

them to renew their application. If they fail to do so and if no reply is received by the deadline given the application will be cancelled.

12.2 Overcrowding

Applicants who are overcrowded would normally fit into one of the following two categories: lacking one room, or, lacking two rooms or more.

Overcrowding bands will be assessed by calculating the number of rooms needed (see table at 13.1) compared to the number of rooms the applicants and their household have use of. Bathrooms and kitchens are not included in the assessment.

Under this policy, the council assumes that a single person with their own bedroom has an adequate number of rooms whereas a couple would need access to a living room, whether sole use or shared. Households with children are assessed as needing sole access to a living room plus the appropriate number of bedrooms.

For example:

A couple with two girls aged 4 and 5 need two bedrooms and a living room, so need three rooms. If they live in a one bedroom flat with one reception room then they have a total of two rooms. They need three rooms but only have two rooms so are lacking one room.

A couple with a boy aged 5 and a girl aged 10 need three bedrooms and a reception room so need four rooms. If they live in a one bedroom flat with one reception room then they have a total of two rooms. They need four rooms but only have two rooms so are lacking two rooms.

Severe overcrowding will only be considered if the applicant is lacking a minimum of 3 rooms plus there are other factors in the property affecting the overcrowding problem further. This will be assessed by the Housing Options Officers. Applicants applying for

priority on the grounds of severe overcrowding will firstly be asked to look for alternative more suitable accommodation with the assistance of the Housing Service.

The priority given to households living in an overcrowded situation reflects the detrimental impacts including but not limited to stress, strain on relationships, disrupted sleep, lack of space for essential possessions, impact on schoolwork, increased susceptibility to infection. For this reason, where priority is already given for overcrowding, additional priority will not be given for the same issues under another priority ground e.g. medical or welfare.

12.3 Medical grounds

Where an applicant or a member of their household has a medical condition or disability that is affected by their housing circumstances, they will be asked to complete a medical self-assessment form. This may be referred to the council's Independent Medical Adviser if the Officer needs more advice or guidance.

The Independent Medical Advisor may also advise on any other re-housing need such as a need for ground floor accommodation or adaptations.

The council will review all advice and information provided from the customer or other professional involved in their care. It is the Housing Officer's final decision whether or not to award priority on medical grounds. When doing so they will look at:

- how the current accommodation is causing or affecting the condition
- how social housing would improve it
- the severity of the effect the housing is having on the condition
- the duration of the condition and any expected recovery time
- the severity in comparison to housing needs of other applicants

- what other housing options are viable that could improve the situation
- a comparison to the awards made to other applicants on medical grounds.

Circumstances that will not be considered for medical assessment include:

- pregnancy
- overcrowding
- minor illnesses (e.g. colds/flu)
- poor conditions in the home such as damp
- temporary disability such as broken limb
- people who are adequately housed

12.4 Unsatisfactory housing conditions

The Housing Officers will assess whether conditions are considered to be unsatisfactory in consultation with the council's Environmental Health Service. This would normally be when an applicant does not have use of a bathroom or kitchen or has no amenities such as heating or water. Sharing facilities with other residents, having no garden or living in a flat will not be considered as unsatisfactory housing conditions.

The priority given to households living in unsatisfactory housing conditions reflects the detrimental impacts including but not limited to discomfort, stress, strain on relationships, increased susceptibility to infection. For this reason, where priority is already given for unsatisfactory housing conditions, additional priority will not be given for the same issues under another priority ground e.g. medical or welfare.

Where the council receives a report of unsatisfactory housing conditions, the council will work with the landlord and tenant as appropriate in order to ensure that the accommodation is made satisfactory and the housing application will be reassessed.

12.5 Other homeless

Applicants who have a homelessness application with Watford Borough Council who have been placed into temporary accommodation under section 188(1) (interim duty to accommodate) or 188(3) (discretionary duty to accommodate) will qualify as other homeless. These applicants will be placed in Band D until a homelessness duty is accepted or rejected, irrespective of whether factors apply which would otherwise result in a higher priority were they not occupying temporary accommodation as it is already recognised that they need to move and the accommodation is temporary.

Applicants whom the council does not have a statutory homeless duty towards, but who are in one of Watford's partner organisation hostels will also qualify as other homeless.

These hostels are:

Watford YMCA

GROW

Watford New Hope Trust cluster flats and houses (not night shelter)

HPCHA young person accommodation in Watford.

Watford Women's Refuge

If an applicant from a direct access hostels is successful in bidding, checks will be made with the hostel provider to ensure they are ready to move on, have a clear rent account and the correct support is in place. Without this they may be made non active, see 8.6

12.6 Social and welfare needs

Social and welfare needs will be assessed by the Housing Officers in the Homelessness Prevention and Options Team or by the housing association where this is within a formal agreement with the council. Cases will be considered when there is an identified housing need not addressed in the banding assessment criteria. Examples of these will include:

- Children leaving local authority care nominated by Children's Services (Herts CC)

- Households who need to move for emergency reasons not covered in the assessment criteria.
- Nominations from approved local hostels actively involved with the multi-agency Prevention of Homelessness Consortium (POsH)
- People who may represent a risk to the public
- People who are particularly vulnerable and/or occupying institutional accommodation: who could live independently with the necessary support, but could not obtain settled accommodation by their own efforts
- Exceptional circumstances relating to giving or receiving care and support
- Nominees through the National Witness Mobility Scheme
- Households who need to move for safety reasons, away from harassment or imminent danger
- Management moves required by housing associations for tenants in Watford where there is an urgent situation and the landlord does not maintain their own housing transfer lists
- Retiring or Redundant former or current Watford Borough Council Staff in Tied Accommodation (Service Occupiers) where TUPE provisions have applied (for former staff).

