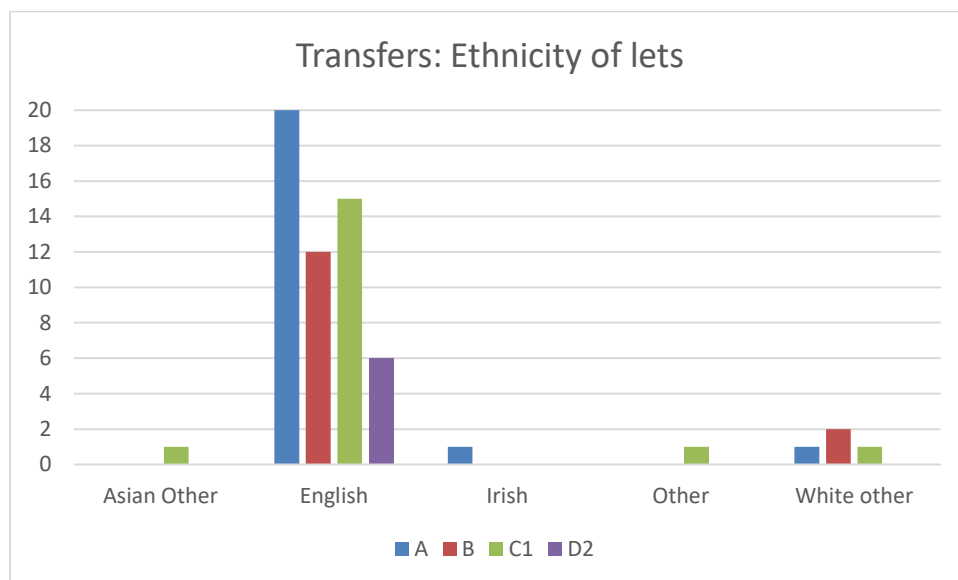
3.5 Further analysis of these figures is shown in the table below, breaking down the number of lets by banding, bedroom size and if the main applicant was over or under 55 years of age at the time of the offer.

	One	Over 55	Under 55	Two	Over 55	Under 55	Three	Over 55	Under 55	Four	Over 55	Under 55
A	15	11	4	5	3	2	2	0	2	0	0	0
B	8	4	4	5	0	5	-	-	-	1	1	0
C1	5	4	1	2	0	2	10	0	10	3	0	3
D2	6	6	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	34	25	9	12	3	9	12	0	12	4	1	3

3.6 When considering equality as part of the statistical review, I have established that 9 transfer applications that were housed during this period declared that they considered themselves to have a physical or mental disability.

	Total	One	Over 55	Under 55	Two	Over 55	Under 55	Three	Over 55	Under 55	Four	Over 55	Under 55
A	3	2	1	1	1	0	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
B	1	1	1	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
C1	4	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1
D2	1	1	1	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	9	5	4	1	2	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1

3.7 We have also established, that of the **62** transfers, **53** were made to 'English' applicants, **4** to 'White other', **1** 'Irish', **1** 'Asian other' and **1** 'Other'.



Home Seekers

3.8 Of the **253** applications, **167** (60%) lead applicants were female, compared to **85** (40%) lead applicants being males. **Two** of the applications that were housed declared that they were pregnant at the time of the offer.

3.9 Of these **253** offers, they were let to the following bandings and bedroom sizes.

Band:	Total Lets:
A	1
B	15
C1	140
D1	2
D2	95
Total	253

Bed Size	Total Lets:
One	132
Two	79
Three	33
Four	9
Total	253

3.10 Of the properties let to home seekers, 37.5% were let to the lowest band D2. The properties should go to the higher bands initially, so we need to strengthen the bandings to ensure that those in need are in a higher band and given a greater chance of being offered housing. Band D2 is quite a broad band and therefore properties could be let to someone with a slightly lesser need than others and this cannot be right. Further analysis of these figures is shown in the table below, breaking down the number of lets by banding, bedroom size and if the main applicant was over or under 55 years of age at the time of the offer.

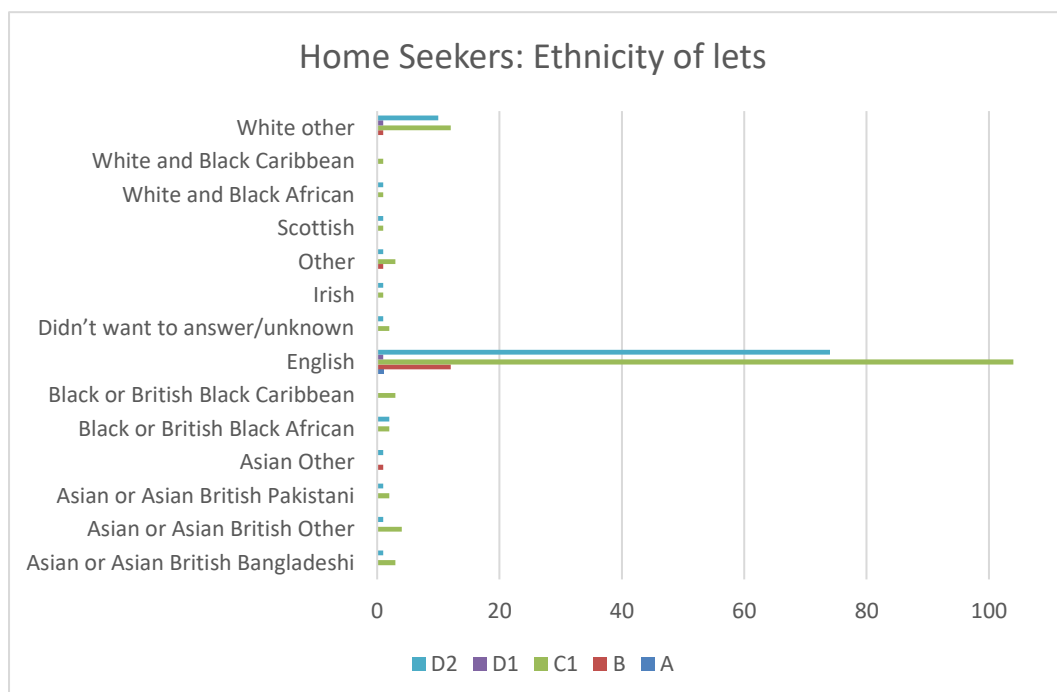
	One	Over 55	Under 55	Two	Over 55	Under 55	Three	Over 55	Under 55	Four	Over 55	Under 55
A	1	0	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
B	10	8	2	2	0	2	-	-	-	3	0	3
C1	46	18	28	60	1	59	31	1	30	3	0	3
C2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
D1	2	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
D2	73	40	33	17	0	17	2	0	2	3	-	3
	132	67	65	79	1	78	33	1	32	9	0	9

3.11 Of the 167 lead female applications, 103 had children in the household and of these 103 lead female applications, only 28 declared a partner. Of the 85 lead male applications, 18 had children in the household and 14 out of the 18 males had a partner declared as part of their application.

3.12 When considering equality as part of the statistical review, I have established that there are **35** applications that consider themselves to have a physical or mental disability. This is broken down to **18** home seekers and **17** transfer tenants. During the period 01 April 2019 to 26 October 2020, **20** home seeker applications that were housed during this period declared that they considered themselves to have a physical or mental disability. A high proportion of lets are made to those with a declared physical or mental disability.

	Total	One	Over 55	Under 55	Two	Over 55	Under 55	Three	Over 55	Under 55	Four	Over 55	Under 55
B	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	-	-	-	1	0	1
C1	13	7	3	4	4	0	4	2	0	2	-	-	-
D2	5	4	2	2	1	0	1	-	-	-	-	-	-

3.13 Of the **253** lets to home seekers, the majority of lets were made to households that declared themselves as 'English'. **192** properties went to this group.



Both: Home Seekers & Transfers

3.14 Across both transfers and home seekers, there were no lets made to any of the following declared ethnicities:

- Asian or Asian British Indian
- Black or Black British
- Chinese
- Welsh
- White Asian

3.15 There are a total of 13 households on the waiting list that have stated their ethnicity to be one of the groups above. These groups represent 1.15% of all ethnicities currently on the waiting list for housing.

- 3.16 The vast majority of lets across both transfers and home seekers went to households that described themselves as English (77.8%). The majority of households on the waiting list describe themselves as English (73.2%).

4. How long does it take:

Transfers

- 4.1 Of the 62 transfers in this period, it took on average **304** days for a transfer applicant to move. The Council operate a choice based lettings system, which enables applicants to be selective in what they bid for and often transfer applicants will wait for the property they consider to be ideal, rather than any property that meets their needs and this increases the average waiting time. The average wait per band and bedroom size is:

	Shortest	Longest	Average		Shortest	Longest	Average
A	0	492	140	One	0	1241	253
B	5	927	265	Two	37	478	275
C1	15	1682	456	Three	0	1758	531
D2	18	1199	491	Four	80	1195	680

Home Seekers

- 4.2 Of the 253 home seekers, including homeless households, that were successful in this period, it took on average 443 days to be successful. This is broken down by band and bedroom size.

	Shortest	Longest	Average		Shortest	Longest	Average
A	442	442	442	One	1	5992	414
B	14	462	119	Two	0	2195	436
C1	0	1263	301	Three	5	2335	541
D1	285	687	486	Four	131	1081	562
D2	1	5992	701				

- 4.3 Given that Band A is the highest priority band, you would expect that the average wait for a property to be one of the quickest, however, there are applicants that are 'selective' in what they bid for which is not what the allocations scheme is intended to be for.
- 4.4 During this period, **1** applicant that was registered as serving in the armed forces was housed. This applicant was a one bedroom need and housed from band D1; the wait was **687** days. D2 is for serving Armed Forces personnel who are not due to be discharged for the foreseeable future. Had the need to move have been more urgent, the scheme allows for a higher banding award in both C1 and B bands.
- 4.5 There were **80** lets to households accepted as homeless and it took on average **231** days to be successful. This represents 31.6% of lets to home seekers going to those accepted as homeless and offered a direct let. Or 25.39% of all lets.

	Shortest	Longest	Average	Total
One	9	451	178	19
Two	0	1060	250	47

Three	5	938	215	13
Four	564	564	564	1

- 4.5 Of the 29 applications that declared they had a physical or mental disability; it took on average **431** days to be accommodated. Depending on the medical need this may impact on the availability of suitable accommodation, for example, some needs are for a wet room or accessibility rails, whereas others will require considerably greater adaptations and the availability of stock or suitability of stock for adaptations will impact on the waiting time for these applicants.

	Shortest	Longest	Average
Transfer	9	1195	505
Home Seeker	0	1289	397

5. How are properties being let: i.e. direct let or bid on:

- 5.1 Of the 315 properties that were let, a total of **119** were let by 'direct let' and the remaining **196** let through the Council's Choice Based Lettings system. The greatest number of direct lets were made to 'homeless households' making up 67% of lets in this manner.

Homeless	80
Adapted Property	7
Best use of stock	12
Hard to let sheltered	3
Management move	9
Other	3
Under occupation	5
	119

6. Bidding and refusals

- 6.1 A Locata report between 05 April 2020 and 05 October 2020 showed that of the **914** households waiting for a social home, **622** households had not placed a bid for accommodation. Whilst there will be some homeless households in Band C1 that are not able to bid as per the scheme, there is still a staggering number of households that have not placed a bid. These are predominantly applicants in band D2.

Locata Reports - Number Of Homeseekers Not Bidding

Number of homeseekers not bidding by partner and band for each month between 05 Apr 2020 and 05 Oct 2020

Band	Band A	Band B	Band C1	Band C2	Band D1	Band D2	05 Apr 2020-05 Oct 2020
Runnymede Council	1	3	64	0	34	520	622
Grand Total	1	3	64	0	34	520	622

- 6.2 When we look at this data with a larger time span i.e. 01 April 2018 to 09 December 2020, there are 634 home seekers that have not placed a single bid in over 18 months.

Locata Reports - Number Of Homeseekers Not Bidding

Number of homeseekers not bidding by partner and band for each month between 01 Apr 2020 and 09 Dec 2020

[print](#)

Band	Band A	Band B	Band C1	Band C2	Band D1	Band D2	01 Apr 2020-09 Dec 2020
Runnymede Council	1	4	75	0	36	518	634
Grand Total	1	4	75	0	36	518	634

- 6.3 There are **127** households set up for “auto bid”. Auto bid is where the system will automatically generate a bid for the applicant on their behalf when a suitable property, relevant to the size they need and their preferred location become available. Of the **15** Band A applications, **3** are set up for autobid.
- 6.4 Given that the waiting time for social housing is considerable, there is a high percentage of applicants that do not bid.
- 6.5 The current scheme entitles accepted homeless households to one reasonable offer off accommodation. This is in line with the homeless legislation which states a final offer of Part VI accommodation will bring the homeless duty to an end. The scheme allows all other applicants the right of two reasonable offers. Applicants have the right to choose what they bid for through the Choice Based Lettings (CBL) system. Properties advertised provide detail of the property, the rent, location in advance and it is for the person to decide if they are interested. Should an applicant bid and be successful, it takes considerable time for the small allocations team to verify and confirm the offer.
- 6.6 If the person then refuses the offer, the team need to offer to the next person, which delays the property being let and impacts on void turn around.

7. Financial Limits

- 7.1 The current scheme has a £30,000 net threshold for single or couples and a £50,000 net income for families. Shelter define affordable housing as no more than 35% of your household income after tax. However, the average household now spends 42% of their income on rent or 72% in London.
- 7.2 Using Shelter’s 35% formula, compared with the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates for Runnymede, this determines that these current limits remain appropriate. This is because the one bedroom LHA rate is £195.62 per week or £10,172.24 per year. A joint income of £38,764 per year or £30,000 net income, means that 35% of the net income is £10,500, which is above the 35% threshold that Shelter recommend. This means the current limit of £30,000 net for a one bedroom need is proportionate.
- 7.3 The three bed LHA rate is £310.68 per month or £16,151.20 per year. A gross income for a family of £71,310 or £50,000 net, shows that 35% of the net 50,000 income is £17,500 and therefore, affordable according to Shelter’s 35% for affordability.
- 7.4 There will be households that do not require a three bedroom property, for example those with one or two children who have a two bedroom need. The two bedroom LHA rate is £253.15 or £13,163.80 per year. 35% of £40,000 net is £14,000. Whilst

consideration was given to implementing a third income threshold for two bedroom households, it was decided that one family threshold of £50,000 net was more appropriate.

- 7.5 Households earning up to £80,000 are also able to access shared ownership assistance.

Asset Limit

- 7.6 The current asset limit is set at £16,000 in accordance with the DWP eligibility for Housing Benefit. This threshold has not changed and it is proposed that we continue to keep this threshold in line with DWP rules. However, it is proposed that those applicants over the age of 60 are able to join for retirement housing only if they have assets of up to £55,000.
- 7.7 Applicant that are over 60 years of age may be less likely to be able to obtain a mortgage or may only be able to obtain a mortgage for between 10-15 years compared to younger people who are able to take out a 25+ year term.
- 7.8 A sample of retirement housing to purchase in the private market within a 5 mile radius of Addlestone ranged significantly with some one bedroom retirement houses for sale for £75,000 and others in excess of £500,000. Taking an average and allowing for a range of properties within the bracket suggests that an average retirement home on the private market would cost around £135,000.
- 7.9 A sample of mortgage lenders online suggest that for a £135,000 retirement property, mortgage companies may offer a 10-15 year mortgage, but others would only allow a mortgage up to retirement age. Most however, would allow a loan to value (LTV) ratio of between 60-75%.
- 7.10 60% of £135,000 = £81,000 mortgage or 75% of £135,000 would allow a mortgage for £101,250. This would leave a deposit requirement of £54,000 at 60% LTV or £33,750 at 75% LTV.
- 7.11 A mortgage for £101,250 at 3% interest over a 15 year term would cost £699 per month but for a 10 year term, this cost would be £978 per month. When comparing a mortgage of £81,000 over 15 years at £559 or £782 for a 10 year term, it seems sensible to allow over 60's up to an asset limit of £55,000 so that they are able to purchase a retirement property on the private market that is affordable.
- 7.12 If applicants over 60 remain restricted at the £16,000 asset limit, it is unlikely that a high proportion of over 60s, with assets between £16,000-£55,000 would not be able to access retirement housing or retirement housing within social housing stock. Increasing the threshold gives those with assets but without sufficient assets, the opportunity to access retirement housing.
- 7.13 All those over 60 years old with assets will also be able to consider the private rented sector where appropriate.

Outcome of Allocations Scheme Consultation.

Introduction & Background

Runnymede's current Allocations Scheme was adopted in 2017 and needs to be updated to reflect changes to legislation and statutory guidance. The Council have consulted on the proposed changes.

The opinions of our applicants are important to us to make sure that we are providing a good service and we try to take all comments into account when shaping the new allocations scheme. However, some changes have been made to reflect legislative requirements.

We consulted in the following ways:

- Online via the website and corporate social media pages
- Online survey
- Email sent to all members of the Homeless Task group, which includes local charities, churches and voluntary agencies
- A survey was sent to all current households on the Housing Register
- Email to all Housing Associations with stock in Runnymede
- Meeting with Council members
- Meeting with Housing Services staff

Consultation of proposed changes

Runnymede Council proposed a number of changes to the current Allocations Scheme.

- **Proposal 1:** Local Connection criteria: Increasing the criteria by which someone working in the borough but not living in the borough of Runnymede can go on the Housing Register from 12 months to 3 years.
- **Proposal 2:** Change the qualification for Independent Retirement Living (Sheltered housing) so that applicants who do not meet the local connection criteria are able to register if they have a family member in the borough who does meet the local connection criteria
- **Proposal 3:** Add separated spouses of armed forces personnel to local connection exemptions and priority banding
- **Proposal 4:** Review the financial limits for households joining the Housing Register
- **Proposal 5:** Simplify the banding structure from A, B, C1, C2, D1, D2 to A, B, C, D, E
- **Proposal 6:** Exclude applicants from joining the Housing Register if they have no identified housing need
- **Proposal 7:** Reduce the number of reasonable offers from two to one for all applicants
- **Proposal 8:** Introduce a requirement for all households to bid for a property within a reasonable period or the system will place bids automatically
- **Proposal 9:** Reduce the review procedure from a two stage review process to a one stage review and increase the time for completing reviews from 10 working days to 56 days.

Responses to consultation

We received in excess of 200 responses. The results and likely outcome for the scheme are documented below, however, these are all subject to legal opinion and Council member approval.

Proposal 1: Local connection. 129 out of 200 responses (64%) either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that local connection rules for working households should be increased to 3 years, compared with 34 responses who disagreed or strongly disagreed (17%). Of the responses, 40% strongly agreed compared to 8% that strongly disagreed. Having considered the consultation, feedback from members, staff and stakeholders, the three year working criteria will be implemented into the new scheme.

Proposal 2: Change the qualification for Independent Retirement Living. 133 out of 200 responses (66.5%) either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that an applicant accessing retirement housing should have a family connection to the borough, compared to 32 responses who disagreed or strongly disagreed (16%). Of the responses, 41% strongly agreed compared to 10.5% that strongly disagreed.

Having considered the consultation, feedback from members, staff and stakeholders, a family local connection will be required for those wishing to access retirement housing without a qualifying local connection in their own right.

Proposal 3: Add separated spouses of armed forces personnel to local connection exemptions and priority banding. 80 of 200 responses agreed or somewhat agreed that separated spouses should be able to join the housing register without a local connection, compared to 55 responses who strongly disagreed or somewhat disagreed (27.5%). A further 55 responses or 27.5% either neither agreed or disagreed or did not know/could not say.

Taking into consideration the Government's guidance that strongly recommends that separated spouses are exempt from the local connection criteria and weighing up the 40% response that agreed, as well as Council member's opinions, it is recommended that separated spouses are entitled to join the housing register without a local connection.

Proposal 4: Review the financial limits. The highest proportion of responses (25%) felt the asset limit should remain at £16,000. This limit was initially set in line with DWP rules for housing benefit and this figure remains £16,000 for these purposes. It is therefore proposed that the asset limit remains set at £16,000. However, as part of the consultation it became clear that those over the age of 60, may struggle to access alternate means of housing that someone younger could access with over £16,000 for example shared home ownership because they may be less able to obtain a mortgage or the mortgage may only be for 10-15 years in duration compared to a younger person obtaining a 25+ year mortgage.

Analysis of the retirement home ownership market and costs within Runnymede suggest that an applicant may be able to access a retirement property on the open market with a £55,000 deposit and a shorter term mortgage and therefore, it is proposed that the new scheme will enable those over the age of 60 who are only applying for retirement housing onto the scheme with assets of up to £55,000.

The feedback for the financial limits for income also varied quite dramatically and therefore, using analysis from what Shelter consider to be affordable, we have determined that the current limit of £30,000 for singles/couples and £50,000 for families remains appropriate. This is on the basis that rent is affordable if it is less than 35% net income.

Proposal 5: Simplify the banding structure. Of 200 responses only 13 disagreed or strongly disagreed with changing the banding structure (6.5%), compared with 143 that

either somewhat agree or strongly agreed to the change (71.5%). Of respondents 56.5% strongly agreed with the change.

The new scheme will have a simplified banding structure of A, B, C, D, E and will no longer have the subcategories that the current scheme has.

Proposal 6: Exclude those with no identified housing need. This proposal applies to both social housing and those privately renting. 76 of 200 (38%) agreed or strongly agreed that those with no housing need should be excluded from the waiting list, compared to 92 that somewhat disagreed or strongly disagreed (46%).

The consultation allowed for response to state why they felt a particular way. A number of replies stated reasons why someone may need to move, such as health, overcrowding, lack of facilities, eviction etc, all of which will be reasons why someone can join the list as these would mean a housing need. This question is explicitly about those without any need to move. However, of those that somewhat or strongly disagreed, at least 30 responses made reference to private rented tenants and that they have less security of tenure so should be allowed on the list.

When weighing up the response to this proposal and the feedback from staff and Council members, it has been agreed that the new scheme will continue to allow those in the private rented sector onto the housing register without a housing need. Any identified need, as mentioned above, may warrant a higher banding. However, those already in social housing will not be able to join the housing register unless they have a pre-described need to move. Social housing tenants have access to other mechanisms to enable them to move, such as mutual exchange.

Proposal 7: One reasonable offer. Of the 200 responses, 67 somewhat or strongly agreed with one offer for all (33.5%), compared to 94 who somewhat or strongly disagreed (47%). Drilling down into the reasons why responders disagreed, there were a number of responses saying that if the property isn't suitable for the persons needs, they shouldn't be forced to accept it and that applicants should be given choice.

The current and future scheme operate a choice based letting system which enables the applicant to see what properties there are available and then to decide whether or not to bid for any property, they therefore have the freedom to choose (unless they are a homeless household accepted as being owed the main duty). The reference in the question does relate to a reasonable offer and anything unsuitable, would not count towards the one offer.

There was reference in the responses to a lack of information in the advert, which although separate to the scheme, we do intend to introduce a new, improved system for bidding which should contain more information and ensure applicants have sufficient information to make the decision whether to bid or not. We have listened to what you said and it has therefore been decided that in the new scheme, two reasonable offers will remain but to be reviewed in the future once system improvements have been implemented.

Proposal 8: Requirement to bid. 92 of 200 responses (46%) somewhat or strongly agreed with introducing a requirement to bid, compared to 57 (28.5%) that somewhat or strongly disagreed.

Depending on the capabilities of the new system, it is proposed that the new scheme will include a requirement to bid during any 12 month period. This will depend on their being available properties to bid for during this time and there will be no penalty to applicants who do not bid where there have been no properties to bid for.

Proposal 9: Change the review procedure. There were 89 (44.5%) of responses that somewhat or strongly agreed with reducing the review procedure to one stage from two, compared with 24 (12%) who somewhat or strongly disagreed.

Having considered the statutory guidance and the response to the consultation, the new scheme will have one review right and the reviews will be completed within 56 days (or sooner where possible).

April 2021

7. REQUEST TO APPROVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HOUSING SERVICES HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY (HOUSING, DEBBIE DALY)

Synopsis of report:

Runnymede Borough Council's Housing Service has identified that whilst Corporate policies relating to Health and Safety are in place, a policy specifically relating to Housing Services was required.

The Housing Services Health and Safety policy identifies what Housing Services need to do to ensure compliance with Health and Safety legislation.

The policy clearly identifies roles and responsibilities of staff at all levels of the Housing Service and at Senior Management level of Runnymede Borough Council.

Recommendation:

Members are asked to approve the implementation of the Housing Services Health and Safety Policy (Appendix E).

1. Context of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this document is to clearly communicate standards of health and safety management throughout our housing stock, for our tenants, staff and contractors.
- 1.2 Health and safety is a key focus for the Housing Service. We are committed to addressing all health and safety challenges to ensure that our service is operated and managed in a responsible manner to comply with all relevant legislation and where possible to implement best practice and set sector leading standards.
- 1.3 The Housing Service has produced this document to ensure those affected by our undertaking understand the health and safety standards which we require across our business.

2. Housing Services Health and Safety Policy

- 2.1 Enclosed with this report is the draft Housing Services Health and Safety Policy. This document has been reviewed by Housing Services Managers and Runnymede Borough Council's Health and Safety Advisor
- 2.2 It is proposed that this policy will be implemented with immediate effect once approved by Housing Committee Members

3. Policy Framework Implications

- 3.1 The Housing Services Health and Safety Policy is a key policy of Runnymede Borough Council's Housing Service. Health and Safety legislation places a number of duties on all Housing Services staff and this policy will help all Runnymede Borough Council employees to understand the roles and responsibilities of Housing Services staff.

