

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO HEALTH & HOUSING COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: THURSDAY, 30 MAY 2013
title: RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL AND RIBBLE VALLEY HOMES
HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY
submitted by: MARSHAL SCOTT – CHIEF EXECUTIVE
principal author: RACHAEL STOTT – HOUSING STRATEGY OFFICER

1 PURPOSE

1.1 To present a revised version of the RVBC and RVH Allocations Policy.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:

- Council Ambitions – To meet the identified housing needs in the borough.
- Community Objectives – N/A
- Corporate Priorities – N/A
- Other Considerations – N/A

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 A review of the Allocations Policy was initiated in response to the allocation provisions contained within the Localism Act 2011. A report was presented to Health and Housing Committee in September 2012 which outlined the proposed consultation process the policy would follow. The document has been through the following stages:

20 September 2012 – report to Committee stating the provisions within the Localism Act. The document underwent a full review by RVBC and RVH and changes were made to the existing policy.

26 September 2012 – a consultation event was held with all registered providers with stock in the borough to review the proposed changes and the impact at an operational level.

November 2012 – January 2013 – all tenants and applicants on the waiting list were given the opportunity to be consulted on four key changes within the policy, namely:

- the emphasised local connection requirement;
- financial assessment of applicants;
- to decide the percentage of lets for those economically active; and
- whether those households not in housing need should be able to register.

November 2012 – RVH policy sub-group established to consider the Allocations Policy.

February 2013 – the findings of a consultation exercise were incorporated into the policy and a report to RVH board.

March 2013 – the findings of a consultation exercise were reported to Health and Housing Committee. Committee agreed for the strategic Housing Working Group to consider the revised policy in more detail.

April 2013 – the Strategic Housing Working Group considered the policy and went through the impact of the changes to the points system on various household situations. The working group identified the issue of numbers on the waiting list and this evidence being used by developers. The Strategic Housing Working Group agreed to address this issue with a bi-annual report to Committee which sets out the number of households on the general needs register, the number of households on the shelter register, the average points required to be offered a property and the number of householders with points above the average required to secure a property.

May 2013 – the document was reviewed again by the Strategic Housing Working Group and the points system was considered. A review date and complaints procedure was incorporated into the policy.

3 PROPOSAL

3.1 Attached at Appendix 1 is the reviewed Allocations Policy. The proposal is from 1st July, the new Allocations Policy will operate. Before that date the following work needs to be undertaken by Ribble Valley Homes:

- amend housing application forms to collect the relevant information;
- make changes to the IT system to enable points of the allocations to be amended to reflect the changes;
- advise all applicants that their application has been reviewed; and
- the Council will introduce a bi annual housing waiting list report, the first will be 29 August 2013.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications:

- Resources – The additional resources required will be RVH staff time.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – No implications identified.
- Political – The Allocations Policy will reflect the changes introduced in the Localism Act.
- Reputation – To demonstrate the Council has responded to the new powers available within the Act.
- Equality and Diversity – The reviewed Allocations Policy will meet equality and diversity requirements.

5 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

5.1 Agree the new Ribble Valley Borough Council and Ribble Valley Homes Housing Allocations Policy to be operational from July 2013.

RACHAEL STOTT
HOUSING STRATEGY OFFICER

MARSHAL SCOTT
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

For further information please ask for Rachael Stott, extension 4567.

RVBC and RVH Housing Allocations Policy

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1.Introduction

The Council is required to allocate Social Housing according to a published Allocations Scheme which has been drawn up according to the Housing Act 1996, Part 6, and as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Localism Act 2011.

We have taken into account, as permitted by the law, prevailing local conditions – they are, the acute shortage of suitable available affordable properties and the increasing demand for those properties, irrespective of the size or type of household.

2.Legislative Context

- Housing Act 1996, Part 6 – as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002
- The Allocation of Housing (Procedure) Regulations 1997 (SI 1997 No.483)
- The Allocation of Housing (Reasonable and Additional Preference) Regulations 1999 SI 1999/1902
- The Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Review Procedures) Regulations 1999 SI 1999/71
- Code of Guidance on the Allocation of Accommodation (ODPM, effective from 31 January 2003)
- Fair and Flexible – Code of Guidance on the Allocation of Accommodation December 2009
- Localism Act 2011

3.The Legal Framework: Allocation Priorities

This section explains how the Council meets the principal legal requirements for allocation schemes, as set out in the Housing Act 1996, as amended.

4.Strategic Context

In writing this Policy the Council has had regard to the following Council Strategies:

- Housing Strategy
- Homelessness Strategy
- Ribble Valley Homes Common Allocations Policy
- Addressing Housing Needs Documents
- Strategic Housing Market Assessment

5.General Approach

Throughout this Policy the Council has had regard to fairness, equality and diversity and the need to demonstrate that due consideration has been given to all sectors of the community, and to those in greatest need, consistent with prevailing local conditions and relevant legislation.