12.7 Under occupation and releasing properties

Social housing tenants living in the Watford Borough or where Watford Borough Council has nomination rights to the property will be given priority where they are:

- under occupying family sized accommodation
- releasing significantly adapted property
- occupying one bedroom or bedsit general needs properties who wish to move into sheltered housing
- occupying ground floor flats who would be willing to move to flats on a higher floor

12.8 Composite Need

Applicants who have two reasons to be in the same band, where at least one reason is overcrowding or medical need, will be given composite need and move to the next band up. However, composite need will not be awarded where the grounds for overcrowding priority and medical priority duplicate each other and there are not separate factors to consider.

12.9 Sufficient Resources

If an applicant owns a property or has an interest in a property, they will not qualify to join the housing register.

If an applicant has sufficient resources to resolve their own housing need, either through renting or buying a suitable property, the applicant may not qualify to join the Housing Register.

Before making the decision that an applicant has sufficient resources to resolve their housing need the Housing Officer will complete a full financial assessment considering their income, savings, financial commitments, outgoings, family size and personal circumstances. A housing options assessment will also be completed e.g to identify whether the existing property can be made suitable through adaptation.

Each case will be considered on its own merits however the following circumstances will trigger a financial assessment.

- Household capital or savings of £16,000 or more
- Any household with a gross income at or above the level required for low cost home ownership
- Total household net income equal to or greater than four times the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rental level of a suitable property annually (with the 1 bed LHA rate being used to assess the income of single people including those who are under 35).

Applicants who do not qualify to join the housing register on these grounds will be notified in writing with the following information:

- the reasons for the decision
- their right to request a review of the decision
- any circumstances under which the council recommends they could reapply in the future

12.10 Deliberately worsened circumstances

If the council has reasonable evidence to suggest that an applicant has deliberately worsened their circumstances or failed to take reasonable action to improve their circumstances and as a result has gained extra priority on the Housing Register, the applicant will be placed in the priority band they held or would have held before their circumstances changed.

Applicants who have their band reduced will be notified in writing with the following information:

- the reasons for the decision
- their right to request a review of their banding
- the timescale after which their application will be reviewed and what will be taken into account in the decision
- the options they have available to them in the meantime and what the council expects them to do in terms of working to improve their housing situation e.g. looking for suitable accommodation in the private sector, registering for the council's HomeLet Scheme, saving for a deposit or seeking assistance from the Credit Union

The review period will be set on a case by case basis, usually at 1 year from the date of change of circumstances. This is with the intention of allowing sufficient time for the applicant to demonstrate that they have followed the advice of the Housing Service to source alternative housing options.

Examples of worsening circumstances include:

- An applicant moving from accommodation that was available for their occupation, that was suitable or more suitable for them than the accommodation they have moved into, and which it was reasonable for them to have continued to occupy
- Homeowners who have transferred their property to another family member within the last five years from the date of their application

- Applicants who have disposed of or deprived themselves of assets which could have reasonably been used to secure housing within the last five years from the date of application
- Applicants who have moved family members or others into a property unsuitable for their needs, when suitable accommodation was being occupied by them elsewhere
- Applicants who have rented a property in the private rented sector too small for their needs
- Applicants who have chosen not to access reasonable and affordable accommodation

12.11 Utilising other housing options

Applicants will be expected to consider other housing options to improve their housing situation without reliance on social housing. The council will support these applicants by providing advice and assistance, guidance on benefit entitlement and how to find housing and in some cases assistance through the rent deposit guarantee scheme or similar incentive schemes.

If it is felt that an applicant does have other options available that they are not pursuing or if an applicant will not cooperate with the Housing Options Officers, their priority on the Housing Register may be reduced. This will be decided by the Housing Options Officers.

Transfer applicants have been excluded from this rule as it would be poor advice to encourage them to give up the security of their tenancy. However if they wish to consider other housing options they will be fully supported.

Applicants who have their band reduced will be notified in writing as at 12.11

The review period will be set on a case by case basis, usually at 1 year from the date of change of circumstances. This is with the intention of allowing sufficient time for the applicant to demonstrate that they have followed the advice of the Housing Service to source alternative housing options.

12.12 Residency Connection

Applicants may be considered as having a residency connection to Watford Borough Council, if one of the following criteria applies.

Applicants must:

- Be living in Watford now and have lived five years out of the last six years in the borough of Watford or
- Live in temporary accommodation outside the borough, placed there by Watford Borough Council and would otherwise meet the residency criteria or
- Have been placed in temporary accommodation outside the borough by a statutory agency and would otherwise have met the residency criteria e.g. care leavers placed outside the borough who would otherwise have met the residency criteria

Applicants who are accepted as statutorily homeless by the council who also fulfil the residency criteria will be placed in Band C if/when they apply to join the register. All other eligibility and qualifying criteria will need to be satisfied in order for them to join the register.

Any periods of residency either as a result of a placement by a different Local Authority's homelessness service or by a statutory agency where Watford is not the applicant's originating authority will not be considered towards residency connection.

Residence in hostel accommodation or similar accommodation in Watford where Watford is not the applicant's originating authority, will not be considered towards residency connection.

In order for a residency connection to give an applicant priority for a nomination it must apply and be relevant at the point in time that they bid for and are offered a property.

12.13 Residency connection exceptions

An exception will apply for tenants of a registered provider whose existing home is within the borough of Watford or where Watford Borough Council will have nomination rights to any resulting vacancy.

An exception will apply for applicants who are accepted as statutorily homeless by the council but do not fulfil the residency criteria and they will be placed in Band D if/when they apply to join the register. They will be moved up to Band C if/when they fulfil the criteria and time spent in temporary accommodation will count towards fulfilling the required residency criteria. All other eligibility and qualifying criteria will need to be satisfied in order for them to join the register.