- 3.2 This policy will help Housing Services to ensure the safety of staff, contractors and residents.
- 3.3 This policy will assist Runnymede Borough Council in ensuring compliance with current legislative duties.
- 3.4 The implementation of this policy forms a part of the Housing Business Centre Plan 2021/22.

4. Resource implications

- 4.1 It is practical to assume that identified training needed of officers will be required following its implementation as there are duties to provide training for employees where required. The identification and provision of Health and Safety training is statutory and, therefore, should not delay the implementation of this policy. The budget allocation for this was approved for the financial year 2021/22 and is adequate to facilitate such requests.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 The Housing Health and Safety Policy is an aspect of the authority's obligations as an employer under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. Under section 1 (3) it is the duty of every employer to prepare a written statement of general policy of health and safety at work of its employees and the organisation and arrangements for carrying it out and bringing it to the notice of employees. This includes revising the policy where appropriate.

6. Equality implications

- 6.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment screening form has been completed. The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 is statutory and, therefore, must be adhered to by all employers, employees and contractors irrespective of any protected characteristics under the Equalities Act 2010.

7. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications

- 7.1 None

8. Other implications

- 8.1 Approval of this policy will give further assurance to the regulator for social housing and also forms part of a limited assurance audit undertaken in late 2020.

9. Conclusions

- 9.1 Runnymede Borough Council's Housing Services Health and Safety policy will assist Housing Services in carrying out their duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974.
- 9.2 It will give clarity for individuals and help them understand their roles and responsibilities and thereby assist all Housing Services staff ensure the Health and Safety of themselves and others.

(To resolve)

Background papers

Draft Housing Services Health and Safety Policy

RUNNYMEDE BOROUGH COUNCIL

HOUSING BUSINESS CENTRE

Policy on Health and Safety

Approved: June 2021

Review due: June 2024

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1. Introduction

1.1 Runnymede Borough Council Housing Service and its approach to health and safety

The purpose of this document is to clearly communicate standards of health and safety management throughout our housing stock, for our tenants, staff and contractors.

Health and safety is a key focus for the Housing Service. We are committed to addressing all health and safety challenges to ensure that our service is operated and managed in a responsible manner to comply with all relevant legislation and where possible to implement best practice and set sector leading standards.

The Housing Service has produced this document to ensure those affected by our undertaking understand the health and safety standards which we require across our business.

1.2 Links to the Corporate Health and Safety Policy

This policy document is designed to support the corporate commitments made on Health and Safety: -

“Runnymede is committed to a Zero Harm philosophy for our People, our Community and our Environment. We will actively engage in positive and proactive safety management and expect the same from all our contractors and suppliers across our organisation.”

This policy statement reflects how the work of the Housing Service links to the delivery of the corporate policy, specifically ensuring: -

- a) A safe working environment with access to adequate welfare facilities;
- b) Work equipment, plant and systems of work which are without risk to health, are suitable, safe and maintained in good working order;
- c) Arrangements for ensuring safety and absence of health risks in connection with the use, handling, storage and transport of articles and substances;
- d) Such information, instruction, training and supervision as are necessary to ensure the health and safety at work of all employees and others on the premises;
- e) Maintenance for any place of work under Runnymede’s control to ensure it is in a safe condition without health risks, including means of access and egress.

1.3 Setting out the minimum standards we require in health and safety management

We recognise that health and safety performance is an integral part of what we do and will reflect on our overall performance as a service. We acknowledge the costs of accidents both in human distress and financial costs and embrace our legal and moral obligations to ensure, wherever possible, that the risks to health and safety are minimised.

The standards contained in this policy should be used by all employees and contractors as a guide to the safe management of work activities. It does not provide all the technical information for each specific topic, however it does provide a framework to deliver a consistent approach.

It will also give guidance on where to find further help and advice if necessary.

This document only covers health and safety issues that relate to the provision of Runnymede Borough Council's Housing Service. The Council's Corporate Health and Safety Policy and Employees Handbook - Covering Welfare, Health & Safety and Standards of Personal Behaviour at Work provides advice on generic health and safety issues which cross departments (Lone Working and Personal Safety for example).

2. Aims

Our health and safety aims, goals and targets within the Housing Service are:

2.1 Our Goals

- To secure the health, safety and welfare of all those who may be affected by our undertaking.
- To foster a commitment to health and safety through consultation and involvement.
- To set health and safety performance targets to enable performance to be measured
- To improve awareness of health and safety management amongst Housing Service staff.
- To develop, maintain and implement standards and procedures that are considered to be best practice.
- To consult and involve tenants as necessary.

2.2 Training and information

- To ensure staff are provided with information, instruction and training
- To ensure all staff should have an agreed training programme which is reviewed annually.

2.3 Risk Assessments

- To ensure risk assessments are completed by a competent person.
- To ensure risk assessments are reviewed at least every **three** years, when significant changes are made or following an accident.
- To ensure any uncontrolled risks are mitigated effectively.
- To carry out continual hazard and risk identification to mitigate any potential for harm.

2.4 Accidents/Incidents

- To ensure all accidents and incidents are reported in accordance with statutory requirement and departmental protocols.
- To ensure that accidents, incidents, dangerous occurrences and near misses are kept at the lowest possible level.
- To ensure that all identified risks are appropriately controlled.

2.5 Monitoring and inspection

- To implement a routine procedure auditing programme to measure the effectiveness of management procedures.
- An annual review of the health and safety management system is to be undertaken by a competent person.

2.6 Review

- To undertake performance reviews and maintain records of data collected in order to demonstrate continuous improvement in health and safety performance.

2.7 Document Control

- All health and safety documentation will be reviewed in line with statutory and service requirements and best practice.
- All documents will be subject to periodic review and re-assessment in the light of any internal or external changes in the way we operate.

3. Health and Safety Responsibilities

3.1 Health and safety management structure

The management structure below helps identify key areas of responsibility and who is the best person to contact should you have a specific issue. This structure follows the same principal as the corporate structure but defines responsibility within Housing specifically.

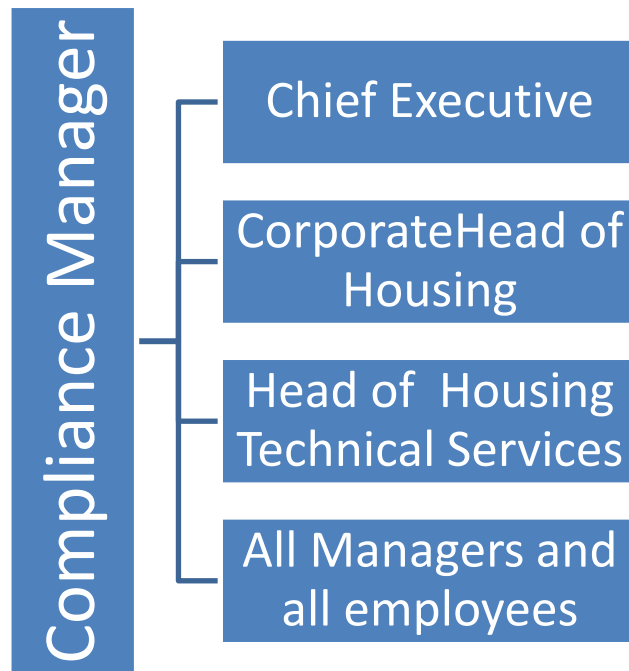


Figure 1 – Housing Service - Health and Safety Management Structure

3.2 Management responsibilities

The health, safety and welfare of all those who may be affected by our business activities is our highest priority and therefore, we commit to ensuring that appropriate resources are set aside for the delivery of safe systems of work, a safe environment for our tenants, the prevention of accidents, incidents and ill health, the effective management of our contractors and to meet our health and safety targets.

3.3 Overall health and safety responsibility

The Chief Executive is responsible for health and safety compliance at Runnymede Borough Council ensuring that all legal obligations are met. The Chief Executive ensures the implementation of Council policy, monitors compliance via the service performance indicators and reports to the Corporate Management Committee on health and safety, to ensure that health and safety performance is an integral function of management.

The Corporate Head of Housing

Reports to the Chief Executive, recommends policy, takes responsibility for management across the Housing Service and reports on compliance to Chief Executive.

Responsibilities include;

- Recommends policy to the Chief Executive for submission to the Housing Committee
- Monitoring compliance and escalating where appropriate.
- Ensuring sufficient resources are available
- Provides adequate management systems and support to ensure standards are maintained.
- Communicating standards, requirements and providing updates on performance.
- Chairing meetings of the Housing Management Team – Health and Safety to be an embedded agenda item.
- Ensuring that all staff are made aware of matters which could affect their health and safety at work.
- Ensure they have adequate knowledge and or access to all legislation relevant to Housing Services.
- Ensure that employees are released to attend appropriate training sessions and that training is funded.

Head of Housing Technical Services

Responsibilities include;

- Setting and monitoring performance standards
- Recommends policy for approval by the Corporate Head of Housing

- Ensuring adequate arrangements are in place to meet all health and safety standards.
- Taking appropriate action to address health and safety issues which may arise.
- Facilitates staff consultation and communication.
- Ensuring Housing Service policies are implemented.
- Promoting greater risk management and Health and Safety awareness amongst all Housing Services employees by example and ensuring that only properly trained and competent staff are responsible for assessing risks and determining adequate control measures within the working environment.

Managers

Responsibilities include;

- Staff are provided with such information, instruction, supervision and training to enable them to safely carry out their duties.
- Risk assessments are carried out on work activities that may present a significant risk to staff, and suitable control measures are devised and implemented.
- Accidents, incidents and ill-health arising out of work are reported, recorded and investigated where necessary.
- Work areas are regularly inspected and monitored for unsafe conditions.
- Where managers have responsibilities for premises, risks relating to both employees and non-employees are adequately controlled.
- Ensuring that the health and safety training needs of all their staff are assessed and fulfilled.
- Ensuring that any contractors, including contract or agency staff, taken on are competent taking particular care with specialist compliance areas such as gas, asbestos, electrical and fire safety.
- Ensuring that both they and their staff are aware of personal responsibilities. Providing regular reports on health and safety performance and issues to the Head of Housing Technical Services

Employees

Responsibilities include;

- As employees we all have a legal duty to take care of our own health and safety and that of others, fellow employees, contractors, tenants and visitors or anyone else who could be affected by their actions or omissions.
- Compliance with all Runnymede Borough Council requirements, instructions, policies and procedures.
- Being familiar with the Runnymede Borough Council Housing Services Health and Safety policy and any other relevant Runnymede Borough Council health, safety or compliance policies
- Not intentionally or recklessly interfering with, nor misusing, any equipment provided for the protection of their, or anybody else's health and safety.
- Measures to control risks must be followed at all times.

- Effective health and safety will only be achieved through co-operation with the Housing Service management team.
- Co-operate with all supervisory and management staff to ensure all relevant statutory regulations, policies and procedures are adhered to.
- Participate in any training designed to improve their knowledge, skills and understanding about health and safety
- Report to their manager all faults, hazards, errors, accidents/incidents, near misses, dangerous occurrences or damage, regardless of whether anyone is injured.
- Be aware of the risk assessment process and its relevance to their roles.

Compliance Manager

Responsibilities include:

- Advising the Housing Service on all health and safety matters concerning property management.
- Producing management updates as required.
- Review as directed management compliance against legal, best practice and our requirements and reporting on a timely basis.
- Conducting regular risk assessments and audits to identify, analyse and eliminate or mitigate any potential risks.
- To act as lead risk officer and effectively manage all associated risks, health and safety and statutory compliance risks relating to Runnymede Borough Council Housing Services.
- Liaise with the Corporate Health and Safety Advisor to ensure all CPD and training requirements for Housing Services employees are met.
- Liaise with the Corporate Health and Safety Advisor on the identification of any mandatory training needs for Housing Services employees.

Competent Advisor – Corporate Health and Safety Officer

The “Competent Advisor” is responsible for:

- Advising the Housing Service on all health and safety matters concerning property management.
- Producing management updates as required.
- Undertaking risk assessments and inspections as directed by the Head of Housing Technical Services.
- Review as directed management compliance against legal, best practice and our requirements and reporting on a timely basis.
- Undertaking accident investigations when required to do so.
- Delivering training when required to do so

4. Policy Statement

4.1 Policy statement

Runnymede Borough Council's Housing Service recognises and accepts its responsibility to provide and maintain the safest and healthiest work conditions which meet best practice and achieve legal compliance so far as is reasonably practicable.

Runnymede Borough Council's Housing Service also recognises that every accident or dangerous occurrence, however slight, is a matter for concern and that the need for constant alertness by all Corporate Heads, Heads of Service, managers, supervisors and employees is equally important in identifying potential hazards and removing or minimising their effect.

All employees of Runnymede Borough Council and others who work for or with Runnymede Borough Council are expected to co-operate with Management to help ensure the effective implementation of this policy and all employees, consultants and contractors are regularly reminded that failure to comply with this policy either by action or inaction may result in the termination of contracts and cancellation of agreements, and may, in very serious cases, result in civil or criminal prosecution.

4.2 Policy Objectives

To this end the objective of the Health and Safety Policy for the Council's Housing Service shall be:

- To establish and maintain safe working systems throughout the Council, including the introduction of permit to work systems (i.e. for hazardous situations or workplaces) where required.
- To scrutinise method statements of contractors working in hazardous situations to ensure due regard has been given to health and safety
- To take all reasonable measures to establish the causes of accidents and impairments to health occurring across the housing service and to institute all reasonably practicable remedial measures to prevent recurrence.
- To provide all reasonable facilities to mitigate the effects of accidents and impairments to health and safety when they do occur.
- To ensure that no process, plant, or machinery, is introduced in the Council unless it has conformed with any relevant statutory testing or examination requirement and it has been established that, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety or health of employees will not be impaired.
- To disseminate information on safe working relating to specific areas of work and on general safety and health matters relating to all employees.
- To provide proper and adequate training facilities in order to ensure that all employees are fully instructed in the safe working methods applicable to their jobs.

- To encourage and foster the closest possible liaison between management and employees in all matters affecting safety and health, including the formation of Staff Safety Committees and appointment of Safety Representatives as appropriate.
- To ensure that all requirements of legislation relating to Housing activities are fully complied with in regard to safety and health, it being recognised that these in the main constitute only a minimum standard of achievement. Monitoring of performance on all health and safety activities undertaken by the Council designed to protect tenants, such as gas and electrical safety testing and rectification, asbestos identification and removal, legionella testing and prevention, fire safety risk assessment will be undertaken quarterly as a minimum and put in the public domain and maintaining clear landings.
- To aim for continual improvement of health and safety performance through employee involvement and by the adoption of newly developed safety and health measures and codes of practice.
- To advise and keep employees informed of their duties and responsibilities under legislation, including:
 - the requirement to adopt and follow safe working systems and practices
 - the requirement to make use of facilities and equipment provided for their protection
 - the requirement to abstain from any act which could endanger the safety or health of themselves or any other person
 - the requirement to refrain from intentionally or recklessly interfering with or misusing anything provided in the interests of health, safety or welfare
 - the requirement to report any known defect which could endanger the safety or health of themselves or other persons
 - the requirement to co-operate with the Council or any other person as far as is necessary to ensure that statutory duties or requirements are performed or complied with
- The Housing Service will prepare a plan and provide sufficient resources in order to comply with this policy and will make this available to all employees

5. Policy compliance

5.1 Compliance with other policies

The standard that this policy aims to achieve can only be met by adherence to all Runnymede Borough Council's Housing Service health, safety and compliance related policies and to Runnymede Borough Council's corporate Health and Safety policies included in the Employee Handbook.

6. Consultation, communication and training

RBC will consult fully and meaningfully with recognised trade unions and non-union staff, on health and safety matters and seek to further develop an effective partnership with the unions in promoting a healthy and safe workplace for all employees and ensuring contractors are doing the same for their employees.

7. Monitoring and performance management

The Health and Safety Policy will be reviewed annually or where is a need for early review due to learning from incidents or changes to legislation.

All related health and safety policies, guidelines and procedures will be audited, monitored and reviewed on a cycle agreed by the staff Health and Safety Group with an annual update following the review to the Housing Committee. The timescales will depend upon particular issues and whether there is a need for early review.

Compliance against health and safety management requirements, within Housing, will be monitored through a variety of methods including internal audits and a suite of performance indicators, reported to Housing Committee quarterly.

The effectiveness of health and safety training will be evaluated and reviewed on an ongoing basis by the staff Health and Safety Group.

Health and safety and compliance performance indicators will be provided to assist in monitoring performance. These indicators will reflect national standards and measures required by enforcing authorities.

8. Equalities Implications

The Equality Act requires that current employees (or job applicants) who fall within the provisions of the Act are treated no less favourably than those without protected characteristics. Consequently, Runnymede will as necessarily make such adjustments to working practices, systems, and environment as are reasonable and practicable in order that employee or job applicants with protected characteristics are not discriminated against.

9. Publication and launch

This policy has been reviewed by the Policy Team. It was approved by the Corporate Head of Housing on .

8. ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR POLICY (HOUSING, AMANDA KENDALL)

Synopsis of report:

Outline the revision of the authority's Antisocial Behaviour Policy and Statement of Procedures on Antisocial Behaviour relating to the management of RBC housing stock, which has incorporated changes resulting from the Tiaa audit, advice from industry experts Resolve and ongoing practice.

The revised policy offers a streamlined document presented in clear categories. Furthermore it incorporates guidance from the Housing Ombudsman and Regulator of Social Housing.

The revised statement of procedures on antisocial behaviour incorporates:

- **Our approach to addressing low level/low impact antisocial behaviour**
- **Management of cannabis complaints**
- **Flexibility in the escalation process**
- **How we will support vulnerable perpetrators and early intervention**
- **The distinction between formal and informal remedies for addressing antisocial behaviour**
- **Our response to hate incidents and hate crime**
- **Advise on the community trigger**

Recommendation:

To approve the Antisocial Behaviour Policy and Statement of Procedures (2021-2023) subject to completed and approved EIA and any revisions required further to the closure of the consultation period.

1. Context of report

1.1 As a landlord Runnymede Borough Council has a statutory obligation to publish policies and procedures in relation to antisocial behaviour (ASB). This item presents a revision of the ASB policy and supporting statement of procedures in line with statutory obligations.

1.2 The revised ASB policy and Statement of Procedures is attached at appendix F

2. Report and, where applicable, options considered

2.1 This policy was last reviewed and presented to Housing Committee in November 2017 and at that time it included the many revisions required in line with the Antisocial Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 and in addition reflected the outcome of some challenging legal cases we had addressed, most specifically around possession of introductory tenancies and proportionality.

2.2 There have been no further legislative changes that need to be adopted but we are committed to reviewing our policy and procedures on a regular basis to ensure it remains current and relevant to both complainants and perpetrators of ASB, thus ensuring the Council achieves the best possible outcome when enforcement action becomes necessary.

- 2.3 In November 2019 an audit of housing enforcement was completed by Tiaa, the audit found that not all cases tested followed the statement of procedures on ASB but it concluded that in all such cases the deviation was justified. For example, investigations showed that an ASB report form and victim risk assessment was not completed with all complainants but justified on the basis that these steps were not required due to the particular low level or one-off nature of the complaints received. The outcome of this necessitated a review of the procedures to ensure that this type of scenario and exceptions are reflected in our documented approach to dealing with ASB.
- 2.4 During the Covid-19 pandemic we have been working with an interim statement of procedures on ASB which has reflected adjustments we have made to the service such as when we will undertake in-person visits to complainants and perpetrators, as well as the restrictions on our ability to commence possession action in line with the Coronavirus Act 2020. Due to the pandemic we have continued to work in partnerships with key agencies, such as Surrey Police, and we have supported residents affected by ASB by using alternative powers available under the Antisocial Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014; this has specifically focused on use of ASB Injunctions and in the period 2020/21 we applied for 7 such injunctions having previously not utilised this option.
- 2.5 Following on from the outcome of the Tiaa audit and in considering our response during the pandemic we sought to work with industry experts Resolve to review our policy and statement of procedures on ASB in full.
- 2.6 We have also sought to address issues that have been highlighted in our day to day case management concerning antisocial behaviour, for example issues around cannabis use and good practice around supporting vulnerable perpetrators.
- 2.7 This revised statement of procedures also incorporates changes to the Housing Ombudsman complaint handling process made in 2020 which seeks to ensure that residents are given early advice about accessing this service. It also includes other guidance set out by the Housing Ombudsman, such as promotion of the community trigger.

Policy

- 2.8 The main changes to the policy have been to streamline the document into specific, methodical, headings covering our approach to ASB. This followed feedback from Resolve that our previous policy was more extensive than needed, had too much detail and so took on the characteristics of a procedure and was often repetitive.
- 2.9 In defining the policy we also paid regard to the Housing Ombudsman guidance on what they expect to see in ASB policies; this includes a definition of antisocial behaviour, how to report antisocial behaviour, as well as our approach to specific issues such as hate crime.
- 2.10 We have also considered the expectations of the Regulator of Social Housing, which includes the requirement to work collaboratively to resolve ASB.
- 2.11 In line with advice from Resolve, and requirements of the Regulator and Ombudsman, we have sought to specify our policy approach under certain categories so residents have clear expectations and can easily retrieve our approach to certain issues, such as prevention, resolving complaints, early intervention,

investigation, support and partnership working. We have also included reference to hate crime, stating that we will deal with this as a priority; the statement of procedures on ASB covers this in more detail.

Statement of Procedures on ASB

- 2.12 The existing statement of procedures on ASB was defined by Resolve as being a comprehensive document that clearly sets out our processes. However, along with Tiaa they identified the need to distinguish our approach to low level/low impact cases as well as defining what we do not consider to be ASB. We have covered this in the revised document both as part of the introductory section and under the heading *Nuisance behaviour assessed as low impact*.
- 2.13 How we will manage complaints about cannabis use has been added to the revised procedure, this is in recognition of some practical difficulties we have experienced over the last period and reflects good practice in the field. This is covered in the introductory section of the procedure and specifies the occasions when we will not be able to progress complaints but also highlights that we will work with Surrey Police to resolve cannabis issues.
- 2.14 Resolve also highlighted that we need to add some flexibility into our processes around how we issue warnings for ASB, suggesting that we should be more flexible than the two warning approach previously referenced. This is in recognition that ASB cases are complex and enforcement should be considered on a case by case basis. In practice we had been taking a flexible approach dependent on the severity of ASB being reported but we have ensured this is suitably referenced in the revised document; this is referenced in the section *Contacting the alleged perpetrator*. In this section we have also included narrative on early intervention solutions that can be considered when working with perpetrators, such as diversionary activities or acceptable behaviour agreements. Furthermore, we have included a new section on *Supporting vulnerable perpetrators*; this is in recognition of the sometime blurred lines between someone who may be a perpetrator but also a victim, such as through cuckooing.
- 2.15 In the section on *Remedies for tackling antisocial behaviour* we have sought to distinguish between informal and formal remedies for tackling ASB, this has included adding in some additional remedies in the *Informal measures* section. This has the aim of providing clarity on the range of tools that are at our disposal and highlight the alternatives to formal remedies that residents can expect us to use, particularly in cases where the impact is medium to low thus ensuring a proportionate response to evidenced ASB.
- 2.16 As well as adding to the range of available remedies, a section has also been added to recognise the range of tenancy types we may take enforcement action against. Traditionally the enforcement section of the Housing and Neighbourhood Services Team would have dealt only with general needs, secure tenancies. However, the team now manage ASB across a range of tenancy types including the addition of non-secure tenancies and licences associated with temporary accommodation. This is added to the section *Remedies for tackling antisocial behaviour*.
- 2.17 In line with the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman we have incorporated our processes around dealing with hate crime which is covered under the heading *Hate incident/hate crime*.
- 2.18 Additionally, in line with the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman we have

included details in the *Who to contact if you are not satisfied* section covering use of the Community Trigger and also advice in this section on how to access support from the ombudsman. Indeed prior to 2021 the Community Trigger function had not been used by any Council tenant but we have actively been promoting it to assist in potentially resolving some long standing complex cases where we have not been able to progress any formal remedies. The benefit of this is that it triggers a formal community safety review with partners to highlight any additional investigations or actions that any partner may need to take, or alternatively to affirm that each agency has acted to the best of its ability.

3. Policy framework implications

- 3.1 This revised policy and procedure seeks to support the Council's vision of supporting local people and improving the quality of their lives through tackling ASB and offering robust support.
- 3.2 The revised policy builds and strengthens the previous one clarifying our response to issues such as low level ASB, however we have included our approach to addressing hate crime which until now has been covered under a separate policy and procedure.