6.Ribble Valley Homes Common Allocations Policy

Ribble Valley Homes the largest housing provider in the Ribble Valley administer the Housing Register on behalf of RVBC they allocate their properties in accordance with a common allocations policy agreed with RVBC and they manage all nominations to other

Registered Providers (Housing Associations) on behalf of RVBC. The Allocations Policy of RVBC and RVH are identical.

Equal Opportunities

The Allocations Scheme has been designed to ensure that those in most housing need are given priority for housing by strictly adhering to the points system. Only in respect of designated properties and local lettings schemes will the normal system of making offers not apply.

There will be special assessment and allocations arrangements for people with physical disabilities to ensure that designated properties are allocated to the applicant in the most need.

Detailed monitoring of allocations outcomes will be undertaken and reported. Regular equality impact assessments of the service will be carried out and one will be completed before a local lettings scheme is implemented. Other measures will be taken to ensure that vulnerable or disadvantaged groups are aware of the opportunity for getting a housing association home and are able to effectively engage with the Allocations Service.

7. Definition of an 'allocation'

An allocation is the selection of a person for an offer of accommodation. It includes moves by existing RP tenants, which are known as 'transfers'.

8. Reasonable Preference

The Council must provide '**reasonable preference**' to certain applicants in housing need.

What is 'reasonable preference'?

Reasonable preference means providing certain applicants with an **advantage** or **head start** compared to other applicants who do not have reasonable preference according to the law.

Reasonable preference must be given to:

- People who are homeless or threatened with homelessness within the meaning of Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996.
- People occupying unsanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise unsatisfactory housing conditions.
- People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds, including disability
- People who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship to themselves or others.

The Council does not have to provide the same advantage to all categories of reasonable preference. The allocations policy is there to meet local needs and housing demand, as well as the requirements of the law.

How does the Council provide 'reasonable preference'?

The scheme provides reasonable preference to the above applicants through the point's system.

9.Statement on Choice

RVBC's allocations policy permits all applicants to make choices about the areas in which they would like to be housed. Every effort is then made to offer suitable accommodation within the applicant's areas of choice. RVBC delivers this via RVH and other associated Registered Providers.

Registering

An application to join the Housing Register must be made using the required form. A verbal request to be housed will be acknowledged but registration will only follow after receipt of a completed application. The applications forms are available at the Council Offices Church Walk Clitheroe or from Ribble Valley Homes (RVH) at their offices in Station Road Clitheroe. Applications can also be requested by phone by contacting RVH Freephone number 0800 111 4448 or via our website www.ribbonvalleyhomes.org.uk

Once an application is registered the applicant will receive a unique reference number which should be used in all contact with Ribble Valley Homes.

The applicant will also be advised of the number of points their application has received, their positions on the waiting list and the "relevant date" of registration. "Relevant Date" is important as applicants will normally be housed in strict date order in a situation of equal points.

Applicants must keep RVH fully informed of any changes in circumstances. Failure to do this may either lead to the applicant being allocated the wrong points, an offer of accommodation being withdrawn because application details were incorrect, or the application being suspended from the list.

It is the responsibility of every applicant to ensure that their application details are correct at the time of registration and are subsequently updated when necessary. (RVH undertakes a 6 monthly review of all applications to ensure information is current failure to return these reviews will result in the cancellation of your application.) Where an applicant is flagged as vulnerable due to age, disability or low literacy contact with family members will be made before an application is cancelled due to failure to renew.

It is an offence for an applicant or member of their household to knowingly or recklessly give false information, or withhold information which the Authority has reasonably required to be given in connection with its functions under Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996.

A person guilty of a summary offence will be liable to a fine not exceeding £5000. They will also be removed from the Housing Register. The Authority is also entitled to seek possession of a tenancy granted as a result of a false statement by an applicant or someone acting at an applicant's instigation.

Some applicants will not be eligible to join the Housing Register. More information on this is given under Eligibility.

Members of RVBC and RVH staff, their close family and elected members who require housing with RVH may apply for housing in the same way as other applicants. Their status should be disclosed on the application form at the time of applying.

If an applicant who is a member of staff, board member or a member of their direct family, is made an offer it must be approved by the Managing Director and Chair of RVH before a formal offer is made. This must be ratified by the Board of RVH at the earliest opportunity

Applicants who deliberately worsen their situation to gain advantage will be assessed on the basis of their situation *immediately prior to* this taking place and may be excluded from the Register as above.