An exception will apply for households nominated through the cross partner pool as part of arrangements with Herts Choice Homes, or where Watford Borough Council is a signatory to an agreed working protocol regarding specific client groups and where granting residency connection is part of the agreed protocol.

An exception will also apply for cases referred through the National Witness Mobility Scheme

An exception will apply in accordance with the Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012 which state that local authority allocation schemes must not disqualify members of the Armed Forces and former Services Personnel on the grounds that they do not have a residency connection where they are:

- serving in the regular forces or who have served in the regular forces within five years of the date of their application for an allocation of housing under Part 6 of the 1996 Act;
- recently ceased, or will cease to be entitled, to reside in accommodation provided by the Ministry of Defence following the death of that person's spouse or civil partner where—
- (i) the spouse or civil partner has served in the regular forces; and
- (ii) their death was attributable (wholly or partly) to that service; or
- (c) is serving or has served in the reserve forces and who is suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is attributable (wholly or partly) to that service.

An exception will apply for households who qualify to move under the Right to Move regulations which were introduced in April 2015. An existing social housing tenant household who:-

- Needs to move because a member of the household works in the local authority district or needs to move to take up an offer of work or an apprenticeship.
- Needs to move for these reasons because they will experience hardship if they do not.

A household must satisfy all of the following in order to qualify for a lack of local connection to be waived under Right to Move regulations:-

- The household must live outside the Herts Choice Homes area (Hertsmere, St Albans, Three Rivers, Watford and Welwyn Hatfield), Dacorum and including any area within reasonable travelling distance as the availability of effective public transport networks will facilitate commuting to Watford for employment.
- The household must be a tenant of a social landlord and must not have been in breach of their tenancy.

- A household must be in long-term employment in Watford, or must have received a definite offer of long-term employment in Watford. The employment must be exception to Watford e.g. working in a local establishment such the local hospital or college. In assessing, we will consider the nature of the work and whether similar opportunities would be available nearer the household's current home.

Proof of the household's tenure and employment status will be requested and considered

13. Eligibility for different property types

13.1 Bedroom Entitlement

The table below indicates the criteria that will be used for assessing overcrowding and the number of bedrooms that an applicant can bid for. This assumes that where there are 2 reception rooms in a property, 1 will be used as bedroom accommodation:

HOUSEHOLD SIZE	NUMBER OF BEDROOMS
Single person (including where expecting first child)	Bedsit /1 bedroom
Single person with staying access to children	Bedsit/1bedroom
For the following, access to one living room whether sole or shared plus:	
Couple	1 bedroom
For the following, sole use of one living room plus:	
Parent (s) plus 1 child	2 bedrooms
Parent (s) plus 2 children, same sex (where under 16 or one or more is over 16 but the age gap is less than 7 years)	2 bedrooms
Parent (s) plus 2 children of opposite sex (under 10 years)	2 bedrooms
Parent (s) plus 2 children of opposite sex (over 10 years)	3 bedrooms
Parent (s) plus 2 children, same sex where there is an age gap of 7 years or more and one child is 16 or over	3 bedrooms

HOUSEHOLD SIZE	NUMBER OF BEDROOMS
Parent (s) plus 3 children	3 or 4 bedrooms depending on ages and gender
Parent (s) plus 4 children or more	3 or 4 bedrooms depending on ages (limited number of 4 bedroom properties)

All properties that are advertised through the CBL scheme will be clearly labelled to identify the household size eligible to bid for each property.

The council will assess the size of home each applicant requires according to their household size, composition and any other special considerations. This is the assessed size (see below).

The council will assess the size and particular features of the home and set a minimum or maximum occupancy which may include criteria about the amount of children to be accommodated in order to make best use of stock.

The assessed size takes account of the following:

- A single parent household is entitled to the same size of accommodation as a two parent household with the same number of children
- For households that include a pregnant woman, the baby will not count towards bedroom entitlement until it is born
- Two children are expected to share the same room where they are:
 - Same sex unless at least 1 is over 16 and there is a 7 year plus age gap

- Opposite sex and under 10 years of age
- A bedsit flat is appropriate for a single person household.
- The assessed size does not include children who are not permanently resident within an applicant's household on a full-time basis
- Households including related or unrelated adults who have been assessed as needing to reside together (see 9.2) will be individually assessed e.g. dependent adults or applicants with carers.

Where an additional bedroom may be required for exceptional circumstances, the council will make an assessment to determine whether this can be accommodated.

These exceptional circumstances will be limited to:

- Medical conditions or disabilities caused or made worse by sharing a bedroom or not having an additional bedroom
- The need for a live in carer which has been verified by appropriate professional agencies
- The need to implement a local lettings policy in order to achieve a mix of tenants in a certain housing development or location

The assessment of exceptional circumstances will take into account:

- Whether there is a verified need for an additional bedroom supported by appropriate independent agencies

- Whether there is a proven link between the issues identified and the property size
- Whether a larger property would be affordable to the household in the long term
- Whether a larger property is likely to become available within a reasonable timescale and whether this could be justified bearing in mind pressures on properties of that size
- Whether there are alternative solutions for the household e.g. independent arrangements for some family members
- Whether there are risks to the sustainability of a particular development or location which justify the implementation of a local lettings policy relating to bedroom entitlement

13.2 Ground Floor Flats

Priority for ground floor flats may be given to applicants with medical problems who require this type of accommodation and who have been awarded urgent or high medical priority or who need disabled adaptations to their home. If this is the case it will be explained in the property advert.

13.3 Applicants who require an adapted property

Where an applicant has been assessed by the council's Independent Medical Adviser as requiring an adapted property, the application will be flagged so that it can later be identified. When a property with adaptations becomes available to let it will be advertised with the details of the adaptations. Applicants flagged as needing an adapted property will be given priority should they bid. If an applicant successfully bids for an adapted property however upon viewing the property it becomes apparent that the property is not suitable and further adaptations would be needed the landlord will make an assessment as to whether or not an offer can be made. HCH will be working closely with local Occupational Therapist teams to assess the need of applicants and to ensure those in the highest need are identified and that properties are advertised appropriately with the correct information.

