Choice Based Lettings Policy

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1. Introduction

This document explains Stafford and Rural Homes (SARH) and Stafford Borough Council’s (SBC) joint policy for allocating SARH homes.

One of the promises made as part of the Transfer Agreement when the homes transferred from Stafford Borough Council (SBC) to SARH, was to implement a Choice Based Lettings (CBL) scheme. SARH & SBC have worked in partnership to achieve this and continue to review the policy.

The policy was developed by SARH and SBC in consultation with customers and stakeholders. The policy has been reviewed and updated in 2012 as part of the work carried out in response to changes in social housing policy contained within the Localism Act 2011. Any review to the CBL Policy will not automatically carry any transitional protection.

In 2012 the introduction of the Homes First Tenancy Policy led to a review of the CBL policy to ensure that it complemented the priorities for tenure management at SARH.

The Government believes that allocation policies for social housing should provide a safety net for those in housing need but also be the source of low cost homes for those in employment and on low incomes. The primary purpose of social housing is to meet housing need, to ensure tenancies are sustainable and successful and to build settled viable and inclusive communities. Pressure is now placed on housing associations to make the best use of their homes by using policies and procedures that match family size with home size in an efficient way.

The local situation mirrors the national picture in that there is more demand for social housing in the borough than can be met by the existing supply. This situation makes it important to match applicants with homes of a suitable size.

SARH vision is:

Together we aim to deliver: Homes, communities and services where people can thrive and prosper

SBC’s vision is:

To provide a high performing health and housing service promoting safe, healthy, green and secure homes and communities.

The policy will be continually evaluated to ensure that it is fit for purpose.

Homes allocated under this Policy will be available through the ‘Homes First’ Choice Based Lettings Scheme. It is hoped that those seeking homes from SARH will find it easy to understand and simple to use.

If there are any questions or comments about the policy please contact Debbie Emmitt, Director of Neighbourhoods, on 01785 216605 or e mail
debbie.emmitt@sarh.co.uk. Or contact Jane Millington, SBC Housing Options Team Leader on 01785 61900 or e mail jmillington@staffordbc.gov.uk.

SARH and SBC would like to thank all the statutory and voluntary agencies and customers who have contributed to the Policy.

Kevin Upton, Chair of the Board
Stafford and Rural Homes

Patrick MM Farrington, Cabinet Member Community Portfolio
Stafford Borough Council
2. What are the aims of the scheme?

The aims of the scheme are as follows:

Customer choice

To ensure a fair and transparent allocations system, with clear, accurate and consistent information. This will allow customers to maximise their choice of suitable homes. The CBL scheme places the initiative to apply for a particular home on the customer, rather than a member of staff selecting a property.

Detailed information on the property and the neighbourhood is available in order that customers can make an informed choice about whether or not they want to bid for a property.

The SARH Housing Choices Team and will provide applicants with a range of information about their housing options to enable the customer to make an informed decision about which properties they are interested in. This will include information about:

- SARH types of home and areas of location.
- The homes offered by other housing associations operating in the area.
- Mutual exchanges.
- Low Cost Home Ownership options.
- Renting in the private sector.
- Support and help available to the customer to sustain the tenancy.
- Rent levels and how housing benefit is calculated. This will allow the applicant to assess the affordability of the rent due on a particular home.
- Deductions from benefits for under occupation and non dependent charges.

Equal access to social housing

All applicants will be treated fairly and equally in accordance with SARH Equality & Diversity Policy.

SARH will promote equality of opportunity for all and will not discriminate on the grounds of:

- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Disability
- Sexuality
- Age
- Religion or belief
- Other categories as detailed / updated in SARH Equality and Diversity Policy

This ensures that SARH complies with all legislative and regulatory requirements.

An Equality Analysis (EA) has been carried out to ensure the scheme does not benefit a particular profile of customer above another, and does not discriminate
against a particular customer profile. An EA is a way of thoroughly and systematically assessing a policy. It is a process to ascertain the actual effects of that policy as it is put into practice.