10. Eligibility

Not everyone who applies for accommodation will be eligible. Those people may be excluded from the Waiting List and not be entitled to Housing from the Council/RVH. The legislation in this area is detailed and complicated summarised below is a list of persons' who are not eligible but in making a decision the Council and RVH will refer to the detailed legal guidance which is appended to this policy.

These include:

- People from abroad who are subject to immigration control within the meaning of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996. There will be some people (as defined by the Secretary of State) who are subject to immigration control but, nevertheless, are entitled to register for housing. These are
 - People who are refugees
 - People subject to Immigration Control but who have been granted humanitarian protection or discretionary leave to remain
 - People subject to Immigration Control and granted ILR – indefinite leave to remain, as long as they are habitually resident in the Common Travel Area (CTA). There may be other conditions as prescribed by the Secretary of State.
 - People subject to Immigration Control and a citizen of a Country that has ratified ECSMA and ESC *as long as* they are in the UK legally or are habitually resident in the CTA

NOTE: An applicant who is already in a Secure or Introductory Tenancy, or an Assured Tenancy allocated by the Local Housing Authority, is not subject to these eligibility requirements.

RVBC and RVH have further agreed that the following applicants will have restrictions placed on their applications for housing.

- Applicants or members of their household who engage in, or have been found responsible for, unacceptable behaviour. This is defined as behaviour which, had they been an assured tenant of RVH at the time they engaged in it, would have resulted in outright possession proceedings successfully being taken.
- Applicants or member of their household who have a history of behaviour which has caused nuisance and annoyance
- Applicants or members of their household who have been convicted for using a dwelling for immoral or illegal purposes, or committing an arrestable offence in the locality
- Applicants or members of their household who have committed domestic violence causing a partner or other family member to become homeless
- Applicants or members of their household who have caused a property to deteriorate due to waste, neglect or default
- Applicants or members of their household who have gained a tenancy through false statement or information given on application

- Applicants who have paid or received premium (received a financial or other benefit) in connection with a mutual exchange
- Applicants or members of their household who have been evicted from a dwelling within the curtilage of a building held for non-housing purposes due to conduct such that given the nature of the building it would not be right for occupation to continue.

In all of the above cases the application will be suspended from the waiting list for a minimum period of 12 months further consideration will be given after a year, if acceptable behaviour has been demonstrated during this period the application will be placed on the active waiting list. Each case will be treated on its merits and suspensions may be permanent or for longer periods than 12 months. An applicant may appeal if not satisfied with the decision.

- Applicants who have a history of rent arrears will not be made an offer of accommodation until outstanding debts have been cleared or RVBC and RVH are satisfied that the debts were as a result of circumstances beyond the applicants control or an arrangement is being maintained to repay the debt. Each case will be considered on its merits.

These are examples and this list is not intended to be exhaustive.

11.Verification of Eligibility

The following documentation will be required to verify an applicants eligibility prior to receiving an offer of accommodation:

- Proof of identity
- Proof of residency of children (Child benefit, court order)
- Proof of pregnancy (maternity notes, letter from GP)
- Proof of income/benefits (bank statement, wage slips, DWP documentation)
- Proof of savings/stocks and shares (bank statement, relevant paperwork)
- If owner/occupier of property, most recent mortgage statement
- Confirmation of immigration status and workers registration certificate (if relevant) for persons from abroad
- Medical evidence (completion of RVH medical assessment form)
- Notice of eviction (notice to quit from the housing provider) if not previously provided
- Any updated information from the original application
- Local connection evidence
- Reference from Landlord or Employer

12.Local Connection

In order to be accepted onto the register you must have a local connection to Ribble Valley;

1. Resident in the Borough
2. Employed, or have a firm offer of permanent employment in Ribble Valley.
3. Close family associations. These include, for example, parents, adult children, brothers and sisters living in the Borough continuously for at least 5 years. (need to think about this not what we currently do only give local connection in these circumstances to pensioners to receive support but I do think this is more in keeping with the localism act)

Applicants who have served in HM Forces in the last 5 years will be eligible to be considered for accommodation without meeting the Local Connection criteria.

13.Housing Need

Applicants registering for housing who are assessed as having no housing need will be accepted onto the housing register but as nil priority and will only be considered for low demand properties.

14.Ability to meet own Needs

Social Housing is for people who are considered to have insufficient resources to meet their housing need. The following applicants will therefore not receive any priority

Applicants who are owner-occupiers, whose home is suitable for their needs and/or who have savings or equity within the property greater than 100K to obtain suitable alternative accommodation. We will consider each application on an individual basis.

The resources available to each household will be assessed to determine whether they are sufficient to meet their housing need.

Applicants with a net household income of greater than £500 per week will be required to complete a financial assessment before any housing need points are awarded.