Adapted properties may be advertised in the cross partner pool in order to make the most use of the adaptations. As this is done on a voluntary basis and not part of the 5% cross selected randomly the priority will be as follows.

1. Applicants from Watford's housing register who need the adaptations
2. Applicants for other councils' housing registers who need the adaptations
3. Applicants from Watford's housing register who do not need adaptations
4. Applicants from other councils' housing register who do not need adaptations.

13.4 Housing List Types

The majority of properties will be advertised for both Homeseekers and Transfers. There may be occasions where properties are advertised for one specific group. This could be to meet local nominations agreements or service level agreements, meet local lettings policies to help sustainable communities, or to ensure regular movement by transfer applicants to the supply of properties by creating a chain of moves.

The council will monitor how many properties are ring-fenced for a particular housing register type.

14. How Nominations are made

With the exception of specialist housing and properties to be let directly by a housing association, all properties will be advertised through the HCH scheme. Applicants will need to bid (express an interest) in any properties they wish to be considered for. Advertised properties will have details of who is eligible to bid for the property. If applicants are not eligible their bid will not be considered. By advertising properties and inviting applicants to apply, the council is enabling them to choose where they want to live.

14.1 Bid types

The majority of bids will be made by the applicant. However in certain circumstances the following may apply.

- **Assisted Bidding.** This is where an applicant may be vulnerable and no third party has been identified to assist them. The council (or Housing Association partner) will take responsibility for assisting the applicant to place bids. The applicant is not obliged to accept any bids made through supported bidding.
- **Active Bidding.** Active bidding is where the council (or Housing Association partner) will bid on behalf of the applicant. E.g. a final offer for a statutory homeless household or a formal offer for a succession case.
- **Approved Bidding.** This will apply for sensitive cases, witness protection or fleeing domestic violence. The applicant may still bid themselves but the council will need to approve the bid as appropriate.

14.2 Time limited bidding

All priority band A (Urgent Housing Need) cases and some categories of priority band B (Very High Housing Need) will be subject to time-limited bidding. This means applicants will be given a time frame for how long this priority will stand. This is because the council acknowledges the urgency of the situation, both for the applicant and for the council. All priorities will be monitored. The Housing Officer will review each case on its own merits, and a decision will be made as to whether:

- The applicant should lose their priority status if the circumstances under which they were placed in the band no longer apply. The applicant may then be re-assessed and placed in a lower band
- The council may actively bid on the applicant's behalf. This is referred to as assisted bidding.

- The applicant's priority may be extended with a further review date

In conducting the review the council will take into consideration the questions posed below.

- Have there been any properties advertised that would have met the applicant's needs?
- If so, did the applicant apply for them?
- Why were any bids unsuccessful?
- Did the applicant receive the appropriate support and help in accessing the choice based letting scheme?
- Did the applicant's circumstances remain the same?

14.3 Homeless Households

Applicants who are accepted by the council as being statutorily unintentionally homeless and in priority need will be given two months from acceptance to bid for accommodation. After that the council will make bids on the applicant's behalf, through assisted bidding. They will then receive **one offer** of suitable accommodation, taking account of all the relevant circumstances of the applicant.

14.4 Shortlisting

When nominating to a general needs property the following factors will be taken into account:

1. Property Eligibility. Does the applicant's household fit the requirements of the property as outlined in the advert?

2. Priority band on the Housing Needs Register

3. Priority date. Where more than one applicant meets the preceding criteria, the applicant with the earliest priority date will be nominated to the accommodation

4. Where two applicants have met the preceding criteria and have the same applicable date, the property will be offered to the applicant for whom the property is considered most suitable, taking all other factors into consideration. This decision will be made by the Housing Officer.

Registered Providers may hold additional eligibility criteria. Details can be found within the policy of the specific Registered Provider.

See Appendix C for a list of registered providers operating in Watford and their websites where their allocation policies can be found. If you are unable to find the policy you are looking for, please contact the registered provider or the council's Housing Supply Team.

The landlord of the property will decide how many people they require to be shortlisted. This will normally be between 3 to 5 applicants. All those on the shortlist may be invited to view the property. Viewings will only be able to take place during the time specified by the Registered Provider. This saves time should the highest priority bidder not want the property. A viewing is not a guarantee of an offer of accommodation.

Should an applicant be offered the property the landlord will give them a timescale in which the applicant must notify them whether or not they wish to accept or refuse the offer (this will usually be 24 hours). If the applicant does not reply within the set timescale it will be assumed they are refusing the offer.

14.5 Sub-Regional Choice Based Lettings

As part of the Herts Choice Homes Partnership, the five local authority partners can advertise properties on a voluntary basis that all applicants on the five local authority Housing Registers would be able to bid for. This may be if, for example, there is a property with significant disabled adaptations and no suitable applicants within the borough. Applicants on the council's Housing Register can therefore bid for properties advertised by Watford Borough Council and also properties which are part of the Herts Choice Homes cross partner pool.

If a property is in the cross partner pool the nominations policy of the Local Authority with nominating rights to the property will be applied when setting eligibility and when short listing.

For more details on using the HCH scheme please refer to the HCH website

14.6 Home Visits

The council will complete robust investigations into applicants' circumstances, including home visits.

The council works to a very tight deadline when providing nominees to a housing association. If that deadline is not met the council may lose the nomination right. As social housing is in such short supply and high demand the council can not risk losing a nomination. Therefore home visits may be conducted at short notice and applicants will have to ensure they are available. If an applicant is not available or refuses a home visit this will affect their chances of being offered accommodation.