4. Resource implications (where applicable)

- 4.1 There is no additional resource requirement resulting from this reviewed policy and statement of procedures on ASB.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 The Housing Act 1996 (as amended) in section 218A (8) defines ASB as:
 - (a) Conduct that is capable of causing nuisance or annoyance to some person (who need not be a particular identified person) and that directly or indirectly relates to or affects the landlord's housing management functions, or
 - (b) Conduct that consists of or involves using or threatening to use housing accommodation owned or managed by the landlord for an unlawful purpose.
- 5.2 Section 218A further states that a local housing authority landlord, must prepare, publish and make available (a) a policy in relation to ASB, and (b) procedures for dealing with occurrences of ASB. It must from time to time keep the policy and procedures under review and, when it thinks appropriate, publish a revised statement. In preparing and reviewing the policy and procedures the landlord must have regard to the statutory guidance.
- 5.3 Taking enforcement action for ASB is complex and ongoing support from legal services is required to apply and progress cases through the courts. When cases progress to trial, this may also include securing the services of a barrister. It is essential that this is done in a timely way to show that we take ongoing antisocial behaviour seriously but also to provide responsive services to residents whose lives can be devastated by the effects of antisocial behaviour.
- 5.4 Advice from experienced counsel is being sought at the final draft stage on the legal compliancy and effective operation of both the policy and procedure.

6. Equality implications

- 6.1 A draft EIA has been completed which shows that the policy and statement of procedures has a positive impact on a range of groups with protected characteristics, for example the procedure refers to the victim risk assessment matrix and if we find that a victim is particularly vulnerable due to disability then we will offer them additional support. The documents also outline how we will support vulnerable perpetrators and any possible adjustments that we will make in determining a course of action we may take.
- 6.2 As is detailed in the statement of procedures, when progressing a case for formal legal action officers are required to submit an authority document for sign off by a senior manager before any legal action can commence, this process includes a full review of the case for any equality issues that are relevant and any adjustments that have been made to show that the proposed course of action is reasonable and proportionate.
- 6.3 Once the consultation period for the revised policy and procedure has closed we will look to make any relevant revisions to those documents and finalise the EIA.

7. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications

- 7.1 Addressing antisocial behaviour swiftly and robustly is essential for creating sustainable communities that feel supported by their local authority.

8. Other implications

8.1 Consultation Strategy

The revised policy and statement of procedures on antisocial behaviour was issued for consultation on 30th April 2021 and closes on 23rd May 2021. As well as being uploaded to the Council's website it has been directly issued to the Runnymede Council Residents Association and key partners both internal and external such as Community Safety, Social Prescribing, Environmental Health, Surrey Police, Surrey County Council Adult Social Care, Catalyst and Surrey Mediation. This approach follows the principles set out in the Council's Consultation Strategy as follows:

- A. Consultations should have a clear purpose and start at an appropriate stage
- B. Consultations should take account of the groups being consulted
- C. Consultations should be clear and concise
- D. Consultations should last for a proportionate amount of time
- E. Responses to consultations should be published in a timely fashion and facilitate scrutiny

- 8.2 Upon the closure of the consultation period we will make any necessary revisions to the policy and procedure as well as publishing the results of the consultation.

8.3 Section 17, Crime and Disorder Act

Authorities have a duty to consider the impact of their functions and decisions on crime and disorder in their local area.

- 8.4 There is evidence that the type of antisocial behaviour we are dealing with has changed in nature from traditional nuisance type behaviour, e.g. parties and noise nuisance, to behaviour of a criminal nature that is having an impact on local communities, for example drug related behaviour and assault. This is something we

intend to monitor closely but our robust procedures and partnership working will enable us to effectively deal with this.

9. **Conclusions**

- 9.1 This revised policy and statement of procedures is updated to reflect the outcome of the Tiaa audit as well as recommendations from industry experts Resolve. The revised documents also contain additional narrative to ensure that we have taken into account the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman and Regulator of Social Housing.

(To resolve)

Background papers

None

RUNNYMEDE BOROUGH COUNCIL
NEIGHBOURHOOD AND
HOUSING MANAGEMENT SERVICES
ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR
POLICY

Approved: May 2021

Review due: May 2023

Introduction

This policy sets out Runnymede Council's policy on dealing with antisocial behaviour (ASB) in Council properties.

This document should be read in conjunction with our statement of ASB procedures.

Our Aims

A key priority in Runnymede's Community Safety Partnership Action Plan is to reduce crime and antisocial behaviour. The Council is committed to tackling antisocial behaviour with prevention and early intervention.

We will enforce the terms of the tenancy agreement in relation to ASB. In doing so we will work in partnership with our colleagues across the Council and with other statutory partners, including Surrey Police.

Definition

Antisocial behaviour is defined in section 218A (8) of the Housing Act 1996 as,

- (a) conduct that is capable of causing nuisance or annoyance to some person (who need not be a particular identified person) and that directly or indirectly relates to or affects the landlord's housing management functions, or
- (b) conduct that consists of or involves using or threatening to use housing accommodation owned or managed by the landlord for an unlawful purpose.

It is defined differently in other legislation and anti-social behaviour can cover a wide range of conduct. However, it does not extend to behaviour that may be perceived by some others as unpleasant or inconsiderate, but in fact is part of a, possibly different, lifestyle or is minor infraction or an infrequent occurrence. If the behaviour complained about does not meet the threshold for ASB, the authority will not investigate. It will nevertheless record the incidents and, where appropriate, may offer complainant self-help solutions, including access to mediation services.

Tenants' responsibilities

All tenants of the Council have signed a Tenancy Agreement which sets out the responsibilities and behaviours expected from them. They must not commit, or allow the people living in or visiting their home to commit, acts of ASB.

We consider that ASB constitutes a wide variety of activities that may cause nuisance and annoyance to others.

The Council expects its customers to be tolerant of other people's lifestyles and will not accept reports of behaviour that most people accept as a reasonable part of everyday life, although some behaviour can be perceived as unpleasant or inconsiderate, it may not be ASB. The Council will record these types of complaints but will NOT investigate them.

The Council will deal with Hate Crime in line with this policy and our supporting statement of procedures. We will respond to incidents of hate crime as a priority.

Prevention

We will ensure tenants are made aware of their responsibilities in relation to ASB, this includes through:

- The sign up process
- New tenant and end of year visits
- Where relevant thereafter including letters, emails, meetings, visits and tenancy audits
- Formal interventions such as written warnings

Resolving complaints including early intervention

The Council will consider which course of action is suitable to the circumstances, depending on the occupation rights (if any) of the perpetrator, the severity and/or persistent nature of the conduct and we will have regard to the proportionality and reasonableness of the action. In some situations we may use more than one remedy to address an issue.

The Council uses a wide range of tools and powers to challenge unacceptable behaviour, and will decide on a case by case basis which tools and powers are the most appropriate to use.

Generally, in those cases that have not been assessed as high priority/impact, early intervention tools and techniques will be applied. Customers will be encouraged to engage and participate in order to stop incidents from escalating, this includes communicating with each other, such as through mediation, and respecting one another's point of view.

The Council will take enforcement action in cases where early intervention techniques have not been successful and the harmful behaviour is continuing, or where

complainants need protection to prevent further ASB incidents from occurring.

Please note that this policy does not relate to a formal complaint about a service a customer has received from the Council. This type of complaint should be put in writing to the Council either by emailing the officer concerned or writing to them at Civic Offices, Station Road, Addlestone, Surrey, KT15 2AH. Alternatively, you can go online and use the Council's general customer feedback form at <https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/article/15102/Feedback-form>.

Investigation

The Council will keep in regular contact with complainants of ASB regarding the progress of a case, this will include ongoing assessment of the risk of harm.

In most cases complainants will be asked to keep a log of further incidents in order to gather evidence of the problem. The Council offers a number of methods which complainants can use to record incidents of ongoing ASB. These include:

- Using diary sheets
- Using the The Noise App on a smart phone to record and log incidents of noise
- Directly emailing or phoning the officer allocated to a case
- Reporting online at <https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/article/13607/Report-it>

Support

We will offer support and advice to complainants of ASB, especially if they are vulnerable, to assist us in enabling enforcement action against perpetrators.

Translation, interpreting and alternative methods of recording incidents will be made available; we want to make it as easy as possible to report ASB.

Support can include practical measures, such as the installation of fire proof letterbox plates, and/or other supportive measures such as referrals to coaching support. In exceptional circumstances we may consider a management transfer to safeguard complainants.

When assessing what actions should be taken to deal with a complaint, the officer has a duty to consider whether the alleged perpetrator would benefit from specialist support to help them address their antisocial behaviour. This could include problems relating to drug or alcohol dependency or mental health needs, which may or may not be having an additional impact on the wider community. Victims of cuckooing who are also perpetrators of ASB will receive specialist support.

Enforcement action

The Council have a graded response escalation process and we will use a range of interventions depending on the nature of the reports being made, our response will be reasonable and proportionate and include but not limited to:

- Acceptable Behaviour Contracts
- pre legal warnings
- legal action

In serious cases and/or where non legal interventions have not been effective the Council may involve an application to the Courts to help resolve the issue. In very serious cases of ASB, such as a serious assault, we may take this action without any further warning to the tenant.

Partnership working

The Regulator of Social Housing, under the Neighbourhood and Community Standard, requires registered housing providers to co-operate with relevant partners to help improve social, environmental and economic wellbeing in their areas and to work in partnership with other agencies to prevent and tackle ASB in the neighbourhoods where they own homes.

Criminal matters should be reported to Surrey Police. If it is appropriate for the police to take responsibility for investigating an incident, the Council will work with them to support their investigation.

Staff training & Continuous Improvement

Managers will ensure staff receive appropriate training in accordance with their role, especially with regard to legislation and dealing with potentially vulnerable people. This includes relevant refresher training and training as part of an induction schedule for new staff.

We monitor the quality of this service, including via satisfaction surveys and performance statistics.

Consultation and communication

In line with The Regulator of Social Housing's Involvement and Empowerment Standard, Residents and the Runnymede Council Residents Association have been consulted, this includes through the Council's website and social media.

A range of Council staff, including Legal and Environmental Health colleagues have also been consulted.

Equalities Implications

The Council has duty under the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to the need to:

- a) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation;
- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a Protected Characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The 9 Protected Characteristics are age, disability, race/ethnicity, pregnancy and maternity, religion, sexual orientation, sex, gender reassignment and marriage / civil partnership.

An Equality Impact screening assessment on this policy has been completed and it is noted that we expect a positive impact for people with the protected characteristics of Age, Race, Religion, Sexual Orientation and Disability.

Managers are responsible for ensuring that this policy is fairly applied, with due regard to a tenant's individual circumstances and for adequate training for staff on equality issues.

RUNNYMEDE BOROUGH COUNCIL

PROCEDURE ON ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Approved: May 2021

Review due: May 2023

Procedure on Antisocial Behaviour

Introduction

This procedure provides information on how the Council ordinarily responds to complaints of antisocial behaviour (ASB). This document should be read in conjunction with our ASB policy.

It provides further details about the following:

- Reporting ASB
- Responding to a complaint of ASB
- Supporting Witnesses
- Supporting Perpetrators
- Remedies for resolving ASB
- Monitoring ASB

The Council aims to deal with all complaints of ASB in accordance with the procedures described in this statement. However, ASB can be very complex and sometimes cases require a more flexible approach in order to achieve the best outcome for the complainant and/or the perpetrator.

The Council does expect its customers to be tolerant of other people's lifestyles and will not accept reports of behaviour that most people accept as a reasonable part of everyday life, although some behaviour can be perceived as unpleasant or inconsiderate, it may not be antisocial behaviour. The Council will record these types of complaints but will NOT investigate them, for example:

- Isolated incidents of antisocial behaviour such as loud music, an argument, a bonfire
- Cooking smells
- Neighbour disputes such as interference with wheelie bins, parking disputes, ball games
- Anonymous complaints
- Noise nuisance caused by daily living noise which is not excessive or unreasonable
- Noise from a baby crying or children playing

Our tenants have a right to enjoy their homes and are entitled to go about their daily lives without having concerns that complaints will be made against them.

Council staff are appropriately trained and will exercise their professional judgement when assessing reports that they receive, and in situations where the Council assess the behaviour reported is NOT ASB, we will provide customers with self help options where appropriate including access to mediation services.

The Council consider the following as some examples of the more common types of ASB, but this is not an exhaustive list.

- ASB related to drug or alcohol abuse

- Vandalism and damage to property
- Extreme noise that is persistent and capable of causing nuisance or annoyance to a reasonable person
- Persistent pet and animal nuisance where the animal's behaviour is capable of causing nuisance or annoyance to a reasonable person
- Actual violence/threats of violence against people or property
- Domestic abuse /Violence
- Verbal abuse, harassment, intimidation or threatening behaviour
- Hate-related incidents (based on race, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, gender, disability, religion, age)
- Other criminal activity in addition to those covered by the bullet points above

The Council considers cannabis use to be ASB and we will work with Surrey Police to resolve these complaints. We may provide complainants with an odour diary to assess the impact of the smell on the complainant however, we are limited in how far we can investigate these issues and we are unlikely to be able to take action for breach of tenancy if:

- There is no evidence to prove where the smell is coming from
- Officers from either the police or council are unable to witness the smell
- The complaint is made by one household against one other – one word against another
- There is minimal impact on the complainant

Responsibilities

The Tenancy Audit and Enforcement Manager and Officer are responsible for responding to complaints about antisocial behaviour caused by Runnymede Borough Council tenants.

Procedure

HOW TO REPORT ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

If the person acting antisocially is a Council tenant, is a member of a tenants' household, or is visiting a tenant, then the complaint should initially be made to Housing and Neighbourhood Services.

Complaints can be made in the following ways:

- In writing to Housing and Neighbourhood Services, Runnymede Borough Council, Civic Centre, Station Road, Addlestone, Surrey KT15 2AH
- By telephone on 01932 838383
- By e-mail tenancymanagement@runnymede.gov.uk
- In person at the offices. If visiting the Civic Centre, it is advisable that you make an appointment beforehand to ensure a suitable member of staff is available.

- On-line at www.runnymede.gov.uk and click on 'Report It'
- Through a third party such as a Councillor.
- Any complaints made through the Council's main social media channels such as Facebook or twitter will be escalated to Housing and Neighbourhood Services.

If the activity is of a criminal nature then the ASB should be reported to the police (call 101 for a non-emergency response and 999 in the case of an emergency).

The Council will record anonymous complaints but will NOT investigate them unless the complaint raises a safeguarding concern, or it relates to a crime in which case we will follow up with relevant agencies such as Adult Social Care, Children's Services and/or Surrey Police. Due to a lack of information about who made the complaint or other evidence, it would be difficult to progress the complaint in such circumstances.

HOW WE WILL INVESTIGATE COMPLAINTS OF ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

All information provided by complainants will be treated in the strictest confidence, however, there are circumstances where the Council is obliged to share information. Please note that in order to comply with safeguarding obligations, if officers receive information that suggests that a child or adult is at risk they have a professional duty to share that information with relevant services including Children's Services and Adult Social Care as appropriate. Similarly, if the Council receives a Court Order to disclose information as part of legal proceedings, the Council is legally obliged to comply.

As part of our investigation the Council may share information with other Statutory Agencies, such as Surrey Police, under the Data Protection Act 2018 and the EU General Data Protection Regulation. We may also be required to share information with a third party under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, for example to prevent a crime. Further information on the Council's Privacy Statement can be found here <https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/privacystatement>.

Complaints of ASB will be assigned to either the Tenancy Audit and Enforcement Manager, or the Tenancy Audit and Enforcement Officer. The named officer will be the complainant's point of contact for all future enquiries relating to the complaint.

Details of the initial complaint will be logged onto the Council's Customer Services Module within the Northgate software system. Complainants will be contacted by a member of the Tenancy Audit and Enforcement team within 2 working days of the complaint being received. Cases likely to include imminent danger, violence or threats of violence, hate crime or domestic abuse, will, be given priority, with a real focus on reducing the harmful behaviour and protecting the reporter by responding as quickly as possible. The Officer will assess the information provided and decide on the most appropriate way to respond to the complaint. The response will be dependent on the nature of the behaviour being reported, and the impact it is having on the complainant, their family, and/or the local community. Translation services or an interpreter are provided as required.

Nuisance behaviour assessed as low impact

The Council takes all complaints of antisocial behaviour seriously and will review the facts and evidence in each case to determine an appropriate response. Complaints about a given type of activity can impact on different people in different ways for various reasons. Complaints which relate to estate type issues will usually be classed as low impact nuisance behaviour. Typically, in these cases there will be no risk of harm to the complainant and no vulnerabilities that would mean the nuisance would have a particularly adverse impact on the complainant. These issues include, but are not limited to:

- Car repairs
- Dogs barking
- Neighbour Disputes
- Ball Games

Where cases have been assessed as low impact the officer will decide on the most suitable course of action and will discuss this with you. Please note that you may be directed towards 'self help' tools to help you try to resolve the situation yourself. This include supplying you with a 'Dear Neighbour' letter that you can put through your neighbour's door if you are being disturbed by noise, or referring you and your neighbour to Mediation Surrey.

Often the best way to resolve nuisance cases effectively is through discussion, negotiation and agreement between neighbours.

If mediation is recommended it is because it is considered as the best option . Therefore, if you refuse without good reason the Council reserve the right to close your case.

A referral to support coaching for the complainant may also be offered if the Officer and complainant agree that it might be helpful.

Antisocial Behaviour assessed as medium to high impact

Where cases have been assessed as medium to high impact, the complainant will be offered an appointment to discuss their complaint in more detail. Ideally, this will be a face to face appointment however, it could also be via a video call. A face to face appointment can take place in the complainant's home, at the Council offices, or at an alternative suitable location of the complainants choosing. If the complainant does not wish to meet with an officer, or take part in a video call, their complaint can be discussed over the phone. Please be aware that if the complainant declines further contact with an officer, so as to provide further details about their complaint, it may not be possible to progress their complaint.

The appointed officer will take down the details of the complaint by completing the ASB Report Form. The purpose of the form is to record the following details:

- what is happening
- when it is happening
- who the alleged perpetrators are (if known)
- what impact it is having on you and/or your household
- whether you need additional support
- why it is happening
- whether the incident has been reported to other agencies
- whether you have discussed the problem with the alleged perpetrator
- what your expectations are with regards to your complaint.
- explore together the next steps

In most cases the complainant will be asked to keep a log of further incidents in order to gather evidence of the problem. The Council offers a number of methods which can be used to record incidents of ongoing ASB. These include:

- Using diary sheets provided to you
- Using the The Noise App on a smart phone to record and log incidents of noise (details will be provided by the officer allocated to the case)
- Directly emailing or phoning the officer allocated to the case
- Reporting online at <https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/article/13607/Report-it>

Regardless of the method the complainant uses they should try to include as much detail as possible, and remember:

- **This is a personal record** – they should only write down what they see or hear, not what anyone else has witnessed.
- **Stick to the facts** - they should avoid using statements of judgement, like, ‘they don’t have to go to work but we do’.
- **Details** - write down everything the complainant knows about the incident including the date, time, duration of the incident, where it took place, who was involved, and specific details of what happened. For example, if someone was shouting write down examples of exactly what words were said.
- **People** - try to identify the people involved in each incident. Write down any names they are known as and their characteristics: clothing, hairstyle etc.
- **Submit the information-** do not hold onto the information once an incident has been logged. When the complainant has completed their log it should be sent back to the Council as soon as possible. The Audit and Enforcement Team will review the information and then make a decision on whether there is sufficient evidence to take action against the offender(s). The complainant will be updated accordingly.

If the complainant is asked to keep a log of further incidents, but fails to do so, their case may be closed if we are unable to progress if further because of this.

The ASB Report Form includes an action plan which the complainant and the officer will sign and date. The action plan will be based around the discussion in terms of how the complaint will be investigated and will include actions for the officer assigned to the complaint to complete if appropriate, and may also include actions for the complainant to complete.

When a case is assessed as medium to high impact, for example where someone is expressing fear of harm or feels unable to go about their daily life as a result of the ASB, the officer will complete a Victim Risk Assessment form with the complainant at the initial meeting. This matrix is used to assess the current level of risk to the complainant and will be reviewed as necessary as the case progresses. In accordance with the Surrey wide multi-agency Community Harm and Risk Management Meetings (CHaRMM) framework the following action plan will be applied to the scoring matrix:

Standard score 0-25

- ASB incident diary to be offered if appropriate
- Offer crime reduction advice
- Consider mediation referral
- Encourage victims to visit <http://www.surreycommunitysafety.org.uk/> for information and advice on what to do if you have been a victim of antisocial behaviour.

Medium score: 26 – 35 (in addition to standard)

- Joint agency home visit, if appropriate
- Initial action plan and engagement with relevant partners to consider CHaRMM referral for case management
- Consider if location of interest marker should be considered by Surrey Police or partner agency and created if appropriate
- Encourage victims to seek support from local victim care team in Surrey on 0808 168 9274

High score: 36-44 (in addition to standard and medium)

- Immediate referral to CHaRMM for case management and support
- Joint agency home visit to be conducted
- Referral to Mediation Surrey Coaching Support
- Immediate circulation and contact with relevant partners
- Case created on ECINS (multi agency database used to record CHaRMM referrals), risk assessment and initial support plan uploaded.

The officer will use the ASB report form and any logs provided to assess what action, if any, should be taken. The proposed course of action will be agreed in discussion with the complainant along with the process involved as well as any translation, interpretation or requirements for alternative ways of recording evidence.

Following the initial meeting the complainant will be sent an information pack which usually contains the following information:

- Covering letter summarising the initial action plan and containing contact details for the designated officer
- Copy of the ASB Report Form
- Copy of the CHaRMM Victim Risk Assessment
- Supply of diary sheets
- Information leaflet “Anti-social Behaviour: Together We can Deal With It”

The covering letter, ASB Report Form and accompanying CHaRMM Victim Risk Assessment form will be scanned onto the Council’s data capture system Information at Work.

If the agreed action plan states that independent enquiries are to be carried out, the officer will start these enquiries as soon as possible after the initial interview. This may involve contacting agencies such as Surrey Police, Children’s Services, Adult Social Care. It can also include making enquiries with other residents to investigate whether they are also aware of the issue.

Please note, that due to the individual circumstances, and complexities of incidents of ASB, the officer dealing with the case may deviate slightly from the procedure described above. This applies to low, medium or high impact cases. Where this is the case the officer should be able to advise why this decision has been made. For example, following an assault but where the victim does not feel at risk of any further incidents.

Hate Incident/Hate Crime

A hate crime is “any criminal offence committed against the person, or property that is motivated by the offenders’ hate against people because of their age, gender, race, religion, disability, or ethnicity, and there is evidence to support this motivation’.

In making judgements about hate crimes it is the behaviour and its impact on the recipient, not the intentions of the perpetrator that are important.

The purpose of this statement from the Macpherson Report is not to prejudge whether a perpetrator’s motive was hate or not. It is to ensure that investigations take full account of the possibility of a hate dimension to the incident and that statistics of such incidents are collected on a uniform basis.

A victim of hate crime does not have to be a member of a minority group or someone who is generally considered to be more vulnerable. For example, the friends of a visibly minority ethnic person, lesbian or refugee may be victimised because of their association. In some cases the perpetrator’s perception may be wrong. This can result in a person entirely unconnected with the hate motivation becoming the victim. In reality anyone can become the victim of a hate crime.

Hate crime can take on a variety of forms including, but not limited to, the following:

- Verbal and written abuse
- Abusive behaviour – such as spitting, threats, offensive items left on doors, posted through letterboxes, phone calls
- Physical assaults on complainant, their dependents and relatives

- Incitement – stirring up hatred by a variety of means such as petitions, leaflets and stickers
- Damage to property – such as abusive graffiti and slogans, bricks through windows and doors, damage to cars and other possessions
- Threats to wellbeing or life – such as lighted matches or rags being put through the letterbox
- Arson or attempted arson

The Council will not tolerate racial harassment and other hate crimes, either caused by or directed at its tenants. Full and comprehensive support will be offered to the victims of such behaviour. In conjunction with our partner agencies, such as Surrey Police and Social Services, we use, as necessary, all of the remedies provided by the law to deal with perpetrators.

The Council aims to:

- To ensure that the reporting of racial incidents and other hate crimes is made easy and accessible
- To increase the reporting of racial harassment and hate crime
- To deal with racial incidents and hate crimes with an appropriate and effective response
- To ensure appropriate support is provided to victims of racist incidents and hate crime

In line with the above we will manage incidents/cases of hate crime in line with our processes for investigating and taking action on anti-social behavior as documented in this procedure and that includes giving priority to address such complaints.

CONTACTING THE ALLEGED PERPETRATOR

The officer may suggest that the alleged perpetrator should be made aware of the complaint straight away or, they may ask the complainant to keep a diary of incidents in order to gain more information before contacting them. It is important that the officer has as much information as possible before discussing the complaint with the alleged perpetrator. If the complainant and the officer decide that contact should be made with the alleged perpetrator, the officer will create a business action on the Customer Services module for the perpetrator. The complainant and perpetrator records will be linked together so that a complete record of all action for the case is linked to the original complaint.

The officer will attempt to talk to the alleged perpetrator face to face. In most cases the 'first letter to perpetrator' template will be used to set up an appointment. The letter makes the alleged perpetrator aware of the complaint and reminds them of the terms of their tenancy agreement. However, given the complex nature of ASB cases the officer may decide that contacting the perpetrator through another method, for example

carrying out an unannounced visit, might be more appropriate when safe to do so. We will not divulge the identity of the complainant without the complainant's clear consent. However, it is possible the identity may be guessed if the complaint is from a close neighbour and we will discuss this with the complainant. If you do not wish for us to approach the perpetrator we will not be able to progress your complaint.

It is possible that the alleged perpetrator may make a counter-allegation, in this event their complaint may also need to be investigated.

