



Allocations Policy- Summary of proposed changes



Bucks Home Choice

- Buckinghamshire Council operates a choice-based lettings process for social housing.
- Properties which are available are advertised on the Bucks Home Choice website weekly, and residents log into their account and can express a preference on the property known as bidding.
- Once the bidding closes, the Choice Based Lettings team put forward nominations for the property to the Registered Providers based on the allocations policy which sits behind the process.



Assessment Criteria Key Areas

- Income
- Dependents
- Physical and mental health issues
- Residency
- At risk groups e.g. domestic violence victims



What is the Allocations Policy

- The policy used to assess housing priority need for social housing
- The assessment criteria used for applications to qualify to join Bucks Home Choice Register (social housing register) and the reference policy for officers to make decisions on housing offers
- The Council is not a stock owning authority, so this process and policy is run in conjunction with Registered Providers (who become the social landlords)
- It was last updated in 2022



Why update the policy?

- To reduce the overall numbers on the list
 - Tightening eligibility requirements
 - Removal of accounts which are not properly engaged with the bidding process
- To ensure that it reflects the latest legislation and is legally compliant
- To enable better outcomes for bidding for priority applicants (i.e. care leavers and other vulnerable groups)
- Align the policy to a county-wide footprint



Proposed Changes

Create a Buckinghamshire wide housing area

1) Remove legacy district boundaries

In April 2020, Buckinghamshire Council became a single unitary council, replacing Buckinghamshire County Council and Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, South Bucks and Wycombe District Council.

The proposal is to reflect this in the housing allocations policy by removing the legacy district areas and instead creating a Buckinghamshire wide housing area within which local connection will be determined.

Currently, an applicant can only qualify to register for the legacy district areas to which their local connection applies. For example, an applicant with a local connection to the legacy Wycombe District area will at present only qualify to register for rehousing in the legacy Wycombe area, and not in the rest of the county.

The proposed change to remove legacy district boundaries will result in an applicant's local connection being assessed against the whole Buckinghamshire area. This would mean that an applicant with a local connection to anywhere in the Buckinghamshire Council area will automatically qualify to register for rehousing anywhere in that area. For example, an applicant living in High Wycombe will be able to bid on properties advertised in other parts of the County.



Tightening Residency Definitions

- 1) Increase the number of years to qualify for residency from two to five years for all applicants on the housing register

There are consistently more people on the housing register than there are houses available, so to help ensure that the available houses are going to the people who need them most, the proposal is to increase the number of years an applicant must have a local connection to the Buckinghamshire Council area in order to qualify for the housing register from two years to five years. This would result in a person needing to have lived or worked within Buckinghamshire for five years preceding the date of their application to the housing register. There will always need to be exceptions to the local residency requirements, and details about who is on the exceptions list can be found in Section 2.3.3 of the proposed allocations policy.

- 2) Introduce residency requirements for over 55s with no local connection to Buckinghamshire

The current policy allows applicants over the age of 55 with no local connection to the Buckinghamshire Council area to qualify to the register for sheltered housing specifically for over 55s. The proposal is to introduce residency requirements for this group of applicants to ensure that those qualifying for over 55s specific housing have a local connection to the Buckinghamshire Council area and that the sheltered housing available is allocated to residents of Buckinghamshire.



Ensuring the policy supports success on the register for target housing priority groups

1) Strengthen the priority for households in temporary accommodation

The proposed change is to strengthen the priority banding of households placed in temporary accommodation by Buckinghamshire Council to help this priority group to move on from Council-funded facilities. This change is intended to reduce the time homeless households stay in temporary accommodation. This would help decrease the overall need for temporary accommodation and reduce the cost to the Council.

2) Strengthen the priority for households that have been assessed as homeless and are not in temporary accommodation

This proposal looks to strengthen the priority banding of households that have been assessed as homeless to enable this priority group to have a greater chance of being allocated housing through the Bucks Home Choice register. This change is intended to increase the number of these households being allocated housing instead of staying in temporary accommodation. This would help decrease the overall need for temporary accommodation and reduce the cost to the Council.



- 3) Redefine the requirements for households under-occupying social housing tenancies that are willing to downsize

The proposal is to allow households that are under-occupying their social housing tenancy (in terms of number of bedrooms) to deviate from the assessed bedroom need where that household is willing to relocate to a smaller property. For example, this change would allow a single person or couple sized household that is occupying a property with three bedrooms to downsize to a property with two bedrooms.

This change is intended to result in a greater number of applicants relocating to smaller properties, releasing the larger properties for allocation to priority households that have that assessed need.

- 4) Clarify when the Council may use automatic bidding for properties and bidding households on the register.

This proposed change to the policy would allow an application to be set to automatic bidding in the software where appropriate. This means that the choice-based lettings system would automatically place bids on advertised properties that match the applicant's requirements, such as bedroom need, type of property and floor level requirements in identified cases.

The policy would be amended to clarify that this can be used in cases of priority applicants, and/or applicants who request or otherwise need support in bidding.



5) Clarify when the Council may allocate a property directly to an applicant

The proposal is to include previously homeless households placed in temporary accommodation in the list of applicants that the Council reserves the right to directly let a property to. A direct allocation would only be offered to this priority group in certain circumstances. These changes are intended to reduce the time households spend in temporary accommodation, help decrease the overall need for temporary accommodation, and reduce the cost to the Council (for temporary accommodation).

6) Revise bedroom standards for households with children over the age of 18

This proposal is to make changes to how bedroom standards are applied to households with children over the age of 18. The proposed change would allow children over the age of 18 to remain eligible as part of the household and be factored into the household's bedroom standard if they might reasonably be expected to reside with the main applicant.



Summary of current register banding definitions

Band	Households included in the Band
Band A	<p>The Highest Priority Band</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those unable to return home due to a health issue/disability, or hospital discharge • Households facing statutory overcrowding (including needing 2 or more additional bedrooms) • Serious safeguarding issues as assessed by a safeguarding board
Band B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Households in supported housing needing 'move-on' permanent housing • Care leavers • Household where current housing has a severe impact on health (includes unsanitary or unsatisfactory conditions as per a council assessment e.g. damp and mould) • Households in overcrowding with an additional bedroom need
Band C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Households where current housing has an adverse impact on health • Households in need of assistance e.g. learning disability, mental health grounds currently receiving a care package from the council • Applicants discharged from the military in the last 5 years due to a serious injury
Band D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Households who have been assessed as either 'Homeless' and/or in Temporary Accommodation • Singles/couple sharing with no dependent children (where property is not overcrowded) or living in HMO • Singles with no fixed address or verified rough sleeper • Singles/couple over 55 who do not fall into higher bands seeking over 55 accommodation • Applicants in armed forces who do not fall into higher bands or left MOD accommodation due to death of a spouse
Band E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All other households which have been assessed as being owed a housing duty or not, but do not meet additional priority qualifications as set out in the higher bands • Households assessed as 'intentionally homeless'

Full banding definitions can be found at - <https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/housing-and-benefits/housing/housing-strategies/buckinghamshire-council-housing-allocations-scheme-updated-april-2022/priority-bands/>