Applicants may be asked to bring original documents to the Town Hall for checking in addition to copies provided at the home visit.

If an applicant does not have any settled accommodation, they will be visited at the care of address/location provided.

14.7 Applicants subject to multi-agency public protection panel arrangements

Housing applications received from the Multi Agency Public Protection Panel will be considered by the Homeless Prevention and Options Team for priority under welfare grounds and suitability for the housing options on offer and, if successful, will be subject to approved bidding, as detailed above.

14.8 Withdrawal of offers

In the following very exceptional circumstances, the Registered Provider (RP) may withdraw an offer of accommodation:

- Where there has been a change in the applicant's circumstances
- Following verification, the applicant is not eligible for the property or their band changes
- Where an error has been made in the advertising criteria
- Where an offer of accommodation could put a vulnerable applicant at risk of harm
- Where an applicant is not eligible under the Housing Association's Letting Policy

14.9 Refusing an offer of accommodation

See 8.7

14.10 Local Lettings Plan

The council, in partnership with Registered Providers, may produce a local letting plan where a deviation from the usual nomination criteria can be justified and there is

evidence to support this . These plans will outline any specific local letting initiatives for the neighbourhood taking into account supply and demand and other management factors.

The local letting plans are normally short term measures put in place to address specific local issues. These can include dealing with sustainable community issues.

Local lettings plans may therefore over-ride the normal shortlisting rules for specific neighbourhoods, local housing estates or developments for a specific period of time. Where a large number of properties are becoming available within a short timescale, the local lettings plan may in some cases only be applied to part of the development to mitigate the impact on the normal functioning of the Nomination Policy.

Local letting plans will normally be subject to local consultation. They will be monitored, developed and changed in line with changing situations and demands.

Copies of any local letting plans will be available from the council and the Registered Provider.

The council will ensure that local lettings policies do not discriminate, directly or indirectly against any particular group.

15. Referrals

15.1 Prevention of Homelessness

The council is an active member of the Prevention of Homelessness Consortium (POsH) and will agree an amount of quota per Council financial year to provide move-on accommodation for people occupying non-secure accommodation with partner agencies.

Nominations will be made in line with agreed criteria and must satisfy the residency connection and other qualifying criteria for the Housing Register and will be assessed by the Housing Officer. See also paragraph 15.3.

15.2 National Witness Mobility Scheme

The council supports the National Witness Mobility Scheme and may consider referrals made to house witnesses at its discretion and in line with outward referrals made under the scheme. Accepted referrals will not normally exceed two in any financial year (or a total of 6 within a 3 year period)

When making the decision to accept a referral, the council will take into account the level of risk the applicant is facing and the demand and supply issues for the type of accommodation requested.

It will be necessary for applicants to meet the eligibility criteria at 7.2 to appear on the housing register with the exception of the residency connection criteria.

15.3 Move on

The council has some agreements with statutory organisations that provide specialist support and accommodation. These organisations deal in particular with vulnerable high need households who may require move-on accommodation to release support accommodation units for other vulnerable local people. The council will endeavour to house an agreed number of applicants nominated from these organisations each year. Examples of such organisations may include the Community Mental Health Team, Care Service, ex-offenders projects.

The Homeless Prevention and Options Demand Manager along with the other Housing Managers and Section Head will agree the annual quota for these nominees based on demand, local issues, local and national targets and priorities and housing supply.

15.4 Floating Support

Watford Community Housing Trust operates a floating support scheme for single applicants with mental illness in partnership with Hightown Praetorian & Churches Housing Association (HPCHA) and Watford Community Housing Trust (WCHT). A quota of 9 one-bedroom properties at any one time is shared with Three Rivers District Council.

Applicants for floating support must be able to sustain a tenancy with a view to managing a tenancy independently within 2 years.

Applicants for the scheme are referred through the Community Mental Health Team (CMHT) and are assessed at a multi-agency panel comprising representatives from the council, CMHT, HPCHA and WCHT.

Once an applicant is accepted as suitable for the scheme a designated member of staff from HPCHA will make the bids on the applicant's behalf through the assisted bidding scheme. Bids will then be checked for suitability by WCHT .

16 Shared Ownership and Low Cost Home Ownership

Depending on how much you can afford, shared ownership allows you to buy a percentage share of a property while a local housing association retains the other share.

It is sometimes known as “part-buy part-rent” because you will then be charged a rental payment on the remaining share owned by the housing association. In most cases shared owners can choose to buy additional shares later on to increase their equity.

Shared ownership and other low cost home ownership schemes operate in Watford and are administered by BPHA. Their contact details are:

<https://www.helptobuyese.org.uk/> or call 03333 214044

17 Black & Minority Ethnic Accommodation

From time to time the council receives nominations to a sheltered housing scheme that is owned and managed by ASRA Housing Association. Applicants nominated for this scheme will meet the eligibility criteria set by the Housing Association which is for people aged 55 and over and is predominantly occupied by people of Asian origin.

18 Allocations to staff, Council members or their family

Members of staff, their close family and elected members who require housing through the council 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 a member of staff, elected member or a member of their direct family make a successful bid for a property, the Head of Service will be informed and must approve the shortlist prior to the formal offer being made.

19 Tenancy management outside the Scope of Choice Based Lettings

The following tenancy management areas fall outside of Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 and will be managed by Registered Social Landlords:

- Mutual exchanges
- Persons transferring from a starter or introductory to secure or assured tenancy in the same property
- Persons transferring from a non-secure or contractual tenancy to a starter, introductory, assured or secure tenancy in the same property
- Where a secure tenancy is assigned by way of succession to the same property
- Where a secure tenancy is assigned to someone who would be qualified to succeed to that tenancy if the secure tenant died immediately before the assignment
- Temporary Housing Association decants where the tenant will be returning to their original property
- Where court orders are made under one of the following:
 - Section 24 of the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973
 - Section 17 (1) of the Matrimonial and Family Proceedings Act 1984
 - Paragraph 1 of schedule 1 to the Children Act 1989
 - the Civil Partnership Act

20 Data Protection and quality

When an applicant applies for housing, the council will seek only information that is required to assess their housing need and ability to conduct a tenancy safely and successfully. The council will collect and keep data in accordance with guidelines on handling personal data.