During the contact with the perpetrator we will :

- Put the allegations to the perpetrator for a response.
- Highlight the tenancy terms being breached.
- Warn of consequences if further incidents
- Explore any vulnerabilities or support needs
- Explore appropriate solutions and agree an action plan to manage the expectations of the alleged perpetrator

A range of early intervention solutions will be explored with the alleged perpetrator, such as drawing up an acceptable behavior contract, referral to appropriate agencies for support to address the behaviour, or a written undertaking. The interventions will be reasonable and proportionate. The Council may also refer the alleged perpetrator to diversionary activities accessed through the Social Prescribing Officer, Targeted Youth Support, and other agencies participating in the CHARMM framework. They may also be referred to the in-house Tenant Support Officer to provide support, including work based skills and training.

Following the meeting, the Council will summarise in writing the agreement reached and provide the perpetrator with an action plan detailing what they need to do to prevent further nuisance and the possible consequences of failure to do this. If the officer is also satisfied that there is sufficient evidence to support that the ASB is significant and ongoing, the alleged perpetrator will also be sent a written warning.

The written warning will state which section of the tenancy agreement has been breached and will list the complaints that have been received to date.

In the event of a warning being issued and the ASB is ongoing, the officer should then consider further action based on proportionality and reasonableness. This **may** include a final written warning. The final written warning will state which section of the tenancy agreement has been breached and will list the complaints that have been received since the written warning has been issued. The final written warning will also state what further action will be taken should the behaviour continue. The decision to escalate a case will be based on the facts of the case, the ASB being perpetrated and the risk of harm that is continuing. This could include formal legal enforcement action. The Council must ensure that any action taken against alleged perpetrators is reasonable and proportionate in all the circumstances.

If the officer decides that further formal, legal, action would be appropriate the case would be referred to the Housing Services Manager in the first instance. Each case will be different and the evidence must be assessed to see whether it supports legal action

being taken. To that end, the Housing Services Manager will be asked to sign off an authorisation document which considers the facts of the case in the light of the proposed course of action. Once the document is duly authorised the Officer will refer the case to the Council's Legal Service.

The steps outlined above provide a basic framework that an officer needs to follow in order to progress a case to the formal legal enforcement stage. In the majority of cases officers will be required to carry out further interviews and meetings, issue informal warning letters, liaise with other agencies, and/or make referrals to supporting organisations before escalating the complaint to the next stage. In most cases the officer will be required to demonstrate to Legal Services that every attempt has been made to engage with the perpetrator through a variety of methods, and that legal action is being considered as a last resort only. However, there will be exceptional cases where it is reasonable to dispense with warning letters and proceed straight to enforcement action on a without notice basis, for example if there has been a serious assault on another resident. Legal action should be taken when it is appropriate to do so within the context of the procedure and when there is sufficient evidence to support this course of action.

All details relating to alleged perpetrators will be held on the Customer Services module of Northgate. This will include contemporaneous notes of telephone calls, interviews, meetings, copies of letters and notes of discussions between professionals.

SUPPORTING PERPETRATORS

When assessing what actions should be taken to deal with a complaint, the officer has a duty to consider whether the alleged perpetrator would benefit from specialist support to help them address their antisocial behaviour. This could include problems including drug or alcohol dependency or mental health needs, which may or may not be having an additional impact on the wider community.

Depending on the circumstances, support for perpetrators may include:

- Referral to tenancy sustainment services, including our in-house Tenant Support Officer who can offer advice and assistance to adult perpetrators whose tenancy is at risk due to their ASB
- Referral to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub who will assess which agency would be best placed to give advice and support to families whose family members (adults and/or children) are perpetrators of ASB
- Catalyst is a not for profit organisation providing services for people with wellbeing problems, often resulting in drug and alcohol use
- Liaison with Surrey Police, Social Services, Runnymede Community Mental Health Team and/or Targeted Youth Support Services

Supporting vulnerable perpetrators

Complex issues relating to county lines, cuckooing, child criminal exploitation and modern slavery mean the lines between who is a perpetrator and who is a victim can become blurred. An individual identified as a perpetrator may well be a victim of

exploitation themselves and the Council is committed to working with partner agencies to support these individuals so that they get the help they need, and to ensure that the ASB stops.

For example, in the case of cuckooing, professional criminals target the homes of vulnerable adults so that the property can be used for drug dealing. These criminals are very selective about who they target as 'cuckoo' victims and are often entrepreneurial. A lot of the time victims are lonely, isolated, frequently drug users themselves and are already known to the police. 'Cuckooing' means the criminals can operate from a discreet property, which is out of sight, making it an attractive option. They can then use the premises to deal and manufacture drugs in an environment under the police radar, usually staying for just one day. When the criminals use the victim's property for criminal enterprises, the inhabitants become terrified of going to the police for fear of being suspected of involvement in drug dealing or being identified as a member of the group, which would result in their eviction from the property.

The CHARMM meets monthly to discuss perpetrators of ASB who are having a significant impact on the local community, and to consider and support victims of ASB where the impact is deemed to be high, and the victim in need of further support.

In cases of cuckooing the Council will refer the perpetrators (if known) to the CHARMM and they will also refer the victim to the CHARMM. The perpetrator will also be referred to the Catalyst outreach Cuckooing programme so that they can reach out to them in an attempt to establish whether they are in fact being cuckooed and whether they are in need of specialist support.

The CHARMM panel will discuss new referrals and make a collective decision as to whether or not to accept the subject onto the Agenda for future action and monitoring.

KEEPING COMPLAINANTS INFORMED OF THE PROGRESS OF THEIR COMPLAINT

We will respond to the initial complaint within 2 days, thereafter we will respond written correspondence, including emails, within 5 working days. If written correspondence is assessed as urgent or high risk we will prioritise our response and aim to reply as quickly as possible. If the correspondence requires a more in depth response we will acknowledge it within 3 working days will respond in full within 15 working days. The full response could be a response in writing or face to face or over the phone. Please note this does not mean the complaint will be fully resolved and closed within 15 working days.

The complainant's named officer is responsible for ensuring that they are kept informed of the progress of their complaint at all times. Whilst having regard to Data Protection, the officer will discuss potential action with them and will update them once the action has been carried out. This can be done in writing, verbally over the phone, or during a face to face meeting.

All details relating to the complaint will be held on the Customer Services module of Northgate. This will include contemporaneous notes of telephone calls, interviews, meetings, copies of letters and notes of discussions between professionals.

ATTENDING COURT

The best evidence to successfully obtain legal action, is always direct evidence which also shows the impact the behaviour has had on a person or community. In cases where the Council takes legal enforcement action against a tenant, we will ask residents to provide witness statement(s) to support that action. Whilst we recognise that this can be an intimidating prospect the reality is that the Courts also expect to hear first hand evidence from the residents who have witnessed the antisocial behaviour. Anonymous witness statements can be submitted but they do not carry as much weight with the Court. The Council may not always be able to proceed with court if the case is solely based on anonymous evidence.

Where residents agree to act as a witness in a case the Council will support them as fully as possible by paying travel and/or work expenses incurred as a result of them attending court as a witness, talking them through the court process and making any other special arrangements throughout the court process as necessary. Such measures are described in more detail in the Council's "Customer Care Charter - witnesses in court".

SUPPORTING COMPLAINANTS

If the complaint is assessed as medium to high impact, for example when someone is expressing fear of harm or feels unable to go about their daily life as a result of the ASB, we will complete a CHaRMM victim risk assessment at the outset of the complaint. This will be reviewed as required throughout the course of the investigation. The complainant will be provided with a copy of the risk assessment and a copy will be kept on their file. If they score highly on the risk assessment they will be referred to CHaRMM where multi agencies will meet to discuss their particular needs, how best to support them with their issues and agree an Action Plan.

If the complainant is considered to be particularly vulnerable we can offer practical measures in order to support and reassure them. This can include:

- security measures, such as installing extra locks and spy holes
- provision of wrist panic alarms and installation of fire proof letterbox plates
- in serious cases of significant anti-social behaviour the Council will consider installing a CCTV camera.

We will liaise with other agencies as appropriate, such as Surrey Police and Social Services, to ensure that full support is provided. For example, we may request that the police conduct local patrols in the area. We will make use of Safer Runnymede's CCTV cameras to gather evidence and provide reassurance as necessary, within the constraints of and in accordance with Investigatory Powers legislation.

We will consider the use of ASB Injunctions where the perpetrator has engaged or is threatening to engage in conduct capable of causing nuisance or annoyance to any person.

The Council will support complainants to make use of the Community Trigger (also known as the case review) if we believe it may be of benefit to them in your situation. If they (or others) have reported an incident 3 or more times within a 6 month period they can activate the Community Trigger (also known as ASB Case Review) through the Council. The Community Safety Officer will then assess their information to decide whether or not it meets the threshold for the Community Trigger. If the threshold it met there will be a multi-agency case review which involves various agencies (e.g. local Police, Local Authority, Housing Association, NHS). This is different from a single-agency complaints process which looks at faults in the way an agency responded – further details on this process are included later on this document, under ‘who to contact if you are not satisfied’. The Community Trigger process is more of a case review to decide whether there are any further steps agencies can take to try to resolve the problem and stop the anti-social behaviour. There are no guaranteed outcomes, and the complainant should keep in mind that the process may not always result in the problem they report being resolved. They can activate the trigger themselves, or someone can activate it on their behalf, including the officer dealing with their complaint of antisocial behaviour. Further details on the community trigger can be found here <https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/communitytrigger>.

MOVING TO ALTERNATIVE ACCOMMODATION

The Council aims to support witnesses to stay in their own homes however, in exceptional circumstances, we will consider moving complainants to an alternative property if appropriate. We will not move someone just because they are experiencing ASB. This process is called a Management Transfer and it is a transfer to another property outside of the normal allocations process and is limited to one reasonable offer. Each and every request will be assessed on its own merits and must be supported by robust evidence from relevant professionals, such as the Police. As a guide, complainants may be eligible for a Management Transfer under the following circumstances:

- a) Surrey Police are of the view that the tenant and/or a member of their household would be at significant risk of harm should they remain in their property
- b) The mental and/or physical health of the tenant or a member of their household would be a significant risk of harm to themselves or another should they remain in the property
- c) Where a tenant is experiencing hate crime and/or harassment because of their age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation.
- d) Other exceptional circumstances, when the approving officer feels that the only way to resolve a difficult situation where the urgency is greater than provided by our rehousing banding system is to offer a move via a Management Transfer.

Further details on management moves can be found in the “Policy & Procedure For Management Transfers Anti-social Behaviour”.

REMEDIES FOR TACKLING ASB

When deciding on what action to take to deal with a complaint the officer will take into account a number of factors including but not exclusive to: the type of behaviour, the time of the incident and how long it lasts for, the frequency of the incidents, how long the incidents have been going on, what steps have been taken to resolve the issue to date, whether independent evidence supports the allegation. The Council must take action appropriate to the circumstances of the ASB. It will seek to act reasonably in all the circumstances. We will update the complainant about what action, if any, will be taken. We will tell you the reasons for this decision.

Before taking any formal action such as making an application for an injunction, and/or serving a Notice, and then later making the decision to apply to Court for a possession or demotion order, the officer should complete an authority document to be signed off by the Housing Services Manager or a more senior officer. The authority document should outline the facts of the case, describe what action has been taken to date in an attempt to resolve the situation and consider any relevant factors under the Equality Act 2010. The authority document will also consider human rights issues and as such it should outline why the action being recommended is reasonable and proportionate and is a lawful response to the situation.

This section lists the types of legal and non-legal actions the Council might consider in addressing ASB, as follows:

Informal measures

- **Mediation** – Following the initial discussion about a complaint, the officer dealing with the complaint may decide that a referral to Mediation Surrey may be the most appropriate course of action. Surrey Mediation Service is independent, confidential and free of charge. Mediators don't take sides or try to tell people what they should do. They are trained and experienced in helping people reach agreements between themselves. They do not give advice. If the officer decides that this is the most appropriate course of action but a complainant chooses not to participate in the mediation process, it may not be possible to progress the complaint at that stage.
- **Warning letters** –warning letters give perpetrators the opportunity to remedy their behaviour before more serious action is considered. These letters will tell the perpetrator what complaints have been made and which section of the Tenancy Agreement has been breached.
- **Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs)** Acceptable Behaviour Contracts are voluntary agreements made between the Council and the perpetrator, and sometimes another agency such as the police or school. The intention is to address the anti-social behaviour and they can be used for children or adults.

- Written Undertaking –from the adult perpetrator to cease specified conduct and/or take certain positive steps. If breached would consider further action.
- Good neighbour agreements – these are voluntary agreements between neighbours and are useful to address issues impacting on the community such as noise, parking, litter, property condition. The Council can facilitate and work with neighbours to draft up the agreement
- Diversionary activities- these can be useful to divert antisocial behaviour for example assisting young people to participate in sporting activities or encouraging residents to become involved in the community or learn new life or work-place skills
- Referral to support agencies – such agencies can assist with underlying vulnerabilities or support needs that might be contributing to the ASB.

This list is not exhaustive but includes the main informal measures that can be explored to resolve ASB.

Formal measures

- Demoted Tenancies – the Council can apply to the County Court to have a secure tenancy demoted for a period of 12 months. A demoted tenancy is a non-secure tenancy and as such it is easier for the Council to then seek a possession order should the ASB continue.
- Possession orders – the Council applies to the County Court for a possession order in respect of a perpetrator’s home. If achieved, it then applies to issue a possession warrant for a bailiff to evict the occupiers.
- Management Transfer – in exceptional circumstances the Council may move the complainant for their own safety.
- “Absolute” ground for possession - where at least one of the following applies: a person has been found guilty of a serious criminal offence, has been found by a court to have breached the terms of an Injunction (under S1 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014), conviction for breach the terms of a Criminal Behaviour Order, where the property is subject to a Closure Order for more than 48 hours, where the person has been convicted for breaching an Abatement Notice obtained under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.
- Criminal Behaviour Orders (CBOs) - this is a civil order which can be granted following a conviction of any criminal offence by the sentencing court.
- ASB Injunction under Part 1 of the Crime and Policing Act 2014 where the respondent has engaged or is threatening to engage in ASB. This is defined as conduct which has or is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to any person or conduct which is capable of causing nuisance or annoyance to any

person. Breach of an injunction is contempt of court which could result in a fine or custodial sentence.

- Community Protection Notice - can be issued to deal with a particular problem which is negatively affecting the community. The conduct must be unreasonable and must be having a detrimental effect of a persistent or continuing nature on the quality of life of those in the locality.
- Closure Notice and Order - used where there is significant nuisance being caused or likely to be caused to members of the general public and/or that there has been disorder or is likely to be disorder at the property. A Closure Notice prohibits access to all persons except those who habitually live there or those who own the property. A Closure Order is granted by the Magistrates Court and prohibits access to all persons at all times. It may allow access to specified persons, and is known as a 'Partial' Closure Order
- Notice to Quit – are used to bring a non-secure tenancy to an end where there has been a breach of tenancy through ASB.
- In cases of significant noise nuisance, which may meet the test for statutory noise nuisance, we will liaise with Environmental Health Officers who can serve a Noise Abatement Notice if the test is met.

The Council offers a range of tenancy types depending on the stage of the tenant's housing journey. In cases of ASB where Notice is served, the type of Notice will depend on the status of the tenancy, as follows:

- License – residents in one of the Council's two shared houses will be given a license. A Notice to Terminate will be used to bring a license to an end.
- Non -secure tenancy - tenant's in the Council's temporary accommodation will be granted a non-secure tenancy. A Notice to Quit will be used to bring a non secure tenancy to an end.
- Introductory tenancy – tenant's who are living in permanent social housing for the first time will be granted a 12-month introductory tenancy. If there are complaints of ASB the introductory tenancy can be extended by a further 6 months. Notice of Proceedings for Possession can also be served as a first step to the Council seeking possession of the property.
- Demoted tenancy – [explained above] Serve a Notice of Proceedings for Possession with a right to request a review within 14 days. If not exercised or decision upheld, then court proceedings with a right to possession if procedure was followed correctly
- Secure tenancy – tenant's with a secure tenancy would be served with a Notice of Seeking Possession as a first step to the Council seeking possession of the property. A notice of proceedings for seeking a demotion order can only be served where the tenant has a secure tenancy.
- Flexible tenancies – upon expiry of the term of a flexible tenancy, the Council will carry out review in order to decide whether to whether to grant a new tenancy

and if so whether this will be at the same property or a property of a different size. The Council will take issues around ASB into account as part of this review. Therefore, in cases where there has been significant ASB the Council may decide not to grant a further tenancy and the tenant would be supported to find alternative accommodation. During the term of the flexible tenancy we can also serve a section 146 Notice of Forfeiture on the grounds of ASB as a first step to the Council seeking possession of the property. A notice of proceedings for seeking a demotion order can also be served where the tenant has a secure flexible tenancy.

CLOSING A CASE

It is essential that complainants provide evidence of the ASB by completing and returning logs in the format agreed with the Officer allocated to your case. Without their evidence it is unlikely that case can be properly investigated and their case may be closed.

In addition, a case may also be closed if the following applies:

- the ASB has stopped
- there is insufficient evidence to take any action
- the behaviour cannot be reasonably classed as ASB or nuisance
- the perpetrator has moved
- the complainant has moved
- no further reports of ASB have been made.

For cases assessed as low impact, the case may be closed without further notice because the complainant has not responded to contact by officers. It may also be closed following a discussion between the complainant and the officer either over the phone or in person. In medium to high impact cases the complainant will receive a closure letter informing them that the case will be closed if they do not contact the officer within 7 days.

When the case is closed we will ask the complainant to complete a satisfaction survey, they will have the option to complete this on line or via postal return. If they do not contact the officer within 7 days the case on the Customer Services module will be closed. Any remaining documents will be scanned onto Information at Work.

A satisfaction survey will be sent to the perpetrator where it is appropriate to do so, for example a tenant who was evicted for ASB would not be sent a satisfaction survey.

Should the antisocial behaviour reoccur complainants can make a further report. Although a new complaint will be opened all the information from their previous complaint will be held on file and will be referred to as necessary.

If a complainant is not content with the response from the Council then they will be given details of the Council's complaints procedure. The complaints procedure can be found [here](#)

MONITORING ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

All complaints of ASB are logged on the Northgate Customer Services module; this includes the name and address of both the complainant and perpetrator. The data is then fed into the Council's overall figures for ASB each quarter.

The local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership receives reports on problems of crime and disorder which impact on identified communities or are being created by identifiable individuals.

In order to continually monitor and improve our service, all complainants receive a satisfaction survey once their case is closed. The results are recorded and are used to provide vital feedback on how we respond to complaints of ASB.

WHO TO CONTACT IF COMPLAINANTS ARE NOT SATISFIED

We aim to provide a high standard of customer care however, we recognise that we do not always meet resident's expectations in relation to how we respond to complaints of antisocial behaviour.

If the complainant is dissatisfied at the outcome of their complaint they may wish to consider activating the Community Trigger to request a review of the decision(s) made in their case. They can find more details of the Community Trigger on the Council's website at www.runnymede.gov.uk/communitytrigger.

The Community Trigger should not be used if the complainant has reported ASB and received a response from us but are unhappy with the service they have received. If this is the case they should follow the Council's internal complaints procedure. Further details can be found on the Council's website at www.runnymede.gov.uk/article/15100/Compliments-comments-and-complaints. Alternatively, they can email or write to the Council or by phoning 01932 83838 or by visiting us at the Civic Centre, Station Road, Addlestone, KT15 2AH when the office is open.

In addition, they may wish to contact the Housing Ombudsman by emailing info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk or by submitting an online form to them at www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/contact-us/. The Housing Ombudsman can assist the complainant throughout the lifetime of their complaint by offering advice and assistance at an early stage, not just at the point where the internal complaints procedure has been exhausted.

OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION

Managers will ensure staff receive appropriate training in accordance with their role, especially with regard to legislation and dealing with potentially vulnerable people. Requirements will be reviewed at 1-1's and appraisals. As a minimum existing officer

will receive relevant refresher training every two years and new officers will undertake training as part of an induction schedule.

We monitor the quality of this service, submitting our performance statistics to HouseMark for independent verification and by analysing the satisfaction surveys of both complainants and perpetrators.

We will consult staff and residents about the operation of our policy and procedures. We aim to review this procedure in 2 years to ensure that it reflects current legislation and the latest examples of best practice.

EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

An Equality Impact screening assessment of the ASB policy has been carried out and notes the potential benefits to vulnerable people of responding pro-actively to complaints of ASB. Managers are responsible for ensuring that this policy is fairly applied, with due regard to individual's circumstances and for adequate training for staff on equality issues.

This Statement is reviewed regularly to ensure it remains relevant and up to date. It was last reviewed in May2021.

DRAFT

9. DISABLED ADAPTATIONS POLICY FOR COUNCIL TENANTS (HOUSING, MAGGIE WARD)

Synopsis of report:

The Disabled Adaptations Policy for Council Tenants has been reviewed and updated to give more clarity on the circumstances that adaptations will be carried out to the stock. As the tenant population ages the policy will be to identify a suitable alternative home rather than installing costly adaptations in underoccupied properties reducing the future use of these homes and enabling a significant proportion of the Council stock to be underoccupied.

Recommendation(s):

Members are asked to approve the new Disabled Adaptations Policy for Council Tenants (Appendix G)

1. Context of report

- 1.1 The current Policy on Adaptations to the Homes of Council Tenants was written in August 2015. This policy has been reviewed and amended to include further information on the Council's policy to ensure that there is a comprehensive policy outlining the situations in which adaptations will be carried out. This document does not represent a change in policy but seeks to provide detail and clarity.
- 1.2 Adaptations are carried out on receipt of recommendations from Surrey County Council Adult Social Care. Housing Services regularly receive requests from elderly residents for major adaptations in properties that no longer suit their needs.

2. Adaptations

- 2.1 Annually Members approve a budget for carrying out adaptations within the HRA stock and for 2021/2022 this figure is £200,000. The Council is committed to ensuring that it provides disabled tenants with suitable homes but the demand for social housing means that this may need to be in an alternative home to the one they currently occupy.
- 2.2 Historically Runnymede carried out adaptations including stair lifts and level access showers for older tenants to enable them to remain in the same tenancy. The level of Housing need in the Borough and demand on the Housing Revenue Account means that it is no longer economically viable or conducive to achieving best use of the stock to carry out adaptations in family size homes where a smaller suitable home is available.
- 2.3 There is a very high incidence of under occupation in family size properties and an availability of one-bedroom homes that could be occupied and where necessary adapted for these tenants. One-bedroom homes are regularly allocated to people in Band D2 (including bungalows) who have no housing need, whilst they might benefit from accessing social housing or want to move within this sector they are in suitable accommodation. We have a demand for family size housing which is resulting in a number of households being provided with Temporary Accommodation (approximately 60 households at any time), at a high cost to the Council, and a social

cost to these families who may have education disrupted as a result of this as we cannot accommodate area preferences either in location of TA or permanent offers.

- 2.4 The introduction of the Social Sector Size Criteria in 2013 whereby tenants in receipt of housing benefit had a reduction in their benefit of 14% for one bedroom in excess of their need and 25% for two or more bedrooms was not applied to tenants in receipt of the state pension which at that point was aged 61 and so there is no incentive for older residents to leave family homes.

Stock by bedroom size

Property Type	bedsit	1	2	3	4	5	6+	Total
Bungalow		273	44	1				318
Caravan Council			11	6				17
Flat High Rise		34	28	31				93
Flat Low Rise	14	315	103	14				446
Flat Medium Rise		76	34					110
House Detached			1	4	3	2	1	11
House Semi Detached		2	354	676	69	10	1	1112
House Terraced		3	104	206	15	2		330
House Town House			33	39	11			83
Maisonette			15	92	12			119
Independent Retirement	25	178	8					211
Total	39	881	735	1069	110	14	1	2850

- 2.5 Provision of adaptations such as stair lifts, ramps, and level access showers for an older person in a family size home is a large capital investment, often for a short period of time. It is rare other than properties with downstairs bedrooms that these adaptations will be required by an incoming tenant. If a member of the applicant's household has mobility issues, they will be only be considered for level access homes. The Council can then have the additional cost of removing the adaptations or an ongoing complaint from a new tenant with small children who wants a bath to replace the shower. Adaptations are bespoke to the individual and so in a stock the size of Runnymede it is not simply a matter of recycling the adapted properties.
- 2.6 It is understood that in many cases there is an attachment to a family home, residents want to maintain extra room for visitors and there is support from neighbours and comfort in a familiar environment. This must be balanced against the need for family homes and the cost to the Council of providing a homelessness service, providing temporary accommodation, and funding to access private sector tenancies for households experiencing homelessness.