The following types of income are fully disregarded:

- Attendance Allowance
- Disability Living Allowance

Capital, Savings and Equity

The capital, savings and equity available to an applicant's household will be assessed. If it is determined that, given:

- The applicant's income, capital, savings and equity
- The size and composition of the applicant's household the local housing market (for example prices to buy or rent privately and availability of the appropriate accommodation)

An applicant can resolve their own housing need within their local housing market they will be registered with no priority

15.Decisions on Reasonable Preference and Additional Preference

The points of an applicant will be assessed to reflect the relative needs of his/her circumstances and taking into account the due consideration shown to all applicants on the register, and within the context of local Housing Provision.

If an applicant disagrees with the points they have been awarded they can appeal for a review, in writing within 21 days of the date of the decision. See Section 23 for further information on how to request a review.

Reasonable and Additional Preference is reflected in the Points structure described at section xxxx in this report.

How We Assess Reasonable and Additional Preference

Assessment of Reasonable, and Additional preference will be carried out by the Allocation's Administration Officers at RVH

This will only be carried out after all the information which the applicant has been reasonably required to provide has been received.

An applicant may not be registered until this information has been received and assessed.

16.Points System

Applications will be recorded in date order and allocated points in accordance with the points system. Available properties will be offered to the highest pointed applicant requesting that type of property in the area that is available. In the case of equal points it will be offered to the applicant who registered first.

Emergency Allocations Priority (These will only be awarded in consultation with RVBC)

Applicants will be given points for emergency housing need if their need for housing is assessed as so exceptional that they take priority over all other applicants or if there is an urgent need to allocate a property for financial or operational reasons.

Substantial evidence must exist and be provided by any relevant statutory or voluntary agencies before such priority is awarded.

The following are **examples** of the type of situations that may qualify:

- Urgent health/ wellbeing need
- Emergency disrepair
- To escape violence or threat of violence, serious harassment or a traumatic event where there is immediate and serious risk to the household The Police or another appropriate agency will usually provide supporting evidence that the risk exists. The person at risk may be the applicant, or another person who might be reasonably expected to reside with them.

Where we accept a household being referred under the Witness Protection Scheme.

Applicants will be given this priority for 3 months. The decision to extend or remove the Emergency housing need status will be made in conjunction with RVBC and will be based upon: -

- Whether a vacancy occurred during the 3 month period that met the declared needs of the applicant.
- If a suitable property became available and was refused was the refusal reasonable

Emergency status may also be awarded where the tenant of a 'sheltered' or 'adapted' property for the disabled has died leaving another family member in the property and the

landlord wishes that family member to be moved quickly to enable the property to be let to an applicant who requires it.

In all emergency cases there is an expectation on the applicant, or their representative, to provide the information required to reach a decision.

Housing Need points

Applicants will receive housing need points if they fall within the categories set out below the weighting of all points is not the same it reflects the seriousness of the housing need:

Lack of bedrooms / Overcrowding

Applicants who lack 1 or more bedrooms in line with rules on Housing Benefit and Universal Credit

Under-occupation

The applicant is a tenant of RVH or an associated Registered Provider who resides within the Ribble Valley area and under-occupies their existing property and is looking to move to a smaller, more suitable property.

Harassment

The applicant is a victim of severe and/or persistent harassment or violence (including racial harassment) at their current property - providing evidence exists to substantiate the claim (e.g. from Police/Housing Officer), and re- housing is the most appropriate course of action. This decision will be made in conjunction with RVBC

Medical/Welfare

The applicant is awarded a 'high' medical priority.

This is based on information provided by the applicant by completion of RVH's assessment form. Please be aware the existence of a medical condition in itself does not automatically translate to points as RVH has to consider how a change of accommodation would help in relation to the medical condition.

Disrepair

Based on the conditions identified, the local authority has deemed your home to have the presence of hazards(Housing Health & Safety Rating System) Points in this category will be awarded following an inspection of the home by RVH property services and housing services staff. If the property is privately rented RVH will inform RVBC Environmental Health for them to take action. Points may not be awarded if an applicant refuses permission for their landlord to be contacted

Supported Housing Move on/Care Leavers

The applicant resides within a short-term Supported Housing project (usually up to a maximum of two years) and is seeking to 'move-on' into independent accommodation. NB: The Project Manager of the scheme must confirm in writing that the applicant is ready for such a move and has acquired reasonable skills to sustain a tenancy. Points

will be similarly awarded to applications from Care leavers (**Points in this category will be awarded by RVBC following an interview with the applicant**)

HM Forces

Applicants who qualify for reasonable preference who have served in HM Forces within the last 5 years

Effective management of social housing within Ribble Valley

This priority will be awarded in a number of situations set out below to aid the efficient management of social housing stock

- Under occupation of social housing
- Those moving from one bed general needs property to one bed sheltered accommodation.