These guidelines are in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 that covers both electronic and manual records. The Act governs everything the council does with the data, including collecting, storing, using and disposing of it.

As the council will be nominating to properties through the HCH scheme, information on applications may be shared with other HCH partners (Councils or Registered Social Landlords).

The council will take all reasonable steps to ensure that the data held is accurate and assessed appropriately under this policy. Systems have been established to check the accuracy of assessments and data entry on a regular basis at management level to ensure adherence with this policy.

21 Confidentiality

Information about applicants shall not be divulged (without consent) to any other member of the public. This applies apart from:

- Where the individual who is the subject of the confidential information has consented to the disclosure
- Where the council is required by law to make such disclosures
- Where disclosure is made to HCH partners in accordance with the HCH Information Sharing Protocol.

22 Right to Review of a Decision

Applicants may request a review of a decision on:

- Whether or not they are eligible for an allocation of accommodation e.g. subject to immigration control
- Whether or not they qualify to join the housing register e.g. residency connection
- The facts of their case which have been or are likely to be taken into account when considering whether to make a nomination
- Any decision not to give him/her any preference under the nomination scheme

Any request for a review should normally be made within 21 days from the date that the decision was notified to the applicant, and should include the applicant's reasons for believing that the decision made was inappropriate. The request can be verbal or in writing and can be made by a representative.

Extensions to the 21 days may be allowed where justified by special circumstances.

The council will advise of any particular information that should be submitted as part of the review.

The council will make a decision within 8 weeks of the date of the request and advise of the outcome and the grounds for it in writing.

The review will be carried out by an officer senior to the officer who made the original decision and who has not been involved in the original decision.

Reviews for decisions made under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (Homelessness) are outside the scope of this policy.

23 The Local Government Ombudsman

The Local Government Ombudsman investigates complaints of injustice arising from maladministration by local authorities and other bodies. They can be asked to investigate complaints about most council matters including housing.

If a complainant is not satisfied with the action the council takes, the applicant can send a written complaint to the ombudsman. A complainant must give the council an opportunity to deal with a complaint first, using its internal complaints procedure.

The Local Government Ombudsman can be contacted at:

The Local Government Ombudsman
PO Box 4771
Coventry CV4 0HE

Tel: 0300 061 0614 or 0845 602 1983

Fax: 027 7682 0001

Email: advice@lgo.org.uk

24 Council Office Contact Details

Watford Borough Council
Town Hall
Watford
Herts
WD17 3EX
Telephone 01923 226400

www.watford.gov.uk

Appendix A

Watford Borough Council Assessment of Housing Need

1. Housing Needs Bands Introduction

- 1.1 When an applicant's housing need is assessed they will be placed in one of five bands. Applicants in band A will have the highest priority, with applicants in band E the lowest priority. The bands are designed to give those households in greatest need reasonable preference for housing, whilst maximising use of the social housing stock.
- 1.2 Applicants will also be given a "priority date" which will identify priority within the bands. Initially, the priority date will be the date of application. Should an applicant's circumstances change, and their band change so may the priority date.
- 1.3 Where a change of circumstance results in a decrease in the applicant's priority band the priority date will be amended to the date they were originally in the lower band. If entering a lower band for the first time, the priority date will be amended to the date of registration.
- 1.4 If an applicant's need increases and they go up a band, their priority date will be the date they enter the band.

2. Band A. Urgent Housing Need (these priorities may be time limited see section 14.2)

2.1 Over-riding Medical Need

Applicants with an over-riding medical priority awarded by the Local Authority in consultation with a Medical Advisor. The applicant's medical condition will be

such that it is being so severely adversely affected by their current housing situation as to warrant an emergency move.

2.2 Over-riding Social/Welfare Need

Applicants with an over-riding social/welfare priority awarded by the Local Authority. The applicant's social/welfare need will be such that it is being so severely adversely affected by their current housing situation as to warrant an emergency move.

2.3 Imminent Danger

Applicants needing to move urgently where there is a serious imminent personal risk if they remain.

2.4 Necessary Decant

Applicants who need to be moved out of their property on a permanent basis where:

- their home needs major work which cannot reasonably be done while they are living at the property, or
- their home is in a block of flats or a group of properties being considered for a change of use, for example to be used for a specific client group, or
- their home is in a block of flats or a group of properties due to be modernised or refurbished, and the work cannot reasonably be done while they are living at the property.

This category will only apply to applicants who are a tenant of one of the Local Authority's Partners living in the Watford Borough or where Watford Borough Council would have nomination rights to their property.

2.5 Applicant succeeding to a Tenancy

If someone who has succession rights to a tenancy after the death of a tenant, the applicant may be required to move to alternative housing in line with their assessed housing needs.

An applicant given priority because they are succeeding to a tenancy, is only able to apply for housing with the landlord of their current property.

Applicants should refer to the Allocation Policies of the individual Local Authorities.

3. Band B. Very High Housing Need.

3.1 Applicants suffering from harassment

All cases of harassment will, in the first instance, be dealt with through the Local Authority or Registered Provider Anti-Social Behaviour Policy. Should the harassment reach a level where there is a recommendation from a senior officer of a relevant statutory or voluntary agency such as the police or Children's Services, that a move is necessary, the applicant may be awarded band B priority.