- 2.7 A full adaptations service will be available to disabled residents who are housed in properties which otherwise meet their housing need. Housing Services will work closely with the Surrey County Council Occupational Therapy service to ensure that recommendations for adaptations are carried out if the current property is suitable.
- 2.8 Historically the council has installed a small number of through floor lifts which are extremely costly, in future the Council's development strategy will include the provision of wheelchair accessible homes including family size properties and through floor lifts will not be installed. The current replacement cost of an existing through floor lift is approximately £17,000 and this would be to facilitate one elderly resident occupying a 5-person home and with no access to bathroom facilities if the lift is out of order.
- 2.9 Where adaptations are refused Housing Services and Housing Solutions staff will work proactively with residents to explore Housing options and support with a move to a suitable home. Where required adaptations can be carried out to meet the needs of the tenants in the new property, if for instance they identify a bungalow and are successful in bidding or are made a direct let due to their circumstances, items such as a level access shower or ramp can be installed. The overriding objective of this policy is to ensure that tenants can live in a home which meets their needs as they age or their health needs change.
- 2.10 Although most older tenants will have a secure tenancy so will never be subject to a review of their housing need in the way that more recent tenants on Flexible fixed term tenancies will, the security of tenure extends to the right to remain in the same property as long as they wish but if the property is no longer suitable there is no right to have the property adapted. A tenant holding a secure tenancy will have the same security in any new home they occupy.
- 2.11 There will be a communications strategy to ensure that residents are made fully aware of the policy and it does not come as a shock to them that they may need to move.
- 2.12 The Council may assist with the costs of a move where a resident is refused adaptations, but this will be subject to a means test. It would not be appropriate to provide financial assistance from the HRA where a tenant has a large amount of capital but where this is not the case funding can be made available.
- 2.13 A tenant questionnaire was issued to all Council tenants in 2020, the information returned on households has been added to our system and it indicates a very high level of under occupation in tenants over 60 with 23% of family size properties not being fully utilised. Whilst there will be some natural movement on this it is apparent that over a fifth of the stock could be better utilised and creating increased downsizing could significantly increase the number of family properties available to people on the Housing Register. These properties are let on a social rent so the benefit to families of accessing social tenancies has to be balanced against the reluctance of older residents to move.

Under occupation in family size homes

Age Over	No of properties underoccupied
90	21
80	86
70	153
60	163
50	147
40	46
30	15
18	6
Total	637

No of unused bedrooms

No of unused bedrooms	Properties
1	383
2	246
3	8
Total	637

- 2.14 Housing services are currently developing an Older Person's Strategy which will link to this policy and assist with the provision of a range of good housing options for older people.
- 2.15 Since 2014 the Council has spent over £1.6m on adaptations, this has reduced in recent years due to more consistent application of the policy. There is a budget of £200,000 for this financial year for disabled adaptations and it is anticipated that this will be fully utilised as we are carrying out an extension and major adaptations to accommodate a disabled child within a family home. The purpose of this policy is not to restrict availability of adaptations to individuals but to unsuitable properties.

Expenditure on adaptations

2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
£203k	£262k	£282k	£332k	£334k	£83k	£67k	£57.00	£1,6m

3. Policy framework implications

- 3.1 The Housing Business Centre Plan 2021/22 identifies the need to ensure the service has in place an up to date suite of policy and procedure documents.

- 3.2 This policy dovetails with other policy and strategy documents such as the Older People Strategy, Tenancy Strategy, Repairs Policy and arrangements in place to support people to move to smaller homes.
- 3.3 This will ensure that arrangements are in place to support tenants who are under-occupying to downsize where is it not best use of the Council's stock to undertake major adaptations. Where tenants have Flexible fixed term tenancies they will be supported to downsize at the end of their fixed tenancy term if they are under-occupying and arrangements will be in place to ensure that adaptations are being maintained while in use.
- 3.4 Extract from the Housing Business Plan is below:

H7	Introduce a Quality Management System to maintenance and roll out across the Department (ISO 9001) Supported by a strategy, policy and procedure framework	Head of Housing Technical Services manager Housing Services Manager Head of Homelessness Business Development & Policy Manager	Effective and consistent working practices and procedures in place for all functions	Implemented by end of July 2021	No
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4. Resource implications (where applicable)

- 4.1 £200,000 is set aside for this financial year within the Runnymede Borough Council's Housing Asset Management Plan to support work to adapt council owned homes.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 The legal implications are dealt with in the policy document itself.

6. Equality implications

- 6.1 A full EIA will be carried out on this policy

7. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications

- 7.1 It is not a sustainable use of the Housing stock to facilitate large scale under-occupation.

8. Conclusions

- 8.1 The Disabled Adaptations Policy for Council Tenants has been reviewed to provide more detail on the situations where adaptations will be available. The focus will be to ensure that tenants are able to access suitable adaptations in line with the recommendations of Surrey County Council Occupational Therapy Service but that this will be within a suitably sized property and not to the current tenancy if this does not match their current need. Assistance will be provided where appropriate with identifying an alternative home and financial support will be provide where the tenant

does not have their own funding for a move.

(To resolve)

Background papers

None

Disabled Adaptations Policy – Council Housing Stock

April 2021



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1. Executive Summary

Runnymede Borough Council aims to ensure that the policy on providing Disabled Adaptations is aligned with the Council's approved Housing Allocation Policy and the objectives of making best use of stock, ensuring Best Value and responding to the housing needs in the area. The increase in demand for social housing requires a greater focus on supporting tenants to consider how their housing needs may be met in the longer term. This policy outlines how this will be achieved:

- Provision of a clear and transparent policy and communicating this to residents so there is clarity throughout their tenancy that as their needs change, they may be required to move to a more suitable property.
- Financial assistance to support tenants with the costs of relocating where needed.
- Support in meeting tenants' overall well-being including support for carers, safety in the home, access to welfare benefits, social inclusion and referrals to sensory services and other healthcare services.
- Ensuring adapted properties are let to those in greatest need of that type of accommodation.
- Ensuring the available budget is used efficiently and that RBC is able to make best use of the social housing stock.

Runnymede Council is committed to enabling tenants to remain living independently within their own home, however in some cases this will be through provision of an alternative home with the required facilities or adaptations already in situ or to be provided on commencement of the tenancy.

2. Introduction

The document outlines the Council's process for dealing with requests for disabled adaptations in Housing Revenue Account owned properties and covers:

- Adaptations that RBC will and will not progress
- Alternative options for tenants
- Indicative timescales within which work is expected to be carried out
- RBC communication with residents, Occupational Therapists (OTs), Social Services, professionals and other specialist agencies
- The management of waiting lists by RBC (e.g. where there is a high demand for adaptations that exceeds the annual budget)
- This policy sets out the parameters within which the Surrey County Council Occupational Therapist Team and RBC will work.

The policy seeks to promote fairness and equality throughout the activities of RBC, regardless of where the applicant lives, their background or circumstances. In deciding whether to carry out adaptations, RBC will have regard to the housing need in the area and the duty to achieve best use of stock this will include not facilitating adaptations where a property is under occupied.



3. Policy Aims

The primary aim of this procedure is to enable RBC to provide housing which best meets the assessed needs of tenants with disabilities. This policy supports the best use of financial resources and property assets. This may result in adaptations being declined and the consideration of rehousing where:

- it is not appropriate to meet the assessed need in the current home because of financial costs
- the property is under occupied under the bedroom allocations in the prevailing Allocation Scheme.
- there will be an adverse impact upon the future use of the property
- it is impractical to adapt the property
- there are available alternative solutions to meet the tenant's assessed needs
- adaptations will not be completed where the household's needs can reasonably be met through rehousing within a 24-month period from the date at which RBC is made aware of the tenant's assessed needs.

The policy will also guide Occupational Therapists (OT) and other professionals to understand when RBC will not be able to assist with adaptations to a tenant's home so that expectations will not be raised and service users will have a full understanding of the parameters within which these decisions are made from the start of the process.

RBC aims to operate a service that offers suitable, practical and cost-effective solutions that meet tenants' assessed needs.

Under this policy RBC will consider solutions that best meet the long-term needs of tenants and their families as a primary objective, ensuring their safety, well-being and quality of life.

RBC aims to ensure that no tenant waits longer than 12 months for an adaptation to be progressed.

4. Relevant legislation

In determining this policy, regard has been had to the relevant statutory provisions, including:

The Care Act 2014 – applying to adults, in particular the duty to provide services which help prevent people needs for care and support.

The Runnymede Housing Allocations Scheme made under the Housing Act 1996, alternative accommodation is offered within its terms.

The Equality Act 2010 - Prohibits discrimination against people with 'protected characteristics', including persons with a disability. By section 20, where a disabled person is put at a substantial disadvantage, the provider is under a duty



to make 'reasonable adjustments' to avoid this. In the context of a letting this could include making adaptations to the property, e.g. installing an access ramp. In assessing what is reasonable, an authority can take into account factors such as the cost, practicality and effectiveness of a proposed adaptation. Alternative means of meeting needs such as a transfer to more suitable accommodation may be a more appropriate adjustment.

Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 imposes a duty on a public authority, where it must in the exercise of its functions, have due regard for the need to eliminate discrimination and promote equality of opportunity and foster good relations. So, a local housing authority may need to go further than a private landlord.

Assessments

Assessments are completed by Occupational Therapists (OTs) in line with their good practice guide and a referral is submitted to RBC detailing the nature of the works required. Each case will be individually assessed on its own merits and RBC decides what is reasonable in the light of its need to make housing available to a wide range of people in need, over the long term.

It is not considered reasonable to carry out adaptations that;

- require structural alteration to the property (beyond that of widening door openings and removal of non-load bearing internal walls)
- involve alterations to the common parts of blocks of flats that will impact the use of these areas by residents of the block
- require alterations to services that are communal to any block of flats (with the exception of door entry systems)
- involve the installation of flush floor showers and wet rooms to flats above the ground floor of a block of flats
- limit the future use of family housing to households with disabilities
- where the particular construction type of a property makes it excessively costly to adapt, RBC will refuse the adaptation in favour of offering alternative housing that meets the applicants needs or which can be readily adapted at a lower cost.
- Where the property will be under occupied

5. Definition

The Equality Act 2010 defines a disabled person as someone who has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

A long-term adverse effect refers to disabilities:

- (i) That have lasted for at least 12 months



- (ii) The effects of which will last for at least 12 months
- (iii) Which are likely to last for the remainder of a person's life

Occupational Therapists (OT) and other professionals are required to *confirm that (ii) and (iii)* apply to each assessment submitted to RBC for consideration.

6. Adaptation Process Overview

In order for adaptation work to be carried out, tenants must request a referral to an OT approved by Surrey County Council, usually Adult Social Care or Children's Services. The OT will assess the level of disability need and a referral must be sent to RBC to be processed. In some cases, the OT will request a joint visit with RBC in order to look at the feasibility of a proposal they wish to recommend.

7. Examples of Work that will be carried out by Runnymede Council

The following is a list of examples of adaptation work that RBC could carry out to an individual flat or house **which otherwise meets the current household needs**; this list is not exhaustive:

- Installation of grab rails in various locations throughout a property
- Installation of access steps/ramps to front and rear entrances
- Additional internal banister rails
- Additional external handrails
- Installation of lever taps
- Alterations to the height of electrical sockets and switches
- Fixed aids for visual and hearing impairment (doorbells/ fire alarm/ smoke detectors)
- Level access shower facilities (only to ground floor bathrooms unless exceptional circumstances and the need for a shower is as a result of medical rather than mobility issues)
- Over bath shower facilities
- Kitchen adaptations

The on-going maintenance and servicing of adaptations will be funded from annual repair and maintenance revenue budgets where approved by the Council. Subject to a means test servicing of some specialised equipment e.g. closomat toilet may be the responsibility of the tenant after installation. The renewal/ replacement of previously installed adaptations will be treated as a repair/ renewal funded from core budgets and will require a current assessment of the households' accommodation needs.

Provision of appliances and portable specialist equipment will not be funded as these are considered to be either a tenant's responsibility or that of social services.



Minor adaptations such as handrails, steps, bannisters, lever taps etc. up to a combined total value of £1000 will be carried out to enable a resident to remain independently living in their home regardless of whether they are under occupying the property. Adaptations in excess of £1000 which constitute alterations to the home will not be carried out if the property is under occupied.

Where a home has been adapted for specific resident who no longer lives there the Council will try to identify a suitable tenant in need of such adaptations. In the event that this is not possible the property may be let with adaptations in place, such as a ramp or wet room and these will not be removed at the request of the incoming tenant. A property advertised and let with a shower and no bath will be accepted as such unless there is prior agreement in writing from the Council to carry out works.

8. Extensions and Conversions

In some instances extensions and/or conversions will be considered where the property is capable of being adapted to meet a tenant's needs at reasonable cost and such adaptation is likely to have an on-going future demand **and there is no other reasonable viable alternative (including re-housing)**. This may include an extension or conversion of an existing outbuilding where ground floor facilities are required. This is **entirely** at the discretion of the Council.

These often require planning permission and building regulation approval, as well as a detailed feasibility study, specification and approved budget before being tendered and a contractor being appointed to carry out the work. Work is progressed as quickly as possible but may take up to 36 months to complete.

9. Circumstances where we will not undertake an Adaptation

This section of the policy only relates to adaptations exceeding £1,000. We will not adapt a property in the following circumstances:

- Where a tenant is under occupying by one or more bedrooms
- Where they are overcrowding or are waiting for a transfer to another property.
- Where the adaptation is unreasonable (e.g. structural alterations are necessary to facilitate the adaptation,
- Installing a level access shower above ground floor which cannot be accessed by an existing lift,
- Where the tenant's needs can be met with alternative use of the original property such as using a ground floor second reception room as a bedroom
- Where there is other suitable alternative adapted, or part adapted accommodation available
- Where it is considered likely that a suitable property will become available within 24 months of the request being made.
- Where an adaptation would adversely affect the council's ability to make the best use of the stock and relet the property in the future.



- Where an applicant's circumstances may be such that further adaptations will be required in the future and therefore more suitable accommodation may be more appropriate at this stage.
- Where an adaptation would place others at risk e.g. a communal stairlift with no alternative access for other first floor residents
- Other than in exceptional circumstances, where a person has left a property with suitable adaptations already present and there was no identified housing need to move.
- Where the property is unsuitable for adaptation due to its construction
- Where the Council does not own the property
- Where the property is used for temporary housing including a temporary decant.

10. Financial Restrictions

The Council will carry out a means test for items over £1000 using the same criteria as that utilised for assessment of Disabled Facility Grant applications in the private sector and may request a contribution for major adaptations to a property.

The Council will not replace adaptations in a property where they have been removed by the current tenant. If they are required, it will be at the Council's discretion to reinstall them and the cost may be recharged to the tenant.

Where the Council declines adaptations in favour of a move to suitable alternative accommodation financial assistance may be provided for the move at the Council's discretion and this will be subject to a means test.

11. Long-term diagnosis

The long-term diagnosis of a tenant's condition and the future use and occupation of the property will be key considerations when deciding about the most appropriate solution or scheme.

RBC will work in close partnership with the OTs and Surrey County Council Adult Social Care when developing adaptation proposals.

12. Redevelopment

Where a tenant living in an adapted property is being moved because of redevelopment or refurbishment of their home, essential adaptations will be carried out in the new home being offered. This is most likely to apply to the tenants of previously converted housing, older properties and Independent Retirement Living schemes which require refurbishment.



13. Planned Maintenance

RBC will ensure, subject to funding constraints, that where possible adaptation works are carried out through the Capital Programme. An example of this is a programme to replace baths with level access shower facilities in Independent Retirement Living housing schemes.

During planned works, we will maintain any existing adaptation or fixed equipment if it is still needed for a disabled member of the household if:

- the household member is still living at the property
- it meets the household's needs,

We may remove any semi-portable equipment, such as a stair lift or specialist shower, if it is no longer needed due to a permanent change in the household requirements.

We may remove minor adaptations (like handrails and semi-portable equipment) if a repair is needed and the disabled person no longer needs the adaptation, unless the equipment is evidently needed, or confirmed by an Occupational Therapist, for another disabled household member.

We will retain and maintain fixed adaptations such as structural alterations or concrete ramps.

A request to remove adaptations if the disabled person is no longer within the household will take into consideration the suitability of the property for the current occupants, the extent of the adaptations and the need for such adaptations within the housing stock.

14. Limitations

It is recognised that tenants with disabilities will sometimes require very specific, tailored solutions to meet their needs. Any adaptation work will therefore only be undertaken after careful consideration of various factors such as:

- The current and future needs of the tenant(s) and their household
- The individual tenant's level of disability
- Professional assessment/recommendations of healthcare professionals
- Characteristics of the dwelling, its construction and internal arrangement
- Planning and building regulation requirements and legislation
- Budget provision and long-term property asset implications
- The most cost-effective temporary of achieving the required outcome
- Alternative solutions to address assessed needs



15. Under-Occupancy

RBC will consider the practicalities and cost involved in adapting an under-occupied property against the potential benefits to the tenant(s) or to the Council of moving them to a more suitable smaller home. If a tenant is under-occupying and has requested adaptations, RBC will assess the suitability of their property for their needs. Our primary aim is to ensure tenants are housed in the most appropriate home to meet their needs.

Secondary aims are to ensure budgets are spent effectively and that the long-term benefit derived from the housing stock is preserved for future use.

Where RBC consider that a tenant's needs are best met by moving them to a smaller and more suitable home, our focus will be to understand the wider impact of a potential move on the tenant's well-being and continuity of care. Support will be provided with a move in collaboration with Surrey County Council Adult Social Care, Housing Services staff or the Social Prescribing Service if required.

16. Overcrowding

Where a tenant and their household are deemed to be overcrowded any OT referral for additional space, for example an extra bedroom, will not be deemed as a need for adaptation on the grounds of overcrowding. This will be classed as a housing needs issue and will be referred to Housing Solutions to help the tenant apply for a more suitable property to meet that need.

17. End of tenancy

Major adaptations will not be carried out where there is a possibility of the tenancy ending. If a notice has been served on the tenancy by the Council only in exceptional circumstances will consideration be given to major adaptations. If the tenancy will not, or is not likely to continue, beyond a period of 6 months from the date upon which the application for adaptations is received by RBC the application will not be progressed. This is to ensure that adaptations are not carried out at a property if the tenant that needs the adaptation is going to be moving.

18. Right to Buy

RBC will not carry out adaptations to properties that are subject to a Right-to-Buy application. The applicant will be referred to the Council's Home Improvement Agency who support homeowners with advice and funding for adaptations, which they may be able to access once purchased

19. Suitability of property for adaptation

In some cases, a property may not be suitable for adaptation due to the characteristics of the building. For example, because of its age, location, internal layout, type of



construction, surrounding buildings, or ground conditions. Where an adaptation cannot be carried out for any of these reasons, RBC will consider moving the tenant to a more suitable property that can be adapted to meet their needs.

20. Level access showers above ground floor

New tenants with a mobility disability or who are elderly are not usually housed in flats above ground floor level without a lift, as access may prove difficult for them. For disabled and elderly tenants currently living in flats above the ground floor, RBC will look at the suitability of installing level access showers in these properties before agreeing to carry out an adaptation.

RBC will consider the long-term needs of the tenant in the first instance, as well as their ability to access the property, in case their needs are better met by a move to another property on the ground floor.

21. Pavement crossovers and hard standings

Pavement crossovers and hard standings for car parking are primarily aimed at wheelchair users and tenants with severe disabilities. Where a need is identified requiring extensive work and substantial investment, the Council may seek to identify an alternative property with suitable access and parking. If the Council does agree to the provision of a crossover and hard standing these requests are subject to approval by the local Planning Department and Surrey County Council Highways.

22. Mutual Exchanges and Transfers

Where a tenant requests a mutual exchange or transfer from their adapted property, through their own choice, to one that is not suitably adapted RBC are likely to decline the request unless there is evidence that the adaptations are no longer required. RBC may not carry out further major adaptations to the subsequent property unless there are extenuating circumstances adaptations. Where adaptations have been carried out to a property and a mutual exchange is applied for, it is expected **that the incoming tenant will have an OT recommendation for the installed adaptations**. RBC will take account of the reasons for the move and work with the tenant(s) to consider the option that best meets their long-term needs and requirements of the tenant(s) and/or their family.

23. Stair lifts and through floor lifts in stand-alone properties

Installation of Stairlifts will be subject to the suitability criteria and the Council's policy will be not to install stairlifts in under occupied properties. The Council will not install a through floor lift unless this can be accommodated within the existing property without utilising a bedroom. The Council will seek to identify alternative suitable level access accommodation within a reasonable period of time.



24. Specialist fixed and free-standing equipment

Specialist equipment such as rise and fall baths, bath and shower stretchers that are fixed to the structure of the property are not the responsibility of Runnymede Council and permission for these will be considered after all alternative solutions have been explored. These types of adaptations are subject to the; constraints of the existing construction, layout of the property, budget availability and financial expenditure limits applicable to adaptations.

Specialist free standing equipment will not be installed by RBC as this is an Adult Social Care responsibility.

25. Communal areas and flatted accommodation

There is no statutory duty to grant works to communal areas.

RBC recognises that where works are both essential and reasonably practical, we shall consider essential access requirements. Such proposals may require the consent of other residents and must not compromise other residents' safety and will therefore be risk assessed on a case by case basis.

26. Stair lifts in communal areas of blocks of flats

RBC will not authorise the installation of a stair lift in a communal staircase in a block of flats. This is due to the increased risk of an impeded exit, not only to the disabled person, but other users of the building.

27. Access and Egress

Suitable access will be considered for the main front door and/or existing rear door(s) to a ground floor property, where reasonable and practical. If this is not viable the most economical provision will be explored, which may include other adaptations such as changing windows to doors. This will be at the discretion of RBC in conjunction with the Surrey CC OT service and an offer of alternative accommodation will be considered.

28. Referrals relating to behaviour

It is appreciated that where a child has challenging behaviour as a result of their disability it can cause difficulties and put additional strain on the family environment. In such instances where the provision of additional space is requested the Household will be assisted through the Council's Housing Allocation Policy.



29. Mobility Scooters

RBC will consider the cost and practicality of making provision for tenant's mobility scooters and whether it is appropriate to offer alternative accommodation. The restrictions on adaptations in underoccupied properties will apply to mobility scooter provision where alternative accommodation with provision is available.

If the Council declines to provide facilities for a mobility scooter, tenants will be responsible for altering access paths/gates and supplying hard standings, sheds, electrical supply and any other associated works connected to accommodating their scooter, after receiving permission from RBC. The work should be carried out by competent and where applicable qualified persons and the relevant electrical certification should be provided to the Council.

Mobility scooters must not be positioned in communal areas or stored near dwelling buildings, to ensure prevention of risk of fire.

30. Other options available to tenants

If a tenant wishes to carry out their own work, they will need permission from RBC's Housing Service before any work is carried out.

In these cases, the tenant must:

- Ensure the proposed work is carried out by a fully competent qualified contractor
- Conform to the appropriate regulations and legislation
- Be responsible for putting right any damage relating to the works being carried out
- Contact RBC's Housing Service upon completion of any work so we can inspect the work to ensure it has been carried out to a satisfactory standard
- Provide RBC with any relevant certificates of the work upon completion
- Maintain and repair any equipment or fittings they have installed.
- If a tenant carries out their own work, RBC reserves the right to request that the tenant signs a legal agreement confirming they will be responsible for ensuring the property is put back to its original condition upon termination of the tenancy. The cost of this must be met by the tenant.
- A reasonable charge will be made to cover the cost of RBC staff engaged in monitoring this work.

31. Communication and Consultation

RBC recognises the importance of communicating with our tenants and will:

- Provide clear and comprehensive advice and information to tenants, with an aim for a single point of contact



- Inform tenants and explain why recommended adaptations have been refused under the limitations of this policy
- Where adaptations are refused in favour of a move to alternative accommodation the Housing Solutions Team will provide support through the transfer application process.
- Consult in person with tenants regarding major works and explain the scope of the works and how long it will take to complete.
- Work with healthcare professionals on individual cases to ensure the most timely and cost-effective options are considered
- RBC will actively promote this policy and the adaptations service through a range of media including (but not limited to) leaflets, posters, newsletters and the RBC website.

32. Performance Monitoring

RBC recognise the importance of working in partnership with our tenants and stakeholders to develop and continually improve our services and raise standards.

To demonstrate this RBC is committed to:

- Monitoring completed adaptations through the use of customer satisfaction surveys; to ensure we maintain performance and help inform future service improvements
- Publishing information in relation to RBC performance against the aims and standards set out in this policy
- Training RBC staff to recognise the need for adaptations and to enable them to give guidance to tenants who may require an OT referral
- Complying with the RBC Comments, Complaints and Compliments policy when a tenant wishes to complain or make a comment about any aspect of the adaptations process

33. Equality and Diversity

Through the management of this policy RBC aim to treat all tenants fairly, and with respect and professionalism regardless of their gender, race, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation and/or marital status.

To enable all tenants to have clear information and equal access to our services, RBC will publish this policy through a range of media. Full details of our approach are set out in the RBC Equality and Diversity Policy.

Where there is a barrier to accessing information about the service, extra effort will be made by RBC staff and its representatives to ensure the tenant understands the process. This may involve asking a relative or third party for help (with the consent of the service user) or employing translation or interpretation services if necessary.

RBC staff will be sensitive to people who have lived in properties for a long time, to ensure that any solution (whether an adaptation or a move) supports their long-term needs, well-being and continuity of care. If the Council declines adaptations in favour



of a move to more suitable property support will be available to residents to navigate this process to achieve a positive outcome and to ensure that suitable adaptations are either already available in the selected new home or these are installed to the OT's specification.

34. Review / Appeal Process

If an applicant is not satisfied with any aspect of a decision taken on their application, they have a right to request a review.

The review will be carried out by someone other than the original decision maker [and usually more senior] within a reasonable period of time.