**Priority for those in housing need**

The CBL policy is designed to give priority to those in greatest housing need. The Policy has been revised to ensure account has been taken of the requirements of the Localism Act 2012 and hence additional priority groups such as armed forces personnel and key workers have been specifically included in the policy.

Additionally on 30 November 2012 the Housing Act 1996(Additional Preference for Armed Forces(England)Regulations 2012(SI 2012/2989) came into force. The Regulations give effect to the Government’s commitment to ensure that members of the regular and reserve forces, and their families, are given appropriate priority for social housing if they need it when serving or after they have left the Armed Forces.

Applicants are assessed for housing based on their current accommodation and personal circumstances. The system has four priority bands:

**Band 1 – Urgent Housing Need**
(The need to move is urgent)

**Band 2 – High Housing Need**
(There is a need to move soon)

**Band 3 – Housing Need**
(There is a desire to move to more appropriate accommodation)

**Band 4 – No Housing Need**
(There is no current housing need but you would like to move)

**Support for vulnerable people**

The scheme will try to identify customers with support needs at all stages of the rehousing process. A wide range of services are available to help customers to access accommodation and live independently. These include:

- Advice from the Housing Choices Team at SARH.
- Advice from the Housing Options Team at SBC.
- The Homefinder Scheme.
- SARH Independent Living Team who provide support if needed to enable independent living for people aged 55 or over in self contained flats, bedsits and bungalows across the Borough.
- Floating Support to customers living in their own homes, to ensure they can successfully maintain current and future accommodation.
- SARH Assistive Technology and Aids and Adaptations service which may allow customers to remain in their own home.
3. Who can join the Housing register?

SARH operates an open Housing Register, which means it is open to anybody who can legally hold a tenancy and is eligible for housing. The open Housing Register reflects the government’s direction on increased social mobility to allow people to move more easily within the social housing sector to enable the take up of employment opportunities.

Can more than one person apply?

Joint applications can be made for example from:

- Married Couples.
- Civil Partners.
- Cohabiting couples (same or opposite sex).
- Home sharers who may wish to have a joint tenancy.

Where an application has been made in joint names, the offer will be made in joint names. All parties will need to be eligible and sign the tenancy agreement.

If circumstances change and an applicant wishes to be re-housed separately, both applicants will need to reapply but will retain their original registration date.

How does SARH manage applications from people aged less than 18 years of age and those leaving care?

Anyone over the age of 16 can apply and be put onto the housing register. However, applicants who are aged less than 18 years would normally need to be referred by a recognised social welfare or health agency.

Staffordshire County Council’s Through Care Team aims to ensure care leavers have a smooth transition into social housing, where appropriate. There is a ‘Move on’ protocol that should be followed when a young person leaving care approaches the age of 18 and wishes to access social housing.

If an applicant is under 18 years of age and has not been in the care of Staffordshire County Council and has nowhere to stay or is worried that they may lose their current accommodation, they can contact SARH or SBC’s Housing Options Team, who will offer advice and support.

If anyone aged under 18 and is offered a home they be given an equitable tenancy until they reach the age of 18. Somebody (e.g. an adult family member or Social Services) will hold the legal tenancy on the young persons’ behalf. Providing the young person has not breached the terms of the tenancy, SARH will give them a ‘legal’ tenancy when they reach 18. Details about the different tenancies will be explained to the young person when taking up the tenancy.
Young people will receive a Through Care Service up to the age of 21 years or 24 years if in higher education.

**How does SARH manage applications from Board Members, SARH staff or their close relatives?**

Board members, SARH staff or their close relatives will be asked to disclose this on their application and at the offer stage to allow for any allocation to be made in line with the highest standards of probity. The allocation has to be approved by the Chief Executive or Director of Neighbourhood Services.

**Can SARH tenants apply for a transfer?**

Existing SARH tenants must satisfy the conditions set out in the terms of their tenancy agreement before they are eligible to register. For example, those tenants who had a starter tenancy must have held their present tenancy for a minimum of 12 months before being eligible to register.

Any exceptional circumstances will be considered on their individual merits by a senior Manager.