Where an applicant receives band B priority resulting from harassment, they will usually only be able to bid for properties of the same size and type as their current accommodation.

3.2 Very High Medical Need

Applicants with a very high medical priority awarded by the Local Authority in consultation with a Medical Advisor. The applicant's medical condition will be such that should the applicant be moved to a more appropriate property the need would be lessened.

3.3 Very High Social/Welfare Need

Applicants with an very high social/welfare priority awarded by the Local Authority. The applicant's social/welfare need will be such that should the applicant be moved to a more appropriate property the need would be lessened.

3.4 Applicant is under-occupying by one or more bedrooms (social housing tenants only)

To enable the Local Authority Partners to make best use of their housing stock, the Local Authorities may offer accommodation to applicants who are under-

occupying their homes if the home they are under-occupying is in demand. In turn, family sized accommodation is released and offered to an applicant on the list.

To be considered as an applicant under-occupying you must be a current tenant of one of the Local Authority Partners and live within one of the HCH Local Authority areas.

This includes social housing tenants occupying a one bedroomed general needs property who wish to move to a sheltered housing scheme.

3.5 Severe Overcrowding

In extreme cases, the Local Authority will make an assessment as to whether they feel an applicant and their household are severely overcrowded. Where the Local Authority makes this assessment the applicant will be awarded band B priority. However, the applicant will only have band B priority with the Local Authority/ies who make the assessment that they are overcrowded.

3.7 Applicants with composite housing needs from Band C

This band also recognises applicants with a composite housing need. To qualify to move to band B an applicant should be assessed as having either high medical need, or lacking two bedrooms (or more) plus at least one other factor from the list under band C. This does not apply to households accepted as statutory homeless who are placed in Band C.

3.8 Realising ground floors or one bedroom social housing

Social housing tenants in Watford occupying one bedroom general needs properties who wish to move into sheltered housing may be given priority. However this priority can only be used when bidding for sheltered housing.

Social housing tenants in Watford occupying ground floor flats who would be willing to move to flats on a higher floor may be given priority. However this priority can only be used when bidding for other flats on higher floors, not other houses or other ground floor flats.

4. Band C. High Housing Need

4.1 Homeless households (Main homelessness duty owed)

Applicants who are accepted as statutorily homeless by the Council who also fulfil the residency criteria. Priority banding will be awarded by the Local Authority who has accepted the main duty and local connection only. An applicant cannot be awarded priority for homelessness by more than one Local Authority at the same time.

4.2 High Medical Need

Applicants with a high medical priority awarded by the Local Authority in consultation with a Medical Advisor. The applicant's current accommodation will be deemed as not appropriate for their medical needs.

4.3 High Social/Welfare Need

Applicants with a high social/welfare priority awarded by the Local Authority. The applicant's current accommodation will be deemed as not appropriate for their social/welfare needs.

This includes nominations from approved local hostels actively involved with the multi-agency Prevention of Homelessness Consortium (POsH) under the POsH nomination arrangements.

4.4 Releasing an adapted property

An applicant releasing an adapted property, with no other housing need will only be placed in band C if the following criteria are met:

- a) The property has what the Local Authority Partners define as a major adaptation, and

b) There is a current need for a property with that adaptation.

To be considered as an applicant releasing an adapted property you must be a current tenant of one of the Local Authority Partners and live within one of the HCH Local Authority areas.

4.5 Applicant is assessed as lacking two or more rooms

Applicants should refer to each Local Authority's policy to see how many bedrooms they are entitled to.

4.6 Retiring or Redundant Current or Former Council Staff in Tied Accommodation (Service Occupiers) where TUPE provisions have applied (for former staff)

A service occupier is someone occupying tied accommodation as a condition of their employment for the better performance of their duties with one of the Local Authority Partners or a contractor of one of the Local Authority Partners where that service occupier was transferred to that contractor as a result of TUPE provisions having been applied.

- Service occupiers may be re-housed in suitable alternative accommodation (not like for like) in accordance with the conditions of their terms of employment.

The service occupier will be eligible for re-housing by the Local Authority Partners only if:

- they are required to vacate their tied accommodation due to retirement or redundancy
- they meet stated requirements in their contract of employment
- they meet the eligibility criteria to appear on the housing list including immigration status
- regardless of the requirements of their contract of employment do not own another property elsewhere
- regardless of the requirements of their contract of employment do not have income or assets that would enable them to meet their own housing needs in the private sector.

Service occupiers accepted for re-housing can only apply for housing with the authority for whom they worked.

4.7 Property is subject to a Compulsory Purchase Order.

Applicant is occupying a property which is subject to a compulsory purchase order and is unable to secure suitable alternative accommodation, and where the Local Authority accepts a duty to re-house.

4.8 Applicants with composite housing needs from Band D

This band also recognises applicants with a composite housing need. To qualify to move to band C an applicant should be assessed as having either medium medical need, or lacking one bedroom (or more) plus at least one other factor from the list under band D.

5. Band D. Recognised Housing Need

5.2 Medium Medical Need

Applicants with a medium level of medical priority awarded by the Local Authority in consultation with a Medical Advisor.

5.3 Medium Social/Welfare Need

Applicants with a medium level of social or welfare need as assessed by the Local Authority.

5.4 Applicant is assessed as lacking one room

Applicants should refer to each Local Authority's policy to see how many bedrooms they are entitled to.

5.5 Homelessness

Applicants who are homeless as defined at ss. 175 – 177 of the Housing Act 1996

Applicants who have a homeless application with Watford Borough Council who have been placed into temporary accommodation under section 188(1) (interim duty to accommodate) or 188(3) (discretionary duty to accommodate) will qualify as other homeless.

Applicants who are accepted as statutorily homeless by the council but do not fulfil the residency criteria. Priority banding will be awarded by the Local Authority who has accepted the main duty and local connection only. An applicant cannot be awarded priority for homelessness by more than one Local Authority at the same time.