If an applicant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the review, they may make a complaint under RBC's complaint procedure

35. Policy Monitoring and Review

This policy and any associated procedures will be reviewed at least every three years. The review will ensure that a comprehensive service is being offered that meets tenants' requirements. The policy will also be reviewed in accordance with any future legislative changes as and when they occur, or if the policy is deemed to be unfit for purpose and/or no longer reflects tenants' changing needs.

Monitoring of performance and satisfaction with the adaptations service will be used to inform of future policy review in this area. All reviews will consider whether:

- The current policy adheres to legislative and regulatory requirements, and reflects good practice
- The aims and objectives of the policy are being met
- The current policy outcomes meet the needs and requirements of our customer base
- Service users are aware and understand the policy and believe it to be fair and consistent
- The service offers value for money

Overall monitoring and review of this policy will be undertaken in consultation with staff, the Runnymede Council Residents Association, Surrey County Council ASC, Runnymede Community Services team and other relevant partners and stakeholders.



10. RENT SETTING POLICY (HOUSING, ANGELA HORSEY)

Synopsis of report:

This report outlines the draft Rent Setting Policy which is based on Government guidance and regulation. Most rents are set at Social Rent, based on Formula rent setting methodology, but Affordable Rent is also charged in some circumstances. Approval within the Policy is sought to charge Affordable rent for most newly acquired properties, to charge the permissible 5% above Formula in certain circumstances and to charge an increased rent if a property is extended. The Policy also proposes assessing each rent at re-let in order to adjust to Formula rent, or amend the Affordable rent charged as necessary.

Recommendation:

That Members approve the new Rent Setting Policy (Appendix H).

1. Context of report

- 1.1 The new Rent Setting Policy outlines how rent is set and increased and how the Council complies with statutory and regulatory requirements on setting Social and Affordable Rents.
- 1.2 The annual rent increases are presented to Members in January each year for approval as part of budget setting.

2. Report

- 2.1 The purpose of the new Rent Setting Policy is to outline the Council's approach to setting the rent for Social Rent and Affordable Rent homes, including temporary accommodation, and rent for shared ownership (DIYSO) properties.
- 2.2 Rent setting is based on the Government's Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing (2019) and the subsequent Rent Standard (2020), as required by the Regulator of Social Housing. 2834 properties are set at Social Rent, also known as Formula rent, which is calculated using the relative value of the property, relative local income levels and the size of the property so that similar rents are charged for similar Social Rent properties.
- 2.3 In 2011 the Government introduced Affordable Rent which permits rents (inclusive of service charges) to be set at up to 80% of market rent. The aim of these higher rents was to generate income to support development of additional social homes. Properties can only be let at Affordable Rent when certain conditions apply and is currently charged on only 18 properties which have been built or acquired in recent years. In addition the charge to occupants of the rooms in the 2 shared houses are based on Affordable Rents.
- 2.4 The methodology for setting Social and Affordable rents is detailed in the policy appendix.
- 2.5 From April 2020 the Government has permitted annual rent increases on both

Social Rent and Affordable Rent properties of up to Consumer Price Index (CPI) plus 1 percentage point for a period of at least five years. The rent increases are presented to Members of this Committee for approval in January each year as part of the annual budget setting. Rents must ensure a financially viable Housing Revenue Account (HRA) which can meet future spending obligations including treasury management requirements and capital investment needs within the stock. The Policy sets out that Social and Affordable rents will increase by a maximum CPI + 1% in line with the Government's five year rent settlement for 2020/21 - 2024/25.

- 2.6 It is permissible to set rents at up to 5% above Formula Rent, and 10% for sheltered housing, where there is a clear rationale for doing so and which takes into account local circumstances and affordability. Rents were set at 5% above Formula for the Beomonds Independent Retirement Living (IRL) scheme to reflect the modernisation and refurbishment work undertaken in 2016.
- 2.7 Approximately 20 HRA general needs properties are used at any one time as temporary accommodation. This figure varies according to current supply and demand and helps keep use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation to a minimum. These properties benefit from a slightly higher specification when void works are undertaken. For example they are decorated and floor covering is provided so that tenants can move straight in. The management and maintenance costs are, on average, slightly higher than for general needs stock. The nature of their use as temporary accommodation also means these properties become void again more quickly than average occupancy. The Policy therefore includes charging rent for general needs properties – while occupied as temporary accommodation – at 5% above Formula Rent. This would take effect from the next let. A significant proportion of households requiring temporary accommodation qualify for support with their rent and these rents will remain well within Local Housing Allowance.
- 2.8 It is best practice to consult with tenants before adopting the 5% flexibility permitted, however as this policy will effect such a small number of households who are not currently tenants, it is proposed to include this in the tenants' annual report as part of information on rent setting. A further review of rents and service charges for temporary accommodation will be carried out as part of the emerging Temporary Accommodation Strategy.
- 2.9 The Policy includes a provision that if an existing Social Rent property is extended, the rent will be revised to reflect the increased property valuation and size using the Government's Formula rent calculation. Any increase in rent will be chargeable as soon as reasonable and practical following completion of the work.
- 2.10 Rents will be checked at each re-let to ensure property records are accurate and rent set correctly. Where rents are set at below Formula, the rent will be increased on re-let to the Formula rent.
- 2.11 The combined rent and service charges of Affordable rents will not exceed 80% of market rents or Local Housing Allowance (LHA). The market rent is assessed according to the individual characteristics of the property and the rent that the accommodation might reasonably be expected to achieve in the private rented sector. At the end of each tenancy Affordable rents will be re-

based to ensure they are no higher than 80% (including service charges) of market rents or LHA for that location. Independent Valuation services will be procured from time-to time to ensure that rents do not exceed 80% of current market rents.

- 2.12 Members of this Committee meeting in November 2016 gave approval for Affordable Rents to be charged for the new build HRA properties in Englefield Green and, subject to Committee approval, for future new build properties to have Affordable Rents. Proposals to charge Affordable rent at new developments will be presented to this Committee for approval, however Members are invited to approve in this Policy that new property acquisitions (for example the purchase of street properties) will result in Affordable rents to reflect the capital costs of purchase and preparing the property to the Council's relet standard. Exceptions to this approach could include charging an Affordable rent if all the other flats in a block were set at Social rent.
- 2.13 The Policy notes that The Regulator of Social Housing requires local authorities to comply with the Rent Standard and compliance is monitored by way of regulatory returns including the annual Local Authority Data Return and Local Authority Housing Statistics. In line with funding agreements made with it, the Council is also required to notify MHCLG annually of the properties for which Affordable Rent is charged.
- 2.14 It is proposed that this Policy will be adopted as soon as possible, subject to configuration of the Northgate system to record individual Formula rents. The Rent Standard and policy statement are widely recognised as having several nuances and potential pitfalls of non-compliance. It is therefore proposed that an internal audit of rent setting is prioritised in order to give Officers and Members reassurance that the Policy and practices are compliant. The results of this audit will be reported to this Committee.

3. Policy framework implications

- 3.1 Members are invited to approve this new Policy which largely documents existing arrangements but also clarifies the circumstances in which Affordable Rent is charged and in which Social Rent is to be increased.

4. Resource implications

- 4.1 As detailed in the report there may be the occasional need to carry out market valuations on some of those properties where an Affordable rent is, or is to be charged. Additionally, it is proposed that an audit of the new policy and outcomes is carried out with the results being reported back to this Committee. It anticipated that any costs incurred can be met from the current consultancy provision with the HRA Housing management budget.
- 4.2 A rent review each time a property becomes void, with a resultant increase to formula rent on all new lets where not currently charged, has the potential to increase the rent debit by around £20,000 per annum, and this would allow for any reductions where rents are currently charged at higher than formula rent levels.

5. **Legal implications**

- 5.1 Clause 4.6 of the Tenancy Agreement reserves the right to change the rent, service charges and other charges by giving the tenant four weeks' notice in writing. By clause 13.1, notice can be given by (a) delivery by hand to the property (b) giving it personally to the tenant or (c) posting it to the property or the last known address we have for the tenant.
- 5.2 The legislative and other legal issues are dealt with in the body of the Policy itself

6. **Equality implications**

An Equality Impact Assessment screening of this Policy is underway. Any necessary mitigation will be actioned and the findings will be noted in the Policy as approved. Any significant findings will be reported to this Committee.

7. **Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications**

- 7.1 None.

8. **Conclusions**

- 8.1 The purpose of the new Rent Setting Policy is to clarify the Council's approach to setting rents and Members are recommended to approve its adoption.

(To resolve)

Background papers

None

DRAFT RENT SETTING POLICY

Version Control

Version	Date	Author	Details
0.1	06.05.21	Angela Horsey	Draft for comments/input
0.2	21.05.21	Angela Horsey	Final draft for approval

1. Scope

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to outline Runnymede Borough Council's approach to setting the rent charged for its Social Rent and Affordable Rent homes, including temporary accommodation and rent for shared ownership (DIYSO) properties.
- 1.2 This policy does not cover service charges as these are not governed by the same factors and regulation as rent, although the Council is committed to keeping service charges affordable.

2. Policy Objectives

- 2.1 This policy aims to provide clarity on how rent is set and increased and how the Council complies with statutory and regulatory requirements on setting Social and Affordable Rents.

3. Context

- 3.1 Rent setting is based on the Government's Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing (2019) and the subsequent Rent Standard (2020). The Regulator of Social Housing expects Registered Providers (RPs) to comply when setting and increasing rent for their social housing stock.
- 3.2 The majority of Runnymede's social housing properties are set at Social Rent. Since 2001 rents have been set using the government's Formula rent methodology for each property. This is calculated using the relative value of the property, relative local income levels and the size of the property so that similar and regionally adjusted rents are charged for similar Social Rent properties. Formula rents are exclusive of any service charges.
- 3.3 While annual rent increases are limited to those prescribed by the guidance (see section 4 below), RPs may increase rents to formula rents on a change of tenancy.
- 3.4 In 2011, the Government introduced Affordable Rent which permits rents (inclusive of service charges) to be set at up to 80% of market rent. The aim of these higher rents was to generate income to support development of additional social homes. Properties can only be let at Affordable Rent when certain conditions apply and Runnymede Council currently has only a small number of properties where Affordable Rent is charged.
- 3.5 From April 2020 the Government has permitted annual rent increases on both Social Rent and Affordable Rent properties of up to Consumer Price

Index (CPI) plus 1 percentage point from 2020, for a period of at least five years.

4. Policy Details

- 4.1 The Council will set rents using fair and transparent calculations.
- 4.2 Rents will be set to ensure a financially viable Housing Revenue Account which can meet future spending obligations including treasury management requirements and capital investment needs within the stock.
- 4.3 The Council follows government guidance when setting the rents for its properties, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rents-guidance>. Since 2001 rents for the majority of Runnymede's properties have been let at Social Rent, based on a formula set by government. The method for calculating the Formula rent under the Government's Rent Standard is set out in the Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing [here](#).
- 4.4 The basic weekly formula rent is equal to:
 - 70% of the national average rent
 - Multiplied by relative county earnings
 - Multiplied by the bedroom weight

 - Plus
 - 30% of the national average rent Multiplied by relative property value.

 - Formula rents are exclusive of any service charges.
- 4.5 Social and Affordable rents can increase annually, subject to Member approval, by a maximum CPI + 1% in line with the Government's five year rent settlement for 2020/21 - 2024/25.
- 4.6 Government allows some flexibility to set rents at up to 5% above Formula rent and up to 10% for sheltered housing if there is a clear rationale for doing so which takes into account local circumstances and affordability. Rent for Housing Revenue Account (HRA) properties used as temporary accommodation (TA) will be set at 5% above Formula on re-let. Rents are set at 5% above Formula for the Beomonds Independent Retirement Living (IRL) scheme to reflect the modernisation and refurbishment work undertaken in 2016.

- 4.7 Rent caps apply as a maximum ceiling on the Formula rent, based on the number of bedrooms. If the Social Rent would be higher than the rent cap for a particular size of property, the rent cap will be used instead.
- 4.8 The combined rent and service charges of Affordable rents will not exceed 80% of market rents or Local Housing Allowance (LHA).
- 4.9 In line with its Tenancy Agreement, the Council will give tenants four weeks written notice of any change in the level of rent which will normally be payable from the first Monday in April.
- 4.10 If an existing property is extended to provide an additional bedroom then the rent will be revised to reflect the increased property valuation and size, using the Government's Formula rent calculation. Any increase in rent will be chargeable as soon as reasonable and practical following completion of the work.
- 4.11 Rents will be checked at each re-let to ensure property records are accurate and rent set correctly. Where rents are set at below Formula, the rent will be increased on re-let to the Formula rent.

5. Temporary Accommodation (Housing Revenue Account stock)

- 5.1 Some non secure tenancies of properties let as temporary accommodation may include service charges to reflect the additional management and maintenance costs incurred. This may result in a higher charge compared with a similar property let on a secure or fixed term tenancy.
- 5.2 The weekly charge for rooms in the two shared houses are based on Affordable Rent calculations. This is due to the works undertaken in creating additional units of accommodation, including an enhanced specification to meet Houses in Multiple Occupation responsibilities and provision of two toilets, kitchen appliances and bedroom furniture.
- 5.3 The rent for the 17 mobile homes used as temporary accommodation is set separately, in line with the appropriate legislation, and approval for rent increases is sought from Housing Committee along with other rents each January.

6. Do It Yourself Shared Ownership (DIYSO) Rents

- 6.1 The Rent Standard does not apply to shared ownership rents which are governed by the terms of the individual lease agreements, with the rent element set as a percentage of the unsold equity.

6.2 Rents can increase annually, subject to Member approval, by a maximum CPI + 1%.

7. Affordable Rents

- 7.1 Affordable Rents are higher than Social Rents. Properties let on Affordable Rent generate additional capacity for investment in new affordable housing. Affordable Rent may be charged in line with the agreement the Council entered into in 2011, in order to fund new housing supply without any other financial support from central government. The proposals must be detailed to MHCLG and the addresses of the properties notified to MHCLG annually.
- 7.2 Affordable Rent may also be charged in line with the agreement the Council entered into in 2012 under which homes built as part of the retained Right to Buy receipts "1-4-1" replacement programme may be let at Affordable Rent where a signed statement is provided by the Council. Only additional dwellings may count as part of the programme. The addresses of the properties must be notified to MHCLG annually.
- 7.3 In November 2016 Housing Committee gave approval for the implementation of Affordable Rents on its new build HRA properties in Englefield Green and, subject to Committee approval, for future new build properties.
- 7.4 The rent for additional HRA properties acquired to add to the Housing stock will usually be set at Affordable rent.
- 7.5 The Affordable Rent, inclusive of service charges, will not exceed 80% of market rent and will be no higher than LHA for that location. The market rent is assessed according to the individual characteristics of the property and the rent that the accommodation might reasonably be expected to achieve in the private rented sector based on property size, location, type and service provision.
- 7.6 At the end of each tenancy, including the end of Fixed Term tenancies, Affordable rents will be re-based to ensure they are no higher than 80% (including service charges) of market rents or LHA for that location.
- 7.7 Rents can be set and reviewed based on analysis of the comparable market but independent Valuation services will be procured from time-to-time to ensure that the Council does not charge rents above 80% of current market rents.

8. Monitoring and continuous improvement

- 8.1 The RSH expects all Registered Providers, including local authorities to have robust systems of internal control in place to ensure compliance with rent requirements, underpinned by high quality data which providers can use to assure themselves, their tenants, and the Regulator that rents are being charged appropriately. The Council's systems will be reviewed and the risk of error or omission assessed regularly. This policy will be reviewed in 3 years to ensure it continues to meet the stated objectives unless legislation, regulation or business needs require an earlier review.

9. Legislation and regulation

- 9.1 RPs must set rents from 1 April 2020 in accordance with the Government's Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing 2018

[Policy statement on rents for social housing \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/414222/policy-statement-rents-social-housing-2018.pdf) (2019) and the subsequent Rent Standard (2020) [Rent Standard - April 2020 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/rent-standard)

- 9.2 The Regulator of Social Housing requires local authorities to comply with the Rent Standard and compliance is monitored by way of regulatory returns including the annual Local Authority Data Return and Local Authority Housing Statistics.

10. Equalities

The findings of the Equality Impact Assessment for this policy are *to follow*

11. Related Strategies and documents

Tenancy Strategy (2018)

Version No	
Approved By	
Approval Date	
Effective from	
Date of next review	
Policy owner	
Policy author	

Consultation	
EIA	
DPIA	

Appendix: Rent Setting Methodology

Social Rent

Rent on properties to be let at Social rent may be set at a level that is no higher than Formula rent, (subject to the rent flexibility level of up to 5 or 10%).

The national average rent that must be used, for April 2000, is £54.62.

The national average property value to be used, for January 1999, is £49,750.

Surrey County earnings data to be used is £333.20.

The prescribed Bedroom Weighting is:

Number of bedrooms	Bedroom Weight
Bedsit	0.8
1	0.9
2	1.0
3	1.1
4	1.2
5	1.3
6+	1.4

Once a formula rent for 2000-01 has been calculated, it must be adjusted for each year using the following two-step process:

Step 1: Uprate to 2019-20

The following is used to adjust the 2000-01 formula rent to 2019-20 levels:

Year	RPI Inflation	Additional	Total
2001-02	3.3%	1.0%	4.3%
2002-03	1.7%	0.5%	2.2%
2003-04	1.7%	0.5%	2.2%
2004-05	2.8%	0.5%	3.3%
2005-06	3.1%	0.5%	3.6%
2006-07	2.7%	0.5%	3.2%
2007-08	3.6%	0.5%	4.1%
2008-09	3.9%	0.5%	4.4%
2009-10	5.0%	0.5%	5.5%
2010-11	-1.4%	0.5%	-0.9%
2011-12	4.6%	0.5%	5.1%
2012-13	5.6%	0.5%	6.1%
2013-14	2.6%	0.5%	3.1%
2014-15	3.2%	0.5%	3.7%
2015-16	1.2%	1%	2.2%
2016-17	N/A	N/A	-1.0%
2017-18	N/A	N/A	-1.0%
2018-19	N/A	N/A	-1.0%
2019-20	N/A	N/A	-1.0%

Different figures apply from 2016-17 to 2019 -20.

- a) The following figures will apply for the period from 2016-17 to 2019-20 in the case of **supported housing**² (except domestic violence refuge accommodation, as this is covered in (b) below):

Year	Inflation	Additional	Total
2016-17	-0.1%	1.0%	0.9%
2017-18	N/A	N/A	-1.0%
2018-19	N/A	N/A	-1.0%
2019-20	N/A	N/A	-1.0%

Step 2: Adjust from 2020-21 onwards

For 2020-21 onwards the rent must be adjusted annually by CPI (at September of the previous year) +1 percentage point.

Formual Rent Caps for 2019-20:

Number of Bedrooms	Rent Cap
1 and Bedsits	£144.26
2	£152.73
3	£161.22
4	£169.70
5	£178.18
6 +	£186.66

Rent Caps increase by CPI (at September of the previous year) + 1.5 percentage points, each year.

Worked example

2 bed flat with a capital value of £66,430 in January 1999.

Average rent at April 2000		£54.62
Average earnings in Surrey		£333.20
National average earnings		£316.40
Bedroom weight		1.0
National average property value in January 1999		£49,750
70% of the average rent	70% x £54.62	£38.23
Multiplied by relative county earnings	$\frac{£333.20}{£316.40}=1.053$ 1.053 x 38.23	£40.26
Multiplied by bedroom weight	X 1.0	£40.26 subtotal
30% of the average rent	30% x £54.62	£16.39
Multiplied by relative property value	$\frac{66,430}{49,750}=1.335$ 1.335 x 16.39	£21.88 subtotal
Add together the sub totals		£62.14

Uprated to £102.12 for 2020/21 and £103.65 for 2021/22

These rents are not higher than the corresponding rent caps so these are the rents to be charged.

Affordable Rent for new Build and acquired properties

Affordable rents will be set at 80% of the relevant market rent, inclusive of any applicable service charges, subject to the maximum Local

Housing Allowance (LHA) for the property type. Where the LHA is lower than 80% of the market rent calculated the LHA rate will be charged.

Market rent will be established based on analysis of the comparable market. Independent Valuation services will be procured as needed and from time-to-time.

Affordable rents will be reviewed annually and amended in line with CPI plus 1 percentage point. CPI will be taken as at September of the previous year and subject to the maximum LHA for the property type.

In addition, Affordable rents must be re-set when a property is let to a new tenant or re-let to an existing tenant at the end of a Fixed Term Tenancy to ensure the new rent is no more than 80% of the relevant market value or LHA.

Worked Example

Newly converted 2 bed flat KT15 2DP

1. Calculated Formula rent = £102.12.
2. Comparable property currently advertised (or as advised by independent valuation) for market weekly rent of £271.15

The affordable rent calculated at 80% of the market value is
 $£271.15 \times 80\% = \text{£}216.92$ per week

Finally, the affordable rent calculated needs to be considered against the current LHA rates:

March 2021	Walton BRMA	East Thames Valley BRMA
2 bedrooms	£253.15	£230.14

Affordable rent is no higher than 80% of market rent so the rent for this 2 bed flat at KT15 2DP is **£216.92 pw.**

11. OLDER PEOPLE STRATEGY CONSULTATION (HOUSING, ANDY VINCENT)

Synopsis of report:

The Housing Service has committed to producing an Older People Housing Strategy for the Housing Committee in September 2021.

A project team has been established with membership drawn from across Runnymede Borough Council, including representation from Community Services and Development, with invites being extended to Surrey County Council's Adult Care Services Team to compile a draft vision for the future of the service.

The following themes are emerging for the strategy: -

1. First class accommodation for older people with modern facilities, that is highly sought after
2. High quality onsite support promoting independence, tackling isolation and maximising resident's health and wellbeing
3. A clear pathway into older peoples accommodation with assistance where required
4. A partnership with Surrey County Council's Adult Care Services to ensure residents receive the 'right' care services where they are required

Extensive consultation is planned with stakeholders on the content of the vision for the service.

Arrangements for consultation include: -

- Consultation events for Independent Retirement Living residents
- Briefings for Councillors and Runnymede Residents Association members
- Newsletter articles
- Letters and emails to agencies, tenants and applicants

Including questionnaires and online surveys to enable feedback to be collected

The consultation is intended to take place in July/August 2021 to assist with the preparation of the strategy for the September 2021 Housing Committee.

Recommendations:

- i. Members are asked to approve the request for the service to consult with its tenants and leaseholders on the draft vision for the older peoples housing service.
- ii. Members anticipate receiving the results of the consultation alongside a final strategy in September 2021.

1. Context of report

- 1.1 Older People are a key constituency to whom the Housing Service provide services.
- 1.2 Many older people have been tenants of Runnymede Borough Council for a considerable length of time.

Property Type	TENANTS OVER 65		TENANTS 65 & UNDER	
	Number of Tenants	Average Length of Tenancy	Number of Tenants	Average Length of Tenancy
GN	693	30	1,816	11
IRL	169	8	31	3
Both GN & IRL	862	25	1,847	11

- 1.3 Housing services specifically for older people are largely provided in the form of Independent Retirement Living accommodation and support.
- 1.4 Support for older people is also provided to assist households where appropriate to downsize into Independent Retirement Living accommodation.

2. Emerging Aims of the Draft Older People Strategy

- 2.1 The following themes are emerging for the Housing Older People Strategy: -
 1. First class accommodation for older people with modern facilities, that is highly sought after
 2. High quality onsite support promoting independence, tackling isolation and maximising resident's health and wellbeing
 3. A clear pathway into accommodation for older people with assistance where required
 4. A partnership with Surrey County Council's Adult Care Services to ensure residents receive the 'right' care services where they are required

3. Consultation

- 3.1 In July and August 2021 Independent Retirement Living scheme managers alongside members of the Older People Project Team will undertake consultation with the following stakeholders:

Consultees	Consultation Mechanisms
Members	Cllr newsletter and workshop
RCRA	In person 1-2-1
IRL residents + NOK/carers	1 workshop with each scheme
Applicants	Email and direct to website/survey monkey questions
Agencies/stakeholders	Letter and refer to website + a different survey
RBC tenants	Tenant's newsletter, email, rent statement free text
Potential downsizers	Specific letter + personal visit

- 3.2 Work is underway on the above documentation/posters/questionnaires/newsletter articles/briefing packs etc.
- 3.3 Invites/letters/emails will be sent out to stakeholders if approval is given to undertake tenant consultation following the meeting of the June Housing Committee.
- 3.4 The results of the consultation exercise will be published in the autumn edition of the Housing newsletter with information highlighting the key approved actions from the strategy.

4. Policy Framework Implications

- 4.1 Housing Business Centre Plan 2021/22 (see below)

H8	Development of an Older Peoples Strategy looking at the Council's Housing Assets and Support Services	Corporate Head of Housing Head of Housing Head of Housing Technical Services Housing Services Manager Community Services		Completion by November 2021	Yes
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Resource implications

- 5.1 There are significant cost implications associated with the delivery of the Older People Strategy.
- 5.2 The Housing Asset Management Plan 2021-2026 identifies the following to support the strategy

"In 2021/22 we will develop an Older People Strategy to look at the future of our Independent Retirement Living stock to: -

1. *Ensure it delivers a first class environment and excellent facilities*
2. *That it meets the needs of residents and is in high demand*

To support this strategy £350,000 has been identified within the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan over the next 5 years to support the enhancement of facilities within Independent Retirement Living and the

upgrading of alarm call systems (including digital switch over where necessary).”