**4. Who cannot join the Housing Register?**

In certain circumstances, applicants may not be eligible for housing and they will be excluded from the Housing Register. Applicants who will be excluded from the Housing Register include:

- People who are guilty of serious unacceptable behaviour under s.160A(7) of the 1996 Housing Act
- People with an immigration status under s.160A of the 1996 Act
- Other persons who are not eligible to be housed in the Common Travel Area

**Serious unacceptable behaviour**

Applicants may be excluded from the Housing Register if evidence is available that they, or a member of their household, have been guilty of unacceptable behaviour, which is serious enough to make them unsuitable to be a tenant of SARH.

Unacceptable behaviour is classed as behaviour that would have resulted in a possession order being granted if they were a tenant. Some examples of unacceptable behaviour are included in the list below (this list is not exhaustive):

- High level rent arrears and failure to maintain agreements to reduce arrears.
- Serious noise nuisance and /or anti-social behaviour.
- Breaking conditions listed in SARH tenancy agreement.
- Using a home for immoral or illegal purposes (drug dealing, for example)
- Violent behaviour/racial harassment.
- Domestic violence.
- Allowing the home to fall into disrepair.
If the behaviour of an applicant or member of their household is likely to affect their ability to be a suitable tenant then this would be taken into account when deciding whether to exclude them. For example, if a household contains a young person who has been served with an Anti-social Behaviour Order (ASBO) this would be taken into account when deciding whether to exclude the applicant.

Under these provisions, serious rent arrears can be considered as serious unacceptable behaviour. However, in applying the unsuitability test, rent arrears which have accrued due to circumstances beyond the applicant’s control should not be considered serious enough to constitute unacceptable behaviour.

All relevant information, such as health problems, people who are dependent on the applicant and other issues will be considered before a decision on whether to exclude is made. The interests of the applicant and their household will be considered and balanced against the interests of the people who live and work in SARH communities.

Applicants that have been excluded in the past can make a new application if they feel they, or their household, have improved their behaviour. Generally, applications will not be reconsidered until 6 months after the original exclusion decision was made, to enable the applicant to demonstrate the behaviour has improved.

Any previous unacceptable behaviour may limit the location where an applicant may later be re-housed due to SARH wider responsibility to the community. For instance an applicant may have improved their behaviour but it would not be seen as appropriate to re-house them back into the vicinity where their previous unacceptable behaviour had affected the community, or where residents may have acted as witnesses in court cases.

**Immigration Status**

The Housing Act 1996 defines categories of persons who are ineligible for housing. This includes people who are subject to immigration control, as described in the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996. This is generally people who require leave to enter or remain in the UK.

The following persons are **eligible to apply and be listed on the housing register**;

a) a person accepted as a refugee by the Home Office.

b) a person who has been granted exceptional leave to enter or remain in the UK outside the immigration rules and whose leave is not subject to a condition requiring him or her to maintain and accommodate him or herself and any dependants without recourse to public funds.

c) a person who has indefinite leave to enter or remain in the UK without any limitation or condition and is habitually resident in the Common Travel Area, except where:
   - a person was sponsored to enter the UK by another person prepared to be responsible for the maintenance and cost of that person (the sponsor);
   - the sponsor (or one of the sponsors) is still alive and
• the person has been a resident for less than 5 years from the date of the sponsorship agreement or the date of entry whichever is the later date.

d) a person who has humanitarian protection granted under the immigration rules.
e) asylum seekers whose claim was made before 3 April 2000 and was made either:
  • on arrival
  • within 3 months of a declaration of upheaval or
  • before 4 February 1996 if the person was entitled to housing benefit at that date

Other applicants without an entitlement to reside in the Common Travel Area

The Common Travel Area includes the UK, Channel Islands, Isle of Man and Republic of Ireland.

Specific information will be requested as part of the application process to check whether someone is eligible on these grounds.