Homeless/Threatened with Homelessness

People who are homeless (within the meaning of Part 7 of the 1996 Housing Act as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002). This includes people who are intentionally homeless and those who are not in priority need;

People who are owed a (homeless) duty by ANY local authority under section 190(2), 193(2) or 195(2) of the 1996 Act (or under section 65(2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985) or who are living in accommodation secured by ANY housing authority under section 192(3). The letter detailing the outcome of a homeless application will specify whether one of these sections applies;

Applicants accepted as homeless or threatened with homelessness under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 including Rent (Agricultural) Act Cases

Homeless applicants who refuse one suitable offer of accommodation will have their homeless points removed, and where it is determined that the offer of accommodation was suitable under the provisions of the Council's statutory homelessness obligations, the duty to them will be discharged. (This decision will be taken by RVBC)

Shared Facilities

Applicants in Hostel Type accommodation who are sharing facilities such as bathrooms and kitchens.

Split Families

Applicants who, not by choice are living in separate households due to the lack of suitable accommodation available, and cannot live together and wish to be re-housed and have not been accepted under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002). This includes those who may not have been living as part of the household at the time of the application, but whom it would be reasonable to expect to live with the applicant, as part of his/her household.

An application form should be completed by the household living in the worst property out of the households applying, to ensure the application is pointed correctly.

Work/Support

Applicants who are able to demonstrate the need to move nearer their place of work within Ribble Valley because they have secured or has permanent employment (over 16 hours) in the area (evidence of the employment must be provided). Also applicants who are able to demonstrate the need to move nearer local facilities or relatives, in order to receive, or give, support or care within the Borough.

Relationship Breakdown

Applicants who wish to live independently but who still reside with their ex partner/spouse following a relationship breakdown.

17.Relevant Date of Registration

When an applicant joins the Housing Register, the date their completed application is received will be their Relevant Date. A completed application is when the completed application form, proof of ID, proof of residency and reference have been received. If all information is not received within 3 months the application will be destroyed.

18.Exclusions from the Register

An applicant will be removed from the Housing Register in the following circumstances:

- They were found never to have been or have ceased to have been an eligible person;
- They have failed to respond to an application review within the specified time limit

The applicant will be notified in writing if the Allocations Service is intending to remove them from the Housing Register and will be given the reasons for removal. If the applicant subsequently gives reasons why they should not be removed from the Register a formal review of their case will be undertaken.

19.Serious Offenders

Serious offenders will not be eligible to join the Housing Register without an appropriate assessment in the first instance, which will take MAPPA (Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements) guidance into account, and will only be re-housed once a multi-agency risk assessment is carried out and there is suitable and safe accommodation available.

20.Application Renewals

In order to maintain the Housing Register as accurately as possible every applicant will be sent an invite to renew their application on a 6 month basis. Included in this will be a request to provide information on any changes in circumstances.

After a renewal request has been issued one reminder will be sent. If an application is not renewed within 28 days of the issue of the renewal letter and reminder the application will be cancelled and notification sent to the applicant.

If an application is cancelled any new application will have a new “Relevant Date” and will not normally be backdated.

Applicants will have the right to seek a review of a decision not to include on, or to remove from, the Housing Register.

21.Reviews

Applicants have the right to ask for a review of any decision made under the terms of this Policy with which they do not agree.

Requests for a review should normally be made:

1. In writing (a request over the phone or made verbally will need to be confirmed in writing). Please ask if you need assistance.
2. Within 21 days of the date of the decision being appealed
3. To the Housing Services Manager at RVH

22.Sharing information

The Council has agreed an information sharing protocol with RP’s working across Ribble Valley. The protocol establishes procedural arrangements for the exchange of information between the Council and RP’s for the purpose of allocations and nominations by the Council to the associations in respect of properties formerly owned by the Council. The protocol takes necessary account of the data protection legislation, health and safety legislation, human rights legislation, the law relating to defamation and the duty as to confidentiality of information. In particular, close regard is paid to the Data Protection Act 1998, which sets out 8 key principles that require personal data held to be:

- Processed fairly and lawfully
- Obtained only for specified legal
- Relevant to the purposes for which they are processed
- Accurate and up to date
- Kept no longer than necessary
- Processed in accordance with the rights of data subjects as detailed in the Act
- Subject to appropriate measures against unauthorised processing
- Not transferred outside the European Economic Area unless adequate controls are in place in the recipient country

These principles are strictly applied with very little statutory exception. Unless the consent of the person providing personal details is obtained, the Council can only lawfully share such information with the associations if there is a legal right to do so or it is justified as being in the public interest. All information held by the Council, which has been obtained for the purpose of, placing applicants on both the Housing Register and the Transfer Register are made available to the associations upon request. Applicants are made aware when they complete an application form that this information is held jointly between the partners. Nominations are made in accordance with Nomination Agreements.