Applicants whom the council does not have a statutory homeless duty towards, but who are in one of Watford's direct access hostels will also qualify as other homeless.

5.6 Unsatisfactory Conditions

Applicants will be awarded band D priority where it is determined by the Local Authority that they are living in unsatisfactory conditions.

6. Band E. Transfers and older people

- 6.1 Tenants of registered providers seeking alternative accommodation but are otherwise adequately housed who are living in the Watford Borough or where Watford Borough Council would receive nomination rights to the resulting vacancy.

6.2 Applicants who are over 60 and are seeking accommodation designated for older people only

7. Local Connection.

Each of the Local Authorities has differing criteria for local or residency connection. The details can be obtained by reading the Nomination Policy of the individual authority.

8. How are general needs properties allocated to applicants?

When allocating (or “matching”) a property and assessing the priority of applicants, we will take into account 4 factors, sequentially:

- i) Property Eligibility (i.e. applicants’ ages, household size and composition in relation to the size and type of property being allocated).
- ii) Banding Priority (A-E)
- iii) Time registered in band (priority date).
- iv) Where two applicants have met the preceding criteria and have the same applicable date, the property will be offered to the applicant for whom the property is considered most suitable, taking all other factors into consideration

Appendix B

Housing Service Charter

This Charter sets out what you can expect when applying to Watford Borough Council's Housing Register.

The Service We Offer You

We promise to provide you with a professional and helpful service.

You can ask to see the Council's leaflet called 'Putting our Customers First' that explains about the standards we try to meet when dealing with all our customers, including housing applicants.

When you contact us by telephone, our response will be:

- Quick
- Polite and professional
- Helpful

If you leave a message, someone will return your call within 1 working day.

When you contact the Housing Demand Team by letter, fax or email we promise to reply within 10 working days.

Our response will be clear and easy to understand.

Making Sure Your Application Is Treated Fairly

You can ask to see the council's policy on Equal Opportunities. Our services are open to everyone and trained council staff are happy to help with your application whether you have difficulty understanding English, have a disability or there is any other reason why you need assistance.

We keep records to show the race, gender and disability of housing applicants so that we can make sure that everyone has been treated equally and fairly without discrimination.

Your Housing Register Application

We aim to process your housing application form within **15 working days**. BUT you must provide us with all the information we ask for if we are to keep to this target.

We will send you a letter to inform you when this has been done.

Appointments

If you have been given an appointment by an officer from the Housing Team, we promise to see you punctually and if you request it, in a private room at our offices. You have the right to be dealt with in a polite and helpful manner and you can expect the Officer you see to have your housing application details available.

Home Visits

Where possible, we will tell you before we visit your home.

We will always greet you appropriately, give you our name, show you an identification badge and treat your home with respect.

If for any reason you want a female or male officer to visit you, we will do our best to arrange this.

Interviews

If you need to discuss your housing application or need help in completing a form, one of the council's staff will help you.

If you wish to speak to one of the Officers dealing with your housing application, you may need to make an appointment in advance.

We promise to make an appointment within 5 working days of your request.

You can see a Housing Advice Officer without an appointment but you may be asked to wait as this is on a first come, first served basis.

Confidentiality

We handle the information you give us in accordance with the details specified in the Data Protection Act.

We promise that your housing application will be dealt with in the strictest confidence.

However, all the details you have provided on your application form will be investigated and other council departments and outside agencies may be contacted in the course of assessing your application for housing or if you are offered a housing association home.

Your Right to a Review

We promise to write to you with decisions that affect your application. We will include information about how you can request a review of this decision.

You can request a review if you are not satisfied with a decision that we have made about your application. You can do this verbally or in writing within 21 days of the decision. We will re-consider our decision and let you know the outcome in writing within 8 weeks of your request.

Changing Our Policy

If we make **significant** changes to our policy we must notify you about them.

Complaints, Comments and Compliments

The council has a leaflet called 'What do you think about our service'. You should ask for a copy of this if you wish to make complaints, comment or compliment about our service.

Alternatively, please see our website www.watford.gov.uk and see 'Putting our customers first'.

Appendix C

Registered Provider Allocation Policies

Please note that Registered Providers may operate their own allocation policies which will determine whether a nomination may be accepted. The following Registered Providers operate in Watford and their contact details are below should you require a copy of their allocation policy.

If you are unable to obtain the Allocation Policy you require, please contact the Housing Supply Team at the council.

Affinity Sutton Group	www.affinitysutton.com
Aldwyck Housing Group	www.aldwycck.co.uk
Circle Housing Group	www.circle.org.uk
Hanover Housing Group	www.hanover.org.uk
Hightown Praetorian and Churches Housing Association	www.hpcha.org.uk
Home Group	www.homegroup.org.uk
London and Quadrant Group	www.lqgroup.org.uk
Network Stadium Housing Association	www.networkstadium.org.uk

Origin Housing	www.originhousing.org.uk
Paradigm Housing	www.paradigmhousing.co.uk
Places for People Group	www.placesforpeople.co.uk
Riversmead Housing Association	www.riversmead.org.uk
Sanctuary Housing	www.sanctuary-housing.co.uk
South Anglia Housing	www.circle.org.uk/south-anglia
St Pancras and Humanist Housing Association	www.originhousing.org.uk
Thrive Homes	www.thrivehomes.org.uk
Watford Community Housing Trust	www.wcht.org.uk

Older Persons' housing

Abbeyfield Society	www.abbeyfield.com
Anchor Housing Association	www.anchor.org.uk

Asra Housing Association	www.asra.org.uk
English Churches Housing Group	www.riverside.org.uk
Home Group	www.homegroup.org.uk
Watford Community Housing Trust	www.wcht.org.uk