An applicant (who is not subject to immigration control) will be considered as a person from abroad and therefore ineligible for housing if:

a) he/she is not habitually resident in the Common Travel Area except if they:
  • are a worker or a family member of the worker.
  • are a self employed person or a family member of that person.
  • are a person treated as a worker for the purpose of the definition of "qualified person" in the Immigration (European Economic Area) Regulations 2006 or a family member.
  • are a person with a right to reside permanently in the UK pursuant to the Immigration (European Economic Area) Regulations 2006.
  • left Montserrat after 1 November 1995 because of volcanic activity.
  • are a person who is in the UK as a result of deportation, expulsion or other compulsory removal from another country to the UK.
  • left Lebanon on or after 12 July 2006 because of armed conflict or
  • arrived in Great Britain between 28 February 2009 and 18 March 2011 who immediately before had lived in Zimbabwe and before leaving Zimbabwe had accepted an offer from the Government for assistance to settle in the UK.

b) his/her only right to reside in the Common Travel Area is:
  • derived from his/her status as a jobseeker or a family member of a jobseeker or
  • is an initial right to reside in the UK for less than 3 months.

Decision on ineligibility

The decision on ineligibility and therefore to exclude from the Housing Register is made by the Homes and Neighbourhoods Manager.
Applicants will be notified in writing of the reasons why they have been excluded and what they must do to remedy the situation. They will also be advised of the appeals process.

An applicant must also continue to be eligible to remain on the Housing Register from the date that they registered and at the time they may be offered a tenancy. If they become ineligible for any reason, their application will be cancelled and this will be confirmed in writing.

5. How is an application for housing made?

How can the application be completed?

Application forms can be completed on-line, by phone or in person at one of the offices set out in appendix 6.

The information given in the application will be verified and proof of identity of the applicant and family members will be required.

Does the applicant need to provide references?

All applicants have to provide two suitable references before the application can be processed and put onto the housing register. References are requested to try and make sure that new customers are able to maintain a tenancy and keep to the tenancy conditions and also to help in identifying any tenancy or support issues that the applicant may have.

If they are currently renting a property one of the references must be from the current landlord or if they have held a tenancy in the past, from the previous landlord. Otherwise references will be accepted from an employer or former employer or any other professional person. In some cases applications without references may be accepted, for example from:

- Current SARH tenants
- Statutory homeless applicants in priority need
- Other applicants who may genuinely not be able to provide two references.

If a person can only provide one reference, they will be invited in for an office interview and their responsibilities as a tenant will be explained. Unless there is a significant issue that causes concern and subsequently their application to be excluded from the Housing Register, the application will be made active and they will be able to bid for properties.

What happens when SARH carries out the eligibility assessment?

All applications will be assessed in accordance with the scheme and policy. Should the assessment identify factors requiring further investigation, the applicant will be contacted. For example, to gather further information on medical or mobility needs.
All applicants will receive confirmation in writing within 5 working days if they have been deemed eligible for housing and placed on the Housing Register or if further information is required. The letter or e-mail will include the following information:

- Their priority band.
- Their effective registration date.
- Their effective priority band date.
- The types of property, including the number of bedrooms the applicant can bid for.
- Advice on affording a home.
- Their UPIN (Unique Personal Identification Number) to enable them to bid online.
- Any further information or evidence they need to supply to progress their application.

Pre-Tenancy workshops will be held for new applicants. These workshops are aimed at helping the applicant to become familiar with SARH and provide an opportunity for applicants to understand more about their rights and responsibilities as a tenant and how to manage their tenancy effectively. The workshops will include links to employment, advice on money management and housing benefit entitlement at offer stage or on request.

**Why do SARH carry out home visits?**

In most cases, applicants will be accepted onto the Housing Register and properties will be offered based on the information applicants provide on their application.

However, in some cases staff may seek to verify the information given by carrying out a home visit or making an appointment with the applicant to discuss the application.

Home visits may be carried out:

- To gather more specific details if an applicant has requested additional medical or welfare priority.
- To assess whether someone is suitable for an adapted property or for housing for older customers.
- To assess SARH tenants to make sure they have not breached any of their tenancy conditions.
- If there is a reason to believe that the information provided is incorrect.
- Give advice and support to customers who have requested a home visit.