All homeless applicants being considered for a housing association home are asked in writing to give their consent to the sharing of information. Any particularly sensitive information will be passed to an officer nominated by the associations who will be responsible for ensuring confidentiality and onward communication of the information. Specific agreement to share third party information will have to be obtained first and can only be done with the consent of the third part except for the purposes of the prevention or detection of crime, or the apprehension or prosecution of offenders.

23. Transfers and Mutual Exchanges

Applicants who already live in RVH or partner association's property in Ribble Valley will normally be regarded as "Transfer" applicants i.e. they are transferring from one Social Housing property to another.

These applications are known as "Transfer" applications and are treated as any other applications with a few exceptions:

1. RVH will occasionally, in the best interests of managing the Housing Stock, and by careful use of Transfers, maximize the number of lettings from an initial vacancy by giving Transfers priority over other Housing Register applicants.
2. The Council will allocate resources in accordance with the Communities and Local Government (CLG) Code of Guidance on Allocations and try to achieve a balance between existing tenants and new applicants
3. Applicants may not apply for a transfer until they have been a tenant of their existing accommodation for 12 months.

Management Transfers are defined as;

Cases considered to be urgent and serious enough to require an allocation to be made outside of the Council's normal policy and procedure are defined as follows:

- a) threats to life
- b) racial or homophobic harassment
- c) extreme anti-social behaviour
- d) vulnerable witnesses
- e) any other significant and/or immediate need for a move to more suitable, alternative accommodation this will include decant of tenants to allow work to be undertaken to their homes and to deal with person's left insitu following the death of the previous tenant. (succession)

Mutual Exchanges

A mutual exchange is where one tenant agrees with another tenant to swap homes. This means that the tenant 'assigns' their interest in a tenancy to another person. The tenancy agreement does not change and by exchanging you accept the responsibilities of the former tenant for the condition of the property. Following a Mutual Exchange RVH or other appropriate landlord will only carry out repairs that are it's legal responsibility they will not undertake repairs that are the responsibility of the tenant.

As a tenant of Ribble Valley Homes, you may exchange with

- Other Ribble Valley Homes Tenants
- Tenants of Local Authorities
- Tenants of other Registered Social Landlords
- Tenants of Charitable Housing Trusts

But not with tenants of private landlords.

You need to ask for our written permission to exchange and there are certain circumstances where we may withhold that permission.

24.Length of Tenancy Term Offered

If you are offered a tenancy with RVH it will initially be a Starter Tenancy for a period of 12 months this will convert to an Assured Tenancy (Lifetime Tenancy) on the anniversary of tenancy commencement providing the tenancy has been conducted in an appropriate manner. In certain circumstances the starter tenancy may be extended. The tenancies offered by other providers may vary and may include Fixed Term Tenancies. The type of tenancy you are offered will be made clear by the Provider concerned but refusal of a tenancy on the grounds that it is a fixed term tenancy would not be considered a reasonable refusal.

25.Exceptions

There are some exceptions to this Policy based upon Primary and Secondary Legislation, or upon locally agreed arrangements

- Part 6 of the 1996 Act does not apply to Mutual Exchanges within a Council's own stock, or via national schemes such as Homeswapper.
- The following cases are also exempted:
 1. Where a tenant dies (either secure or fixed term) and a succession takes place under The Housing Act 1985
 2. Where assignment takes place by way of mutual exchange under the Housing Act 1985
 3. Where a secure tenancy is granted by order of a Court under Matrimonial Causes Act 1973, or Matrimonial and Family Proceedings Act 1984, or Children Act 1989.
 4. Where an Introductory Tenancy becomes a secure tenancy

There are also some circumstances in which allocations may be made other than in accordance with the scheme detailed in this policy.

These include:

- Supported accommodation (i.e. accommodation in which support is provided as a condition of occupancy).
- Accommodation for keyworkers, as defined locally
- Lettings to joint tenants, where a tenancy is currently held by one of the joint tenants as a sole tenancy.
- Letting to a former tenant, where a joint tenancy has been terminated by one joint tenant and the other tenant wants to remain in the property (when this is in accordance with eligibility for the specific property type in question)
- Letting to someone who has lived in that property as the relative or carer of a tenant who has died, but there is no statutory right for that person to succeed to the tenancy
- Letting of a property for the purpose of decanting an existing Registered Provider tenant (e.g. where their current property requires work which cannot be carried out with the tenant in residence, or if the current property is scheduled for demolition).
- Letting of a property to an existing Registered Provider tenant, for management reasons. Such allocations can only be carried out with the prior approval of the Housing Services Manager.
- Letting of a property which is particularly suitable for an applicant by virtue of its design, construction or adaptation.
- Letting of a property to a person referred to the Council by the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) as a result of Domestic Violence.