- 5.3 The long term forecast includes provisions of £350k to refurbish the schemes and £50k to modernise the alarm call equipment. There is no provision in the current budget and therefore once the scope of the works has been completed and quotes have been received officers will seek approval from the Committee for a Supplementary estimate or these costs may be incorporated into the Probable budget when the Committee considers the estimates in January 2022, alternatively if the works are to be undertaken later they may be built into the 2022/23 budgets, which will also be considered by the January 2022 Committee.

6. Legal implications

- 6.1 Additional requirements are placed on social landlords who deliver support services to older people. These include those set out in the Part 1 of Care Act 2014, which places an emphasis on local authorities seeking to prevent the need for the provision of care and support to ‘vulnerable’ people. Also, the Supporting People regime, which originated in the Local Government Act 2000 and was introduced in 2003, which launched many of the current practices around the provision of support to ‘vulnerable’ people.

- 6.2 Where what is proposed amounts to a significant change in the housing management service, section 105 of the Housing Act 1985 requires landlords to undertake consultation with its secure and demoted tenants. There are no leaseholders in Independent Retirement Living accommodation, but consultation will be extended to leaseholders [and those with other forms of tenancy].

7. Equality implications

- 7.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment will be undertaken as part of the report to the Housing Committee to seek approval for the final version of the Housing Older People Strategy.
- 7.2 The Equalities Impact Assessment will also look at any equality’s implications arising from the tenant consultation exercise.

8. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications

- 8.1 The impact of the Older People Strategy will be to improve the physical environment in and around Runnymede Borough Council’s Independent Retirement Living accommodation
- 8.2 To update the alarm call equipment to ensure that it can make digital calls
- 8.3 To modernise the support service and to ensure where appropriate support is in place to enable tenants/residents to downsize into Independent Retirement Living accommodation and in doing so help to create neighbourhoods that are sustainable and best use of the housing stock in line with our Tenancy Strategy.
- 8.4 Plans to improve the energy performance of the accommodation are contained within the Housing Asset Management Plan

9. **Other implications (where applicable)**

9.1 Consultation Strategy

This consultation exercise follows the Council's Consultation Strategy principles.

- A. Consultations should have a clear purpose and start at an appropriate stage
- B. Consultations should take account of the groups being consulted
- C. Consultations should be clear and concise
- D. Consultations should last for a proportionate amount of time
- E. Responses to consultations should be published in a timely fashion and facilitate scrutiny

10. **Conclusions**

- 10.1 Significant investment has been identified to upgrade Runnymede Borough Council's Independent Retirement Living. It is important that the plans for this expenditure are supported by current and prospective tenants and where possible reflect best practice within the industry.
- 10.2 Undertaking a comprehensive consultation programme with existing residents of Independent Retirement Living, Runnymede Borough Council's tenants, housing applicants, stakeholders and Local Councillors will ensure that future plans for the accommodation and service are supported by the community.

(To resolve)

Background papers

None

12. REPAIRS POLICY CONSULTATION (HOUSING, SIMON ALLEN)

Synopsis of report:

Runnymede Borough Council's Housing Service is due to enter a new Repairs, Maintenance and Voids contract with an external supplier in the spring of 2022.

In preparation for entering this new contract the service is undertaking a review of its Repairs Policy.

The reactive repairs service often features as the housing service that most influences customer satisfaction. Therefore, getting this service 'right' is essential.

The service intends to use a range of approaches to gather tenant and leaseholders' views on the enclosed policy. These include: -

- **Consultation events at key locations across the borough over the summer**
- **An article in the July edition of the Housing newsletter**
- **An email to housing tenants/leaseholders**
- **A formal letter to leaseholders (see legal implications)**
- **Information on the Council's website**
- **Social media messaging**

Recommendation(s):

- i. **Members are asked to approve the request for the service to consult with its tenants and leaseholders on the draft Repairs Policy.**
- ii. **Members anticipate receiving the results of the consultation alongside a final policy in September 2021.**

1. Context of report

- 1.1 The reactive repairs and voids service are delivered to Runnymede Borough Council's tenants and leaseholders by two contractors Mills and Laker.
- 1.2 The existing contract to deliver the service is due for a further two-year extension in December 2021. The existing contract was placed via a Dynamic Purchasing System and awarded on a three + two years basis.
- 1.3 The service undertook 29,650 responsive repairs in 2020/21 – visiting 2804 individual occasions to the 2850 owned by Runnymede Borough Council's Housing Service, and accounting for an average number of repairs per household of circa 10.5 repairs.
- 1.4 Currently satisfaction with the repairs service is 93.7% – based on the return of 63 slips per month or 756 annually.

2. Repairs Policy

- 2.1 Enclosed with this report is the draft Repairs Policy. This document has been reviewed by Housing Services staff.
- 2.2 It is proposed to consult tenants and leaseholders over the summer (July and August 2021) on the content of the policy.
- 2.3 It is proposed that the consultation exercise will include: -
- Consultation events at key locations across the borough over the summer
 - An article in the July edition of the Housing newsletter
 - An email to housing tenants/leaseholders
 - A formal letter to leaseholders (see legal implications)
 - Information on the Council's website and
 - Social media messaging
- 2.4 Conversations will be conducted with Runnymede Council's Residents Association regarding the detail of the consultation exercise and whether additional more targeted communication is required to ensure views are representative of all parts of the community the council serve.
- 2.5 The consultation exercise will specifically seek tenants' views on: -
- Repairs appointment times – including evening and weekend appointment
 - The process of repairs ordering and finding suitable appointments slots at the first point of contact
 - How the Council deals with dead and decaying trees
 - The response to fallen fence panels
 - The impact a mutual exchange has on the repairs service
 - What work the Council should and should not be recharging for
- 2.6 Tenants' views on the Empty Homes Standard will be sought via a separate consultation exercise.
- 2.7 The results of the consultation exercise will be fed back to tenants and leaseholders in the September edition of the housing newsletter.

3. Policy Framework Implications

- 3.1 The Repairs Policy is a key policy of Runnymede Borough Council's Housing Service. The repairs service has the most contact with customers and is the service area that most visibly impacts on customer satisfaction with the landlord service amongst tenants and leaseholders.
- 3.2 The refresh of the housing policy suite forms a part of the Housing Business Centre Plan 2021/22 (see below)

H7	Introduce a Quality Management System to maintenance and roll out across the Department (ISO 9001) Supported by a strategy, policy and procedure framework
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4. Resource implications (where applicable)

- 4.1 The annual cost of the repairs service to Runnymede Borough Council's Housing Service is £1.3m in 2021/22.
- 4.2 This service has significant cost implications. The annual rent roll within the Housing Revenue Account in 2021/22 is anticipated to be £16.5.
- 4.3 Proposed changes to the service with cost implications will need to be considered against anticipated income generation trends and service delivery priorities.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 The underpinning legislation for tenancies is in the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 ('the 1985 Act'). By section 11 a landlord must repair the structure and exterior of a property, including pipes and drains; installations for the supply of gas, water, electricity and sanitation, including sinks, baths and WCs; space and water heating installations. Broadly, tenants are responsible for internal repairs and damage caused by their use.
- 5.2 Repairing duties, in the case of leasehold flats, will be detailed in the lease, and the landlord will be required to maintain the structure of the building, and the common parts and facilities.
- 5.3 The Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018, amending the 1985, Act, implies a term of 'fitness for human habitation' into residential tenancies, s.9A, which extends to the common parts, s.9A(6). If the condition of the property concerning a listed matter, including 'repair' and 'freedom from damp' is so far defective that it is not reasonably suitable for occupation, then it will be unfit for human habitation, s.10. The introduction of this obligation is likely to increase the circumstances in which a landlord will be required to do works.
- 5.4 Under the Housing Act 1980: Section 41A Secure Tenancies (Right to Repair Repair) Scheme 1985), a local housing authority must have a right to repair scheme in place for secure, flexible and introductory tenants. The Day-to-Day Repairs Policy fulfils that requirement for 'qualifying repairs'.
- 5.5 Other legal matters are detailed within the policy itself, including under section 8 '*Legislation and Regulation*'.
- 5.6 This is a housing management matter, by provision of services, that represents a change in practice or policy that engages the duty to consult secure tenants under section 105 of the Housing Act 1985. The authority will undertake the necessary consultation with leaseholders, in compliance with s.20 of the 1985 Act, to ensure, where applicable, the costs of qualifying works are recoverable.

6. **Equality implications**

- 6.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment will be undertaken as part of the report to the Housing Committee to seek approval for the final version of the Repairs Policy.
- 6.2 The Equalities Impact Assessment will also look at any equality's implications arising from the tenant and leaseholder consultation exercise.

7. **Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications**

- 7.1 Minimising the environmental impact from the delivery of the repairs service will be explored within the new contractual documentation.
- 7.2 Measures such as, utilising electric vehicles, sourcing materials locally etc will need to be explored.

8. **Other implications (where applicable)**

8.1 Consultation Strategy

This consultation exercise follows the Council's Consultation Strategy principles.

- A. Consultations should have a clear purpose and start at an appropriate stage
- B. Consultations should take account of the groups being consulted
- C. Consultations should be clear and concise
- D. Consultations should last for a proportionate amount of time
- E. Responses to consultations should be published in a timely fashion and facilitate scrutiny

9. **Conclusions**

- 9.1 Runnymede Borough Council is undertaking a review of its Repairs Policy in preparation for the tendering of a new repairs, maintenance and voids contract later in the year.
- 9.2 The repairs service forms a key service delivered to tenants and leaseholders by the Local Authority.
- 9.3 It is proposed to undertake extensive consultation with tenants and leaseholders on the content of the policy prior to its implementation.

(To resolve)

Background papers
Draft Repairs Policy

RUNNYMEDE BOROUGH COUNCIL

HOUSING BUSINESS CENTRE

Responsive Repairs Policy

Approved: 2021

Review due: 2024

1. Scope

1.1 Runnymede Borough Council Day-to-Day Repairs Service

The purpose of this document is to set out Runnymede Borough Council's policy when undertaking day-to-day responsive repairs to our tenant's homes.

The policy also details the responsive repairs service Runnymede Borough Council's leaseholders can expect to receive.

2. Context

This policy supports the Housing Landlord Service objectives of: -

1. Optimising Income and Efficiencies
2. Good Quality Housing

2.1 Data Protection

Runnymede Borough Council is committed to ensuring the privacy of individuals is respected and that all personal data that is processed by the organisation is dealt with in accordance with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the Data Protection Act 2018 and other related legislation.

The GDPR lays down rules relating to the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing and sharing of personal data; it protects the fundamental rights and freedoms of natural persons and in particular their right to the protection of personal data.

The Council will therefore aim to ensure that all employees, elected members, contractors, agents, consultants, or partners of the Council who have access to any personal data held by or on behalf of the Council, are fully aware of and abide by their duties and responsibilities under the law. Specifically, in respect of:

- their responsibilities under data protection law for the protection of personal data
- the necessity of appropriate data sharing
- the benefits for good records management
- the technical and administrative controls operating in the Council

(This is an extract from RBC's Corporate Data Protect Policy)

3. Policy Objectives

The objectives of our Repairs Policy are:

3.1 Our Goals

- To maximise customer satisfaction with the repairs service – by being clear what repair work Runnymede Borough Council is responsible for and what repair work we expect our tenants/leaseholders to be able to undertake.
- To undertake repair work to the highest possible standard – getting as much work as possible completed ‘right first time’.
- Ensure value for money for Runnymede Borough Council and our tenants/leaseholders, by: -
 - promoting self service via Housing Online
 - checking on the quality of work undertaken
 - monitoring customer satisfaction
 - recharging for damage caused by neglect or misuse.
- To encourage our contractors to report any concerns regarding the tenant/leaseholder and their household they identify while undertaking repair work

3.2 Monitoring and inspection

Runnymede Borough Council will monitor the quality of the repairs service being delivered by undertaking: -

- Post inspection
- Customer satisfaction monitoring

4. Policy Details

4.1 Repairs Responsibilities

4.1.1 Runnymede Borough Council’s repairing obligations

For our tenanted properties we are responsible for keeping in good repair the structure, fixtures and service installation at the premises, examples include:

Systems providing heating, gas, electricity and water in your home including:

- heating systems, water heaters fitted by the Council
- electrical circuits, sockets and switches
- internal pipes, baths, sinks, basins, toilets, taps and deck mixer showers (installed by us)
- other appliances we put in and own (such as communal

television aerials and door entry systems)

- annual servicing of Council gas appliances

Exterior of your home:

- external paint work
- chimneys, chimney stacks and flues but not including sweeping
- drains, gutters and outside pipes
- roofs, external walls and floors
- windows

- paths and steps
- fences, walls and gates erected and owned by the Council

- door fittings – locks, handles, hinges and letter boxes
- windows and window frames
- kitchen units and bathrooms

Interior of your home:

The Council is responsible for the following interior repairs due only to natural wear and tear. We are not responsible when damage has been caused through misuse.

- walls
- floors and ceilings
- plaster work
- doors and door frames

Communal area and facilities:

- lifts and entry phone systems
- fire detection and emergency lighting system
- shared entrances, halls, stairs and passages
- painting the inside and outside of shared areas
- parking areas and any other shared areas

In properties we managed owned by a leaseholder we are responsible for keeping in good repair the structure of the property (this does not include doors and windows) and the communal area and facilities.

4.1.2 Our tenants repairing obligations

As a tenant you are responsible for maintaining certain parts of your property.

Examples of tenant's responsibilities include:

Interior of your home

- chimney sweeping
- curtain rails
- damage caused by you, anyone living with you, your visitors or pets
- door adjustments required when installing flooring or floor coverings
- doorbells (if battery powered) and door furniture
- fuses and plugs on your own appliances
- general decoration
- glazing (unless authorised by us)
- plugs and chains for all baths, sinks, wash hand basins and WCs
- shower heads and hoses
- smoke alarms (if battery powered)
- toilet seats (unless resident is in sheltered accommodation)

- TV aerials and satellite dishes (unless linked to a communal aerial)

Exterior of your home

- blockages to waste pipes, gullies and WCs caused by misuse
- damage caused by forced entry by the police (unless nothing was found, and no-one charged)
- gardens / garden contents
- keys - lost or stolen, including the replacement of locks
- pests (unless they are interfering with our ability to carry out repairs)
- wooden sheds or outbuildings.

4.2 Repair Reporting

Tenants and leaseholders are able to make repair requests via our Customer Service Centre and via website customer portal 'Housing Online'

4.3 Repairs Appointments

Repairs should be convenient, and tenants should be able to arrange for work to be completed to their home according to their availability and the availability of the contractor.

We are therefore proposing that we will only operate two categories of repair appointments: -

Emergency – emergency repair work will be completed within 4 hours

General – all repair work will be completed within 20 days

Appointments will be given in two categories –

- AM (08:00 – 12:00)
- PM (12:30 – 17:00)

Appointments by arrangement for a specific timeslot can be arranged with the contractor directly to meet needs of residents.

Repairs to the structure of a property or to a communal area will normally be completed within 20 days. Leaseholders are able to make requests for this type of work either online or via our customer contact centre.

4.4 Out of Hours Emergency Repairs

Runnymede Borough Council provide an emergency out of hours service which operates from the hours of 17:00 until 08:00. This service is for emergency works only that cannot wait until the next working day. The service is a make safe only and any further works required will be undertaken during normal business hours.

Wilful neglect of this service may result in residents being recharged.

5. Repairing Specifics

There are certain types of repair jobs that require further explanation; these include: -

Fencing

We will seek to repair existing fencing to prolong its life

Where existing fencing is in poor condition and needs replacing, the Council will: -

- Install 6ft close boarded fence panels bordering a public footpath
- Where an individual panel is 'down' we will replace if necessary, on a like for like basis
- Between gardens we will install x2 6ft close boarded fence panels from the back of the property to act as a privacy screen – all other fencing will be at 3ft. Including the rear of the property.

Fire Safety

When we are installing new kitchens or while properties are empty, we will ensure the door from the kitchen into the rest of the property is a fire door conforming to FD30 compliance.

Signs on the door will remind tenants that removing the door closer makes the fire door ineffective.

We will complete Fire Risk Assessments for each of our flat blocks and Independent Retirement Living Courts. These will be made available to tenants at their request.

More detail on Runnymede Borough Council Housing Service's approach to Health and Safety is contained within our Health and Safety Policy.

Mould and condensation

We will develop a procedure in relation to mould and condensation. The purpose of the procedure will be to support tenants with mould issues and address any 'lifestyle' issues that are impacting mould growth, alongside exploring issues associated with the fabric of the property.

Mutual Exchanges

If a tenant has installed, after receiving permission from RBC's Housing Service a non-standard item – such as a kitchen, or conservatory – they may be asked to maintain it.

If a tenant who has a non-standard alteration seeks permission to exchange – the exchanging tenant may be asked to continue to maintain the alteration.

Raising concerns

We encourage our repairs contractors to report concerns to us following visits to our tenant's homes. Where concerns are raised, we will ensure they are recorded and followed up by the relevant part of the service or external agency.

Trees

Where trees are decayed and/or dangerous we will arrange for them to be inspected and removed.

Where requests are made for 'cosmetic' work – we will refer tenants to a list of approved contractors.

Voids (Empty Homes)

We have published a specification for new tenants which details the work that has been undertaken to make the property ready for its new occupants.

Our focus while a property has been empty is to ensure it is safe to occupy for the new tenant – this means a gas and electrical safety check, the identification of any asbestos in the property and a thorough clean as a minimum. We will also lock loft hatches to ensure insulation is not damaged and so it cannot be used for storage.

As part of our health and safety commitment we will also clear the garden so it can be maintained, check the condition of the fencing and remove any potential trip hazards on paths.

If the property needs more extensive work – such as a replacement kitchen or bathroom this will be installed when the new tenant moves in to enable them to have as much choice as possible over the design.

Where we are not able to undertake work

The condition of some properties dictates that we cannot undertake repair work in them.

Where this is the case, we will record the contractor's objections.

The Council will support the tenant in making arrangements to enable the work to go ahead.

5.1 Permission for work

Alterations and home improvements may be classed as damage to the property if:

- the Council's Housing Service has not given permission (Planning/Building Control permission must also be sought in line with current planning requirements)
- not carried out to the required standard (recharges will apply if Runnymede Borough Council needs to put right unsatisfactory work). In certain circumstances, the Council will require a qualified surveyor to sign off works undertaken to ensure it is satisfactory and safe.
- not safe or adequately maintained

If we need to bridge over for example an extension to undertake repair/maintenance work, we reserve the right to recharge the tenant extra cost that may entail.

5.2 Recharges

The Council can recharge tenants for work that is the tenants' responsibility and for putting right some work. This can include: -

- Putting right unsatisfactory/poor repair work
- Repairing damage to our property as a result of misuse, neglect or wilful damage
- Removing rubbish from a property (normally after the tenant has ended their tenancy)
- Replacing lost keys
- Works listed as tenant responsibility as detailed within the policy

6. Consultation and communication

Tenants and leaseholders have been consulted on the content of this policy. Tenants and leaseholders will be consulted if any changes are made to the content of this policy.

Information on the repairs service will be communicated regularly via our newsletter and within our annual report including the performance of our repair's contractors.

Information will also be contained on our website and within our Repairs Handbook.

7. Monitoring and performance management

We aim to review this policy in 4 years (or before if there is a change in legislation) to ensure that it reflects current legislation and the latest examples of best practice.

We will consult staff and residents regularly about the operation of our policies.

We will meet with our contractors monthly to discuss the operation of this policy, including associated performance indicators and the success we are having in meeting our policy aims.

The Council welcomes feedback on its services. Complaints about the Repairs service or the operation of this policy can be made in line with the Complaints Policy ([link](#)).

8. Legislation and Regulation

The following regulation/legislation relate to this policy document: -

Homes Standard - The Home Standard sets expectations for registered providers of social housing to provide tenants with quality accommodation and a cost-effective repairs and maintenance service.

[Home Standard - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

Right to Repair (Housing Act 1980: Section 41a Secure Tenancies (Right to Repair) Scheme 1985) – Local authorities must have a right to repair scheme in place for secure, flexible and introductory tenants to use.

[Repairs available under the right to repair scheme](#)

Only certain types of repairs are covered under the right to repair scheme. These are called **qualifying repairs**. They include insecure windows and doors, unsafe power sockets or electrical fittings, leaking roofs and broken entry phone systems.

[Using the right to repair scheme - Citizens Advice](#)

Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 defines the fundamental structure regulation and enforcement of workplace health, safety and welfare.

The Act defines general duties on employers, employees, contractors, suppliers of goods and substances for use at work, persons in control of work premises, and those who manage and maintain them, and persons in general.

Equality Act 2010 protects people against discrimination, harassment or victimisation in employment, and as users of private and public services based on nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

9. Equalities Implications

We will monitor the take up of repair services. We want to ensure all parts of the community are able to access the service. We will act to ensure this happens.

Where individuals are over or under using the service, we may also seek to understand what is causing differences in use of the service.

10 Health and Safety

Repairs undertaken to our properties will be undertaken in accordance with all relevant health and safety legislation and guidance.

Runnymede Borough Council's Housing Service have produced a Health and Safety Policy which details how we seek to maximise the health and safety of our tenants/leaseholders, staff and contractors.

This policy will be updated to reflect changing to legislation/guidance/best practice etc.

11. Related Strategies and Documents

Documents: -

- Runnymede Borough Council's Introductory/Flexible/Secure Tenancy Agreement
- Housing Asset Management Plan

- Housing Health and Safety Policy
- Runnymede Investment Standard
- Empty Homes Standard
- Repairs Handbook
- Improvements Policy

Approval

Version No	
Approved By	
Approval Date	
Effective from	
Date of next review	
Policy owner	
Policy author	
Consultation	
EIA	
DPIA	

Version Control

Date	Author	Version	Details of Review

13. HOUSING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM UPGRADE (HOUSING, ANDY VINCENT)

Synopsis of report:

Runnymede Borough Council's Housing Service has commenced a project to upgrade its Housing Management IT system.

This will mean rationalising the systems used by the service, with contracts with four existing systems being terminated (Locata, Rent Sense, Propeller and SAM) with associated re-profiling of licencing costs.

Adopting a fully integrated system will ensure: -

- **Customers can undertake a range of semi-automated transactions via the Housing Online Portal. Including paying their rent, ordering repairs, viewing key documentation, viewing plans to improve their home and getting involved in tenant consultation.**
- **Information seamlessly updates our asset information following the completion of certain repair work**
- **Multiple information queries can be run – for example involving satisfaction, housing application, repairs, anti-social behaviour and housing related support – enabling us for example to target households for support who are showing signs of 'vulnerability'**
- **Better performance data - on repairs, decent homes, the energy performance of our stock, relet times, tenancy management, support provision and tenant/leaseholder involvement.**
- **Real time data on customer contacts – which will enable us to manage working patterns and make best use of resources**

Recommendations:

- i) **Members are requested to approve an additional HRA Capital for up to £100,000 to be used to bring forward the delivery of the Northgate Housing upgrade. These costs will ultimately be met from HRA Working balances.**
- ii) **Members are asked to note the potential savings arising from the enhancements to the system as identified within this report.**

1. Context of report

- 1.1 At the June 2020 Housing Committee, members were advised that the Council had agreed to enter into a new Contract with the incumbent supplier for a number of the Council's back office systems, including the Northgate Housing system. This was approved at Corporate Management Committee on 27th February 2020 and Full Council on 5th March 2020. Members had previously received a number of reports outlining the significant upgrade required to the system as there were serious deficits in the applications being used, primarily within the Technical Services section. Introduction of a number of new modules was essential to enable effective management of the stock.

- 1.2 The Northgate Housing system at Runnymede has had significant under investment – with limited capital and development investment in the system since 1997. The enhancements to the system are largely a catch-up programme to bring the Runnymede Northgate system up to its equivalent at other housing organisations. This will enable the service to benefit from the significant cashable and non-cashable efficiencies using a joined up, process driven system that promotes self-service and digital interaction on all aspects of the housing services.
- 1.3 The Capital cost of the new modules for Housing was £75,000 but the implementation costs of any new system are usually significantly higher than the modules themselves (£65,000 was approved for development costs – largely to create a dedicated project resource).
- 1.4 The original scoping exercise to identify the costs associated with the system upgrade underestimated the service requirements for consultancy support with module implementation and the internal resource required to introduce such a varied and complex system covering such a wide range of tasks.
- 1.5 Since the original scoping work was undertaken and during the current implementation programme it has been identified that the system would benefit from additional enhancements, such as: each new module will require detailed and complex configuration mapped to replicate RBC processes with structures in place to enable the modules to link and exchange data. An example of the outcomes of this upgrade would be that RBC currently utilises a standalone asset management system and planned maintenance works are accessible as individual works orders on repairs or in spreadsheets. Following a complex implementation and integration the Estates, Repairs, Planned Maintenance, Asset Management, Service Charges and Leaseholder modules will share information ensuring a comprehensive and live set of data is available on the HRA's assets.