**What happens if the applicant’s circumstances change?**

Applicants must notify SARH of any changes in their circumstances to enable re-assessment of their application to take place. This will enable the correct banding to be awarded. If this involves a change of address a new application will need to be submitted and a new UPIN will be issued.

Where an applicant has advised SARH of a change in circumstance, their application may be suspended until any relevant documents or evidence is provided. Failure to
provide any evidence requested within 28 days may result in the application being cancelled and the applicant will be advised of this in writing.

Where false information has been given to obtain accommodation from SARH, the application may be suspended from the Housing Register, legal action may be taken against the applicant and, if appropriate, any tenancy obtained may be terminated. The process to be followed in these circumstances can be found in the policy Tenancy Fraud Policy.

What is the annual review?

Every year, on the anniversary of the applicant’s registration date, the applicant will be contacted to ask if they want to stay on the Housing Register and to ask if there has been any change in circumstances. If there is no reply within 28 days their application will be cancelled and the applicant will be informed of this. If an applicant is known to be vulnerable, every effort will be made to contact them, either by telephone, visiting them at home or contacting a support agency (where applicable) to confirm whether a move is still required.

6. Will SARH cancel/suspend applicants from the Register?

Yes.

Cancelled Applications

Applications will be cancelled from the Register in the following circumstances:

- If it is found that the applicant ceases to be an eligible person.
- There has been failure to respond to the annual review.
- There has been a failure to respond to formal communication concerning the application.
- If the applicant makes a request to be removed from the register.
- SARH are informed that the applicant has passed away.

The applicant will be notified in writing of the reason why their application has been cancelled, except where the applicant has passed away.

Suspended applications

In some cases, an application may be suspended, for example, due to unacceptable behaviour, rent arrears or other breach of tenancy conditions.

An applicant who owes current or former tenant arrears to a landlord or any other debt to SARH must have a payment plan that has been adhered to for 24 weeks before their application will be made live on the CBL scheme. Applicants must continue to adhere to the payment plan whilst seeking accommodation through the CBL scheme. Any default on in the repayment plan may result in further suspension or the applicant being bypassed on an offer of accommodation, applicants will be notified of this decision.
Applications from prisoners will be suspended until they are within three months of their release date and the release date must be confirmed by the Prison Service.

Applicants who are subject to a Probation Order will only be made live on receipt of confirmation from the support provider that they have engaged with pre-tenancy support and are suitable / ready for housing.

An applicant who places bids and when offered accommodation repeatedly refuses numerous properties for no good reason will be suspended for 3 months. Advice and assistance will previously have been provided to the applicant and will be repeated at the time of suspension.

**What happens if there has been a breach of SARH tenancy conditions?**

SARH customers will have a home visit before being made an offer of another SARH property.

If it is found that the customer is breaching their tenancy conditions, their application will be suspended until rectified. Actions to remedy any breach and timescales will be agreed and, whilst suspended, they will not be able to bid. Actions that may constitute a breach of tenancy include the following:

- Damaging the property.
- Making structural alterations without SARH permission.
- Allowing the garden to become seriously neglected or overgrown.
- Poor internal decoration and/or cleanliness standard with the home.
- Rent arrears.
- Anti Social Behaviour.

The applicant will be notified in writing of the reason why their application has been suspended with an explanation of what they must do to remedy the situation to enable them to be considered for an offer in the future.

The wellbeing of an applicant will be taken into account when deciding whether or not to remove or suspend an application from the register.

**Are offers made to people who owe money to SARH?**

Verification checks will be made at the time of application. The applicant will be informed in writing of any outstanding debt and the need to clear this in full before any new tenancy will be granted. In all circumstances the applicant will be allowed to enter into a debt payment plan. If payments are kept in line with the plan an offer may be made. Staff should obtain authorisation from the Homes and Neighbourhoods Manager in these circumstances.

**Former Customers**

If a former customer of SARH is first in line for a property, if there is any debt outstanding applicants will be given 48 hours to repay the debt in full checks will be made to ensure applicants have repaid any debt in full. If they are unable to do so then the offer will be withdrawn and the property offered to the next applicant.
In some circumstances where a former customer has kept to a repayment plan, they may be offered a home dependent on the amount of time payments have been made. Authorisation is required from the Homes and Neighbourhoods Manager.