- Lettings which are required in order to secure a 'chain letting' whereby RVH maximises use of the stock available to meet the most housing need.

Any decision to allocate accommodation outside of the policy will be signed off by the Housing Services Manager.

26. Allocating Affordable Rented Properties

The policy does not differentiate between working and non-working households in the allocation of Affordable Rent housing.

Affordable Rent will be accessed in terms of the priorities and requirements set out in the Allocations Policy this will allow RVH to maximise use of housing supply to meet need.

RVBC's Strategic Housing team will agree local letting plans for new developments where appropriate. Consideration will be given to establishing local lettings plans where there is a high level of affordable housing in a particular area. There may also be certain circumstances where a local letting plan might be used or agreed where Affordable Rent lettings will be prioritised for certain groups of applicants.

27. Local Lettings Policies/Schemes

Local lettings schemes will be designated by RP's following detailed consultation with the Council and an assessment of the impact. Once agreed these schemes will have their own allocations criteria. Local lettings schemes will be put in place for a specific area or estate and will be set up in response to particular local circumstances. They will include a clear commitment to equality of opportunity, the provision of clear and accurate information to applicants and an appeals mechanism.

The aim of local lettings schemes is to work towards more balance within local communities to result in outcomes that reflect the wider community and address issues such as child density and the proportion of households in employment in any one area or estate.

Working towards more balanced communities may mean housing a mix of:

- a) Different household types;
- b) Households of different ages and/or with children of different ages;
- c) People who are in paid employment and those who are not in paid employment;
- d) Families which have one parent and those which have two parents;
- e) Households that have previously had a tenancy and those that have not;
- f) Local connection to rurally isolated villages

The precise approach to be adopted will reflect the particular problems/issues of each area

Developing local lettings

Proposals for any local lettings scheme will need to set out the following:

- a) A clear definition of the issues backed up relevant evidence
- b) A method which is likely to address the issues
- c) Some assessment of possible adverse impacts
- d) A way in which the scheme can be monitored
- e) Proposals for reporting and reviewing the scheme

The mechanics of local lettings schemes can work in a variety of ways. For example:

- By-pass the mainstream rehousing policy and procedures altogether;
- Select some, or all, allocations from within the mainstream system, but change the weighting given to various aspects of housing need;
- Select some, or all, allocations from within the mainstream system, but introduce additional criteria for the scheme;
- Select from the mainstream system but according to locally set targets.

Once a local lettings scheme has been designated and the rules that will apply agreed, the Allocations Service will allocate all vacancies in the area or estate according to the agreed rules. The policies that apply to all other general needs properties will be suspended. A system for monitoring the impact of the scheme will be agreed and the results reviewed at meetings between RVBC and RVH

28.Pilot Schemes

From time to time the Council in conjunction with housing association partners will wish to pilot certain schemes to make best use of the social housing stock. Full details of any current scheme will be published on the Council's website.

29.Reciprocals

Other local authorities sometimes request rehousing on a reciprocal basis. The following criteria will be applied:

- The nominated person would be at risk in their present property, and
- The referring organisation is unable to intervene to mitigate the risk or to house the nominated people themselves.

Once accepted for housing assistance will be on the following basis:

- The applicant will be offered time limited priority on the waiting list
- The Allocations Service will have nomination rights to the resulting vacancy or another property of similar type or size;
- The accommodation will be of a similar size and type to that occupied at present;
- The offer of accommodation will be at a safe distance to the present accommodation.

30.Withdrawal of Offers

In the following very exceptional circumstances, offers may be withdrawn:

- Where there has been a change in the applicants circumstances
- Following verification the applicant is not eligible for the property; or
- Where an offer of accommodation could put a vulnerable person at risk of any harm
- Where an applicant has knowingly or otherwise provided information that is false and/or misleading

Where the termination of tenancy has been withdrawn

Match of household type to property size

The following table indicates the type/size of accommodation for which applicants can expect to qualify. On occasions applicants may be offered a property that is larger than their housing needs require this will usually be where there is insufficient demand from people who need that size of accommodation. Any offer will be subject to a financial assessment to ensure the applicant can afford the higher rent associated with the larger property.

| | |
|--|---|
| Single person | Bedsit, studio or one bedroom accommodation |
| Couple | One bedroom |
| Two adults, not living together as a couple e.g. if an adult has a medical need for a carer to live with them, on a full time basis, and this carer is not their partner. Proof will be required. | Two Bedrooms |
| Adult(s) with one dependent child | Two bedrooms |
| Adult(s) with two dependent children of the same sex (up to 16 years) or opposite sex but aged under 10 years | Two bedrooms |
| Adult(s) with 2 dependent children of opposite sex aged over 10 years | Three bedrooms |
| Adult(s) with three dependent children | Three bedrooms |
| Adult(s) with four or more dependent children | Three or four bedrooms |

Additional Criteria

Priority for Ground floor accommodation will normally be given to someone who requires level access on the grounds of age, disability, medical need or children under the age of 8.