2. Northgate Upgrade Progress

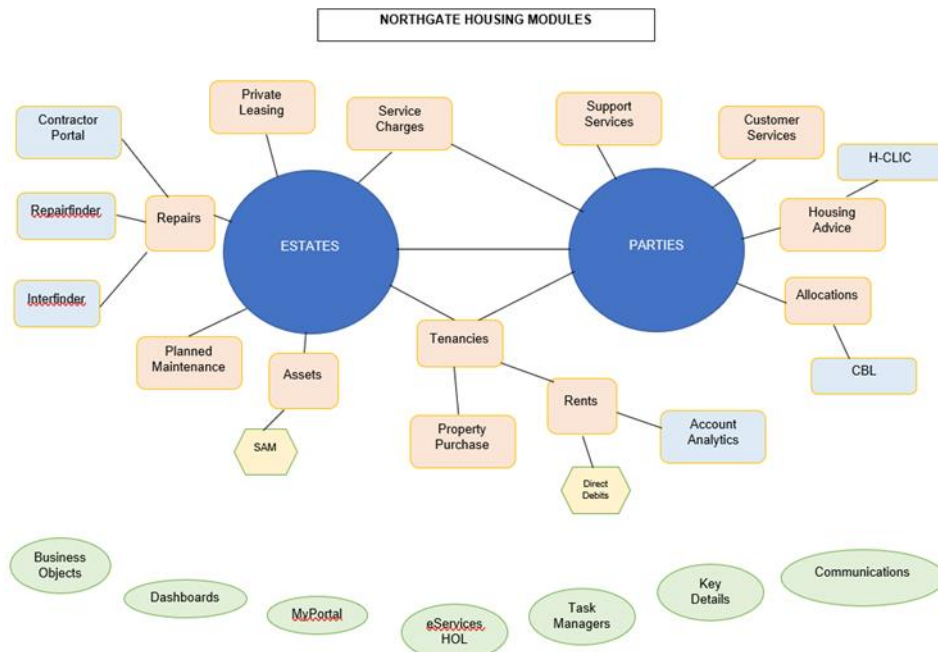
- 2.1 The Housing Online Portal is going live in July. This will enable tenants/leaseholders to self-serve – enabling them to query their rent account, set up Direct Debits, upload and view documents, update contact details and later on raise repairs, identify improvements to their home, view progress with their anti-social behavior case, view their support plan and engage in tenant involvement activities etc.
- 2.2 Other upgrade activity currently planned for this financial year are: -
 1. Launch of the Housing Allocations module in Northgate
 2. Setting up rent analytics within Northgate
 3. Adopting the service charges module – enabling leaseholder billing to be automated and undertaken within the Northgate system.

Attached at Appendix I is the Northgate Upgrade project plan.

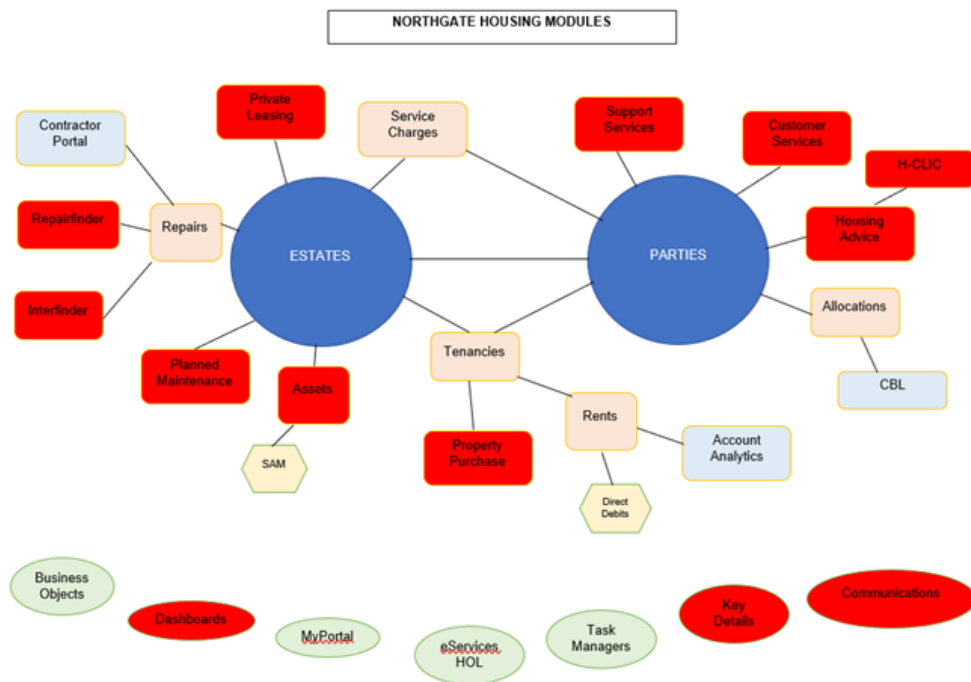
3. Making Further Progress

- 3.1 The Housing Service would like to speed up the pace of the enhancements to the system.

3.2 The map below highlights the complexity of the system and the relationship between the system modules.



3.3 The following map identifies the modules where the service has committed to their introduction but currently do not have timescales for their introduction as our implementation resource is at full capacity (highlighted in red).



4. Policy Framework Implications

- 4.1 The Northgate system should underpin our compliance with legislation. The objective is to register all activity within the Housing Business Unit within the system. Introduction of electronic workflows and transactional activity within the system will ensure consistent application of policy and procedures and a digitally time stamped record of all customer contacts.
- 4.2 The relevant extract from the business plan is set out below:

H5	Upgrade the Northgate Housing IT system and implement essential new modules as part of Corporate Digital Transformation Strategy	Head of Housing & Business Planning Business Development & Policy Manager IT Accountancy Legal Procurement	Provides an integrated system, will modernise and streamline processes and offer online services for the majority of our tenants, enabling resources to be focussed on those less able to self-serve.	Commence March 2020 and two-year implementation Implementation of the Choice Based Lettings Model by March 2021 Implementation of Rents, Asset Management, Support, CRM, homelessness and engagement by March 2022	No
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5. Resource implications

- 5.1 It is proposed to bring in additional temporary staffing resource to speed up the delivery of the IT enhancements identified.
- 5.2 It is also proposed to identify additional resource to procure essential Northgate consultancy for the delivery of the modules identified above.
- 5.3 It is proposed that authority is given for up to an additional £100,000 to be spent on the Northgate enhancement project. Savings within the HRA during 2020/21 resulting in increased HRA balances could be used to cover the increased costs.
- 5.4 It is likely that this expenditure would be made over the course of the elongated project. Permission is being sought from Housing Committee members to make this expenditure in 2021/22 concertinaing delivery and realising efficiency savings sooner.
- 5.5 It is identified that delivery of this project will enable cashable efficiencies in the following areas. The delivery of these efficiencies will not purely be down to an enhancement in the IT system – but improvements in the system will enable better data, more targeting of resources and some automation of processes speeding up response times: -
- Termination of licences for four existing housing systems (Locata, Rent Sense, Propeller and SAM) (£13,000, £31,700, £2,000 = £46,700 per annum though this will be offset by the increased costs of the new

Northgate equivalent of Rent Sense (say £15,000) so overall annual savings of around £31,700)

- Rent collection performance improvements, through reduction in level of write offs (£10k per annum)
- Improvements in relet times and reductions in rent loss (£50k per annum)
- Improvements in recharge collection (£5k per annum)
- Better asset data and the ability for Runnymede to manage largescale capital improvement projects. With an effective IT system and the right staffing resource this will enable Runnymede to manage the delivery of the capital programme (This could be considerable but will be difficult to measure)
- Reduction in the number of documents sent as more information can be sent over the email or uploaded to the website (£2k per annum)

5.6 Non-cashable efficiencies can also be made in the following areas: -

- Customers will be able to self-serve, therefore fewer contact to Customer Services and back office teams
- Process efficiencies with automation – leading to improvements in response times and customer satisfaction
- The integrated Service Charge module has the potential to produce both administrative savings as currently processed on several un-coordinated systems and Microsoft packages, while also improving the offer to leaseholders.
- Real time data on staff activities, enabling better management of staff resources to optimise effectiveness.
- Better data/information from different services able to be queried simultaneously and therefore enable better decision making

6. Legal implications

6.1 There are no specific legal implications attached to this project.

6.2 Better quality data and evidence of activities will enable potential legal challenges to be more easily rebutted such a disrepair claims, complaints and use of the community trigger for example.

7. Equality implications

7.1 Better quality information on how customers are interacting with the service will better inform equality impact assessments.

7.2 This will enable more responsive adjustments, ensuring a fairer more, equal distribution of services

8. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications

8.1 Enhancements of the Northgate Housing system will enable the service to capture, model and analyse better quality data on the energy performance of the stock.

8.2 This will enable better quality decision making around the most cost-effective way to reduce carbon emissions, enabling a more focused and effective targeting of resources.

9. Other implications

9.1 None

10. Conclusions

- 10.1 Bringing forward the delivery of the Northgate Housing upgrade will enable efficiencies to be realised earlier than originally envisaged.
- 10.2 It will enable the service to terminate a number of existing IT licences and integrate these systems with the other housing functions.
- 10.3 It will significantly reduce the manual entries being made into the Northgate system currently (for example updating the Asset Management System SAM when improvements have been made to individual properties).
- 10.4 It will give the service access to better data enabling better quality decision making where all information from across the service can be fully linked.

(To resolve)

Background papers

Northgate Upgrade Project Plan

Link to the June 2020 Housing Committee Papers p33 is the item on Digital Transformation

[Housing Committee Agendas 2020 - Runnymede Borough Council](#)

14. **UPDATE ON COMMUNICATION WITH THE REGULATOR OF SOCIAL HOUSING (HOUSING, SIMON ALLEN)**

Synopsis of report:
To advise Members of the recent contact with the Regulator of Social Housing

Recommendation(s):
None. This report is for Information.

1. **Context**

1.1 Following the notice served by the Regulator of Social Housing in October 2019 Members requested an update at each committee on progress with remedying the service failures outlined in the notice.

2. **Report**

2.1 The Council continues to have monthly meetings with the Regulator to appraise them of progress with achieving compliance across the stock, issues encountered and to detail improvements to ensure full compliance is achieved.

2.2 During our last meeting, the regulator expressed that they were happy with the electrical safety compliance, but for the notice to be reviewed further, The Council will need to have addressed all high-risk overdue action for Fire Risk Assessments.

2.3 The Notice was served on the Council on 31st October 2019 and this will remain in place until the regulator is satisfied that the Council has proven that we are managing all risks detailed in the notice and can evidence this.

2.4 The electrical certification was 91.45% as of the 18 May 2021 with 244 tests still to be completed. This is a reduction of 305 tests since last report to Committee To be noted that most of these outstanding tests have been issued to the contractors.

2.5 High risk fire safety action as reported on the 18 May 2021 are at 94 in total. This is a reduction from 282.

2.6 The Regulator is being kept informed of the planned programme of fire prevention works for Surrey Towers.

3. **Legal implications**

3.1 The Regulator of Social Housing served a Regulatory Notice on the authority as a Registered Provider, under the powers in the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008. The Notice, published on 30 October 2019, cited the statutory fire

and electrical safety standards that gave rise to the authority's breach of the Home Standard.

3.2 It remains open to the Regulator to take further formal action if they are not satisfied with the progress towards compliance.

4. **Conclusion**

4.1 The Council is continuing to engage with the Regulator monthly and are committed to ensuring that we have an open and transparent professional working relationship.

(For information)

15. **PERFORMANCE INDICATORS, Q4 AND YEAR END 2020/21 (HOUSING, ANGELA HORSEY)**

Synopsis of report:
This report provides the results of the Key Performance Indicators for the final quarter and year end for 2020/21; and the monthly health and safety compliance statistics for February, March and April 2021.

Recommendation:
That Members note the results of performance monitoring.

1. **Context of report**

1.1 This report informs Members of the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) results for the final quarter of 2020/21, along with the results of the monthly health and safety compliance monitoring for February, March and April 2021.

2. **Report**

2.1 This report presents the full suite of KPIs identified in the annual Business Centre Plan, along with some contextual information on complaints and Universal Credit. Since the investigation by the Regulator of Social Housing, Members have also received the results of the monthly monitoring of health and safety compliance measures and this report presents the statistics as reported to the Regulator.

2.2 Key Performance Indicators 2020/21

Performance Indicator	Annual Target 2020/21	Q1 Result	Q2 Result	Q3 Result	Q4 Result	2020/21 Result
Percentage of tenants satisfied with reactive repairs service	95%	N/A	95% (274 surveys)	93% (294 surveys)	93% (188 surveys)	93% (756 surveys)
Percentage of formal complaints not upheld	90%	100%	78%	73%	63%	76%
Number of formal complaints resolved		2	9	11	19	41
Of which, number upheld		0	1	2	7	10
Number of decisions investigated by the Ombudsman requiring a remedy	0	0	0	0	0	0

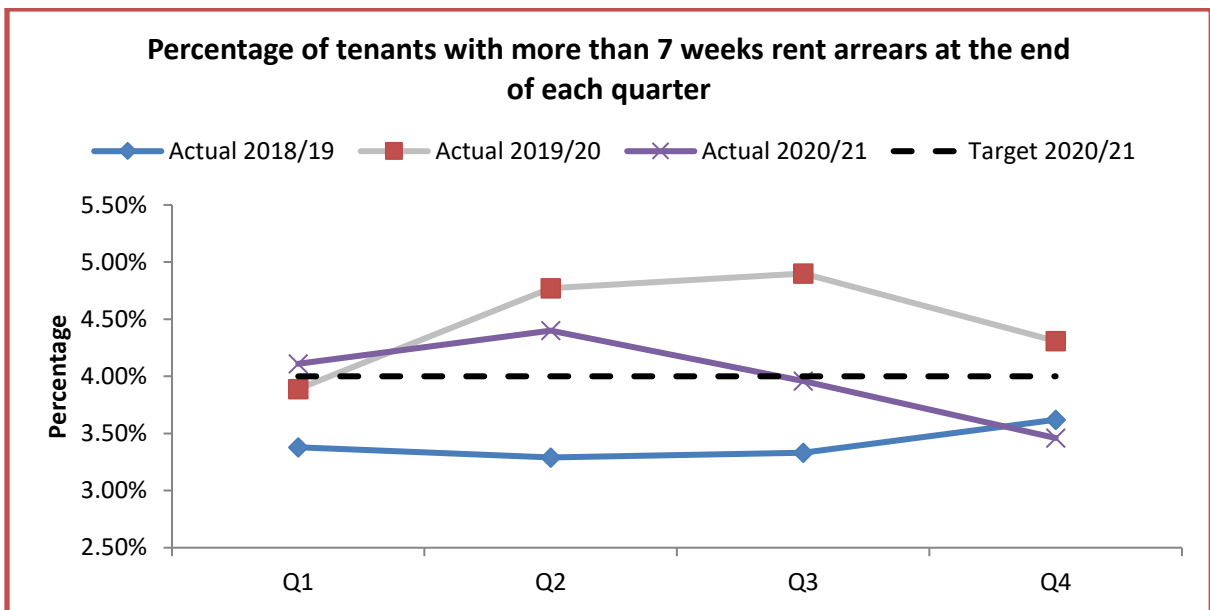
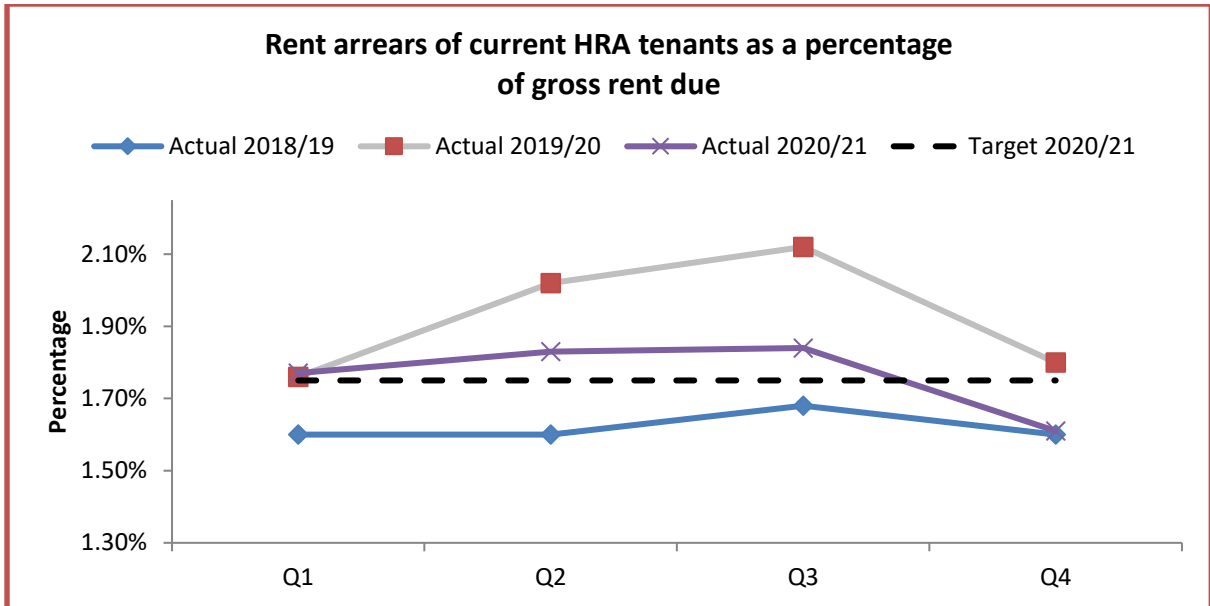
Percentage of dwellings re-let to deadline	Target for Qs 3 & 4: 85%	0%	45%	3%	7%	16%
Number of households in B&B accommodation for more than 2 weeks	16	1	0	2	4	7
Rent arrears of current HRA tenants as a % of rent due	1.75%	1.77%	1.83%	1.84%	1.61%	1.61%
Percentage of tenants with more than 7 weeks rent arrears	4%	4.11%	4.40%	3.96%	3.46%	3.46%

2.2.1 Satisfaction with the repairs service was slightly below target for quarter 4 and for the year. Members will be aware that the repairs service and posting of satisfaction surveys has been disrupted by the pandemic and also that improvements to the way surveys are carried out will become possible with Housing Online functionality.

2.2.2 The percentage of complaints not upheld exceeded the target for the year, with 10 out of 41 complaints upheld or partly upheld, compared with only 2 out of 32 complaints upheld in 2019/20. A new Housing Complaints Policy was introduced this year, in line with the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code, which includes a commitment to learning from complaints to improve services and such improvements are now reported to the Housing Management Team.

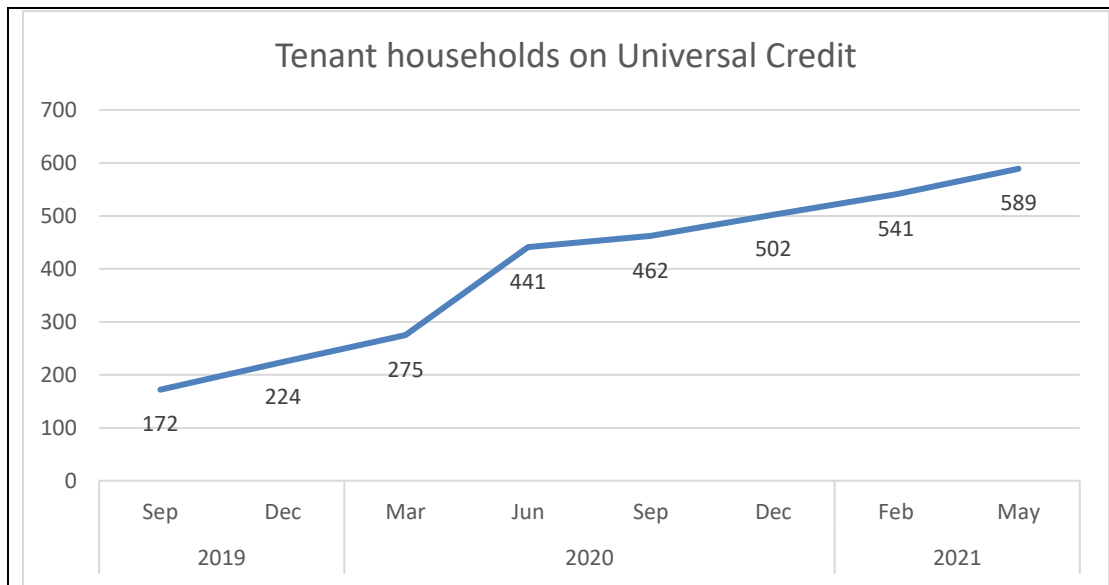
2.2.3 An end to end review is being taken of the voids process to identify service weaknesses. Some of the anticipated improvements were delayed by the pandemic. Currently void works include asbestos and gas contractors, as well as the main contractor who is required to provide electrical certification and an Energy Performance certificate for each property on completion of the works. Future contracts will simplify these processes and include incentives and penalties. Additional functionality in the Northgate system is being implemented, along with system generated reporting which will assist in the management of the entire voids process.

2.2.4 The rent collection performance for quarter 4 and for the year was especially pleasing given the circumstances of the last year. Staff worked hard to achieve these results and the use of the Rentsense software has had a positive impact. Planning for the implementation of the Northgate solution, Account Analytics, is now underway.



2.3 Impact of Universal Credit

2.3.1 The overall number of households on Universal Credit (UC) has continued to increase throughout 2020/21.



2.3.2 A sizeable proportion of rent arrears is owed by tenants on UC who are more than seven weeks in arrears.

Universal Credit April 2021	Percentage of tenants in receipt of benefits	Percentage of tenants in arrears	Percentage of tenants more than 7 weeks in arrears
Tenants on UC	20.1%	36.6%	8.8% (50 tenants)
Tenants on HB	38.6%	9.8%	0.8% (9 tenants)
Tenants paying full rent	41.2%	16.6%	2.6% (30 tenants)

2.4 Analysis of Complaints resolved in 2020/21

	Not upheld	Partly upheld	Upheld
About a member of staff	4		
Adaptations	1		
Allocations Scheme Consultation	1		
ASB	5		
Rent credit at end of garage tenancy			1
End of tenancy (outstanding rent)		1	2
Flickering light			1
Garage maintenance	1		
Homelessness	3		
Housing Offer	1		
Housing Register (delays)	1		
Housing Register (policies)	2		

Letter chasing contact details			1
Priority Banding	1		
Property maintenance	4	1	3
Request for bath to be installed	1		
Right to buy valuation	1		
Succession to parent's tenancy	1		
Suitability of current property			
Tenancy Agreement	1		
Tree Surgery	1		
Unfair treatment	1		
Waiting time at Civic Centre	1		
Total	31	2	8

2.5 Health and Safety Compliance

2.5.1 Since the engagement with the Regulator of Social Housing, Members have also received the results of the monthly monitoring of health and safety compliance measures. Officers have monthly calls with the Regulator to provide updates on the Council's progress with compliance and share the most recent data, as shown above.

2.5.2 The KPIs for 2021/22 include the measure of number of outstanding high-risk Fire Risk Assessment actions. This will be reported to Members of this Committee as part of the new suite of KPI for the current year. The result for quarter 4 was 189 high risk overdue actions, down from 281 in quarter 3.

Fire Risk Assessment: Overdue Actions Quarter 4			
	High Risk Factors	Medium Risk Factors	Low Risk Factors
All overdue actions	189	561	2

Health and Safety Compliance

	KPI Target	Result Jul '19	Result Oct '19	Result Jan '20	Result Apr '20	Result July '20	Result Oct '20	Result Nov'20	Result Dec'20	Result Jan '21	Result Feb '21	Result Mar '21	Result Apr '21
Gas Safety													
No. of CP12 certificates out of target	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	3	3	7	6	5	3
% of valid CP12 certificates	100%	100%	100%	100% (2645)	99.96% (2644)	100% (2645)	99.92% (2647)	99.89% (2646)	99.89% (2646)	99.74% (2641)	99.77% (2642)	99.81% (2643)	99.89% (2646)
Electrical													
% of stock with valid safety EICR certification	100%	40%	39%	44% (1262)	41% (1184)	47% (1340)	64% (1827)	67% (1935)	71% (2042)	75% (2150)	81% (2312)	86% (2434)	90% (2583)
% of emergency lighting tests completed against target	100%	100%	87.40%	32.30%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	87%	78%	77%
Water Management													
% of water management inspection tests undertaken	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Passenger Lifts													
% of inspections undertaken against programme	98%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Asbestos													
% of stock with a valid asbestos survey	100%	26%	27%	39% (1105)	45% (1280)	46% (1312)	50% (1443)	52% (1500)	55% (1573)	57% (1625)	70%	70%	70%
Accidents Reporting													
Number of RBC RIDDOR reportable incidents	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Number of days lost to accidents and incidents	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fire Risk Assessment													

% of inspections completed in target	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Lightning conductors													
% of works required completed in target	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Sprinkler systems													
% of annual servicing completed within target	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

3. Conclusions

3.1 This report presents a range of performance data for information, including the results of the key performance indicators for quarter four and 2020/21 year end.

(To resolve)

16. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

If the Committee is minded to consider any of the foregoing reports in private, it is the

OFFICERS' RECOMMENDATION that -

the press and public be excluded from the meeting during discussion of the relevant report under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that the report in question would be likely to involve disclosure of exempt information of the description specified in the relevant paragraph(s) of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

(To resolve)

PART II

Matters involving Exempt or Confidential Information in respect of which reports have not been made available for public inspection

a) Exempt Information

(No reports to be considered under this heading)

b) Confidential Information

(No reports to be considered under this heading)