**Current Customers**

Current customers will be expected to clear any debt outstanding to SARH within 48 hours of an offer being made. If they are unable to do so then the offer will be withdrawn and the property offered to the next applicant.

In exceptional circumstances an offer may be made to a current customer who owes money to SARH, subject to approval by the Head of Neighbourhoods and Independent Living, a Director or the Chief Executive. Examples of exceptional circumstances include, but are not limited to:

a) The applicant has a Band 1 medical priority;
b) There is serious domestic violence;
c) Exceptional welfare needs can be evidenced.

**The repayment plan**

Where a current or former customer is paying off debt to a repayment plan they will be expected to show that they have been keeping to this plan for at least 24 weeks. This will include any customer currently housed in supported or move on accommodation.

Where there is a default on the plan, the 24 week requirement starts again.

**Welfare Reform**

Where there are exceptional circumstances of debt related to the introduction of the ‘bedroom tax’ contained within the Welfare Reform Act, there may be opportunities to work with the customer to identify a suitable housing option.

**7. How do SARH assess priority for housing?**

The law requires that reasonable preference must be given to households in certain housing circumstances. A banding system is used to consider all applications in a fair and consistent way.

**What is The Banding System?**

Applicants are prioritised based on their current accommodation and personal circumstances. Applicants will be placed in one of four Bands, with Band 1 being the highest priority band.

**Band 1 – Urgent Housing Need** (The need to move is urgent, for example the applicant can no longer live in their current home)
Band 2 – High Housing Need (There is a need to move soon to address housing needs)
Band 3 – Housing Need (There is a need to move to more appropriate accommodation)
Band 4 – No Housing Need (There is no current housing need but an applicant would like to move).

Please refer to Appendix 1 for more detail about the Bands and criteria.

Banding makes it easier to recognise the many different types of housing problems that people may have, helping SARH to make fairer decisions about who has the most urgent need for a new home.

Priority for accommodation will be based on the seriousness of housing problems such as overcrowding, medical reasons or if someone is losing their home.

Does the applicant always keep the same application date?

No. There will be occasions where an applicant’s circumstances change, resulting in their application moving up or down the priority bandings. If an applicant moves up a band they are given an "effective priority date" this is the date they enter that band. If an applicant moves down a band, their priority date will be their original registration date.

8. How do Stafford Borough Council assess priority for homelessness and move on priority?

Homeless Applications

SBC has a legal duty under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) to ensure that homeless applicants owed a full housing duty under s.193 (2) are provided with suitable accommodation. Applicants meeting these criteria will have been notified in writing of the decision. Homeless applicants to whom the full duty is owed will be placed in Band 2.

What happens if an applicant is in priority need but is intentionally homeless?

Where a homeless applicant is assessed to be in priority need but intentionally homeless, they will be placed in Band 3.

What is Homelessness Prevention?

Preventing homelessness means providing people with the ways and means to address their housing and other needs to avoid homelessness.

SBC work to prevent homelessness wherever possible and will work with customers to help find permanent accommodation as soon as possible.

If someone is threatened with homelessness they will be required to attend a housing options interview with SBC to discuss their housing choices.
What happens when an applicant has been assessed as statutory homeless?

An applicant that has been assessed as statutory homeless will be given 2 months to bid for accommodation. SBC will monitor their bidding and will expect homeless people who need urgent rehousing to be flexible about their area choices. If the applicant has not placed any bids in this time, then SBC may place bids it deems to be suitable on the applicant’s behalf.

What happens if an applicant is homeless, but not in Priority Need?

Where a homeless applicant is assessed to be homeless, but not in priority need, they will be placed within Band 3.

What happens once a suitable offer is made?

If the applicant refuses the offer and there is no reasonable ground for doing so, then SBC may discharge their statutory duty. If the applicant is in temporary accommodation provided by SBC, they will be served with a legal notice to leave the property.