Applicants who need adaptations will only be offered a property where the adaptation is in situ. Exceptional cases will be considered at the discretion of the Housing Services Manager where there is a very urgent need to move and the risk to the applicant to remain in their current accommodation is significant, and where a move into a standard ground floor property will significantly reduce the risk

In order to be eligible for bedroom spaces for children, the adult(s) must demonstrate that the child(ren) live(s) with them on a full time, permanent basis. Proof of Child Benefit will be the determining factor. On occasions when there is an excess supply of larger properties an offer may be made to someone who has part time access to children subject to a financial assessment.

When we have registered your application we will advise you what size of properties you will be considered for.

31. Additional Notes

A copy of this Policy, or a summary, is available from Ribble Valley Borough Council offices or via the website at www.ribbonvalley.gov.uk

Advice and assistance on the Housing Register and how to secure accommodation is available free of charge from Ribble Valley Borough Council, Council Offices, Church Walk, Clitheroe BB7 2RA or by telephoning 01200 425111

The Council will provide a draft and consult on the details of any significant changes to this policy. All stakeholders will be consulted, including (but not exclusively) Registered Provider (RP) partners, applicants, and representatives of statutory and voluntary agencies.

The policy will be reviewed on an annual basis and will be reported to Ribble Valley Borough Council's Health and Housing Committee.

How Points are Awarded

| Points category | Points Awarded | Reason/Circumstances for Award |
|--|------------------|---|
| Medical Points | 0-25 | Awarded in bands of 5 following completion of medical assessment form (see note below) |
| Overcrowding | 10 points | Awarded for each bedroom short based on bedroom criteria detailed in Policy |
| Underoccupation | 10 | One bedroom excess and living in Social Housing Tenancy |
| | 30 | Two bedroom excess and living in Social Housing Tenancy |
| | 50 | Three bedroom excess and living in Social Housing Tenancy |
| Homeless Points | 10 | Homeless at Home (allocated by RVBC) |
| | 15 | LA Statutory Duty Exists (allocated by RVBC) 5 additional points will be awarded every 3 months up to a maximum of 12 months- 20 points |
| Children above ground floor | 5 | Awarded where a child under 8 is living in accommodation above ground floor level |
| 1 bed general needs to 1 bed sheltered | 10 | To free up higher demand properties |
| Move on From Supported Accommodation/Care Leavers | 10 | Awarded where applicant needs to move on from supported living into independence. |
| Emergency Allocations Priority | 10 | As detailed in policy and will only be awarded in conjunction with RVBC |
| Harrasment | 10 | Specific evidence based circumstances as detailed in policy |
| Disrepair | 0-15 | Awarded in bands of 5 following visit by property services and housing services |
| Member of HM Forces within the last 5 ears | 10 | This is not awarded where 10 residency points apply |
| Single Independence points | 5 | Young people wishing to move on from their family home |
| Lacking Facilities | 20 | No fixed abode applicants – evidence required. |
| Shared Facilities | 10 | Hostel type accommodation sharing kitchen or bathroom facilities |
| Split Families | 5 | Awarded where families who would reasonably e expected to live together cannot due to their housing circumstances |
| Local Connection - Residency | 0-10 | In bands of 5 after 12 months and 10 after 5 years, break of 12 months residency may be allowed in certain circumstances without loss of points |
| Work/Support | 10 | Evidence required e.g. proof of employment/need to give or receive support |
| Relationship Breakdown | 5 | Awarded following relationship breakdown and the same house still being occupied |
| Age Points | 10 | Awarded after the age of 70 |

The two crucial factors that are looked for in any awards of medical conditions are:

1. The physical link between the identified medical complaint and the current housing accommodation/situation.
2. That there is a realistic expectation that the identified medical condition would improve if alternative, more suitable accommodation was made available.

The following list covers some of the main factors, which can be reflected in a points award under medical considerations.

1. Mobility - Inability to manage stairs/control-heating (e.g. put on extra clothing or adjust fire). size of accommodation, garden.
2. Applicants or tenants who are more or less confined to their existing accommodation, or where they depend on others to enable them to leave the dwelling.
3. Where present accommodation is causing the applicant's mental or physical disability, which could be overcome by a move to more suitable accommodation.

The approach in this instance is to focus on how the applicant or tenant's circumstances could be improved by a move to alternative accommodation - points will be awarded accordingly.