The Localism Act brought about changes in the ways in which the Local Authority may discharge their duty. SBC may discharge their duty by offering a tenancy of private rented accommodation and this will count as a reasonable offer.

Where an applicant refuses an offer the statutory homeless priority will be removed and their priority reassessed. They will still remain on the Housing Register but are likely to have a lower priority to reflect their current housing circumstances.

A homeless applicant can ask for a right to review of the offer if they think that the property offered was not suitable. This request must be made to the SBC Housing Options Team preferably at the time of refusing an offer but no later than 21 days of the offer, be in writing and give the reasons why they feel the property is unsuitable. The review will be carried out by an independent officer of SBC. The applicant must be given the advice that if they are not happy with the offer they can either:

- Refuse the property outright - but if the Right to Review decision is that it was a suitable offer then the applicants priority could be significantly reduced and they will only be made any future offers based on their current banding and registration date
- Accept the property in principle – if the property is ready to move into they must sign for the tenancy and rent will be due. However, if as a result of the Right to Review the decision is overturned the applicant will be placed back into Band 2. SBC may continue to place bids on the applicant’s behalf.

If the Right to Review decision is that the offer was reasonable then they may continue to reside in the property under the conditions of the signed tenancy agreement.
Can homeless applicants be excluded?

People who are owed a duty under homeless legislation will not be excluded from the Housing Register unless they are ineligible (see Section 4 ‘Who cannot join the Housing Register?’).

What is Move On?

‘Move on’ priority is given to help residents of recognised Supported Accommodation based in Stafford to make a planned move into permanent accommodation when they are ready to live independently.

Residents of Supported Accommodation in Stafford Borough will have an appropriate assessment of housing need by the SBC Housing Options team which will include if the customer has a local connection to Stafford borough or cannot return to their local area due to safety reasons or exclusion (confirmation from Probation Officer will be required). If eligible the customers application will be placed in Band 4 but suspended. The customer will be placed into Band 2 and made active when the following conditions are met:

- They have engaged with the supported housing project to gain the skills required to live independently.
- The supported housing project provides written evidence by way of a move-on referral highlighting the applicant’s readiness for move on.

8. How do SARH assess medical and welfare priority?

Can an applicant apply for medical priority?

An applicant who has a medical condition and thinks they will require a specific type of property or some adaptations or who thinks their home is unsuitable based on their medical needs must complete a medical priority application.

Medical Priority

Medical Priority is awarded at two levels:

- Band 1 - Urgent Need
- Band 2 - Standard Need

The assessment will be based on the applicant’s medical need and the suitability of their current home.

Medical priority will only be awarded where re-housing will improve an applicant’s or a member of the applicant’s household, health or quality of life. It could be the case that an applicant may be very ill but suitably housed so will not be awarded priority.

Priority will only be awarded in respect of the person or household experiencing the medical circumstances and requesting assistance from SARH and not in respect of others who would not be re-housed as a result of the application.
The priority awarded will depend on:

- How severe the needs are; and
- How well an applicant can manage in their present home, if the property is unsuitable for aids or adaptation.

A medical award will contain a property restriction. For example, if an applicant is awarded medical priority because they need ground floor accommodation, they will not be eligible for houses or upper floor flats with no lift access.

Advice may be considered from a medical advisor or appropriate external agency supporting this aspect of the application.

**Band 1 medical priority may be awarded if:**

- The applicant is to be discharged from hospital and the home is totally unsuitable for them to return to
- The applicant cannot get into or out of their home; or
- The applicant cannot access essential facilities within their home, such as a bathroom.

Supporting information will be required, for example from the hospital confirming that the applicant cannot be discharged until they are re-housed into suitable alternative accommodation.

The award of medical priority will be subject to a periodic review.

**Band 2 medical priority may be awarded if:**

- The applicant has other medical or disability problems, which mean that the restrictions within their home are having a detrimental effect on their physical or mental health.

Where an applicant has been refused medical priority, no further medical assessment will be made unless there is evidence of a change in their medical circumstances. The award of medical priority will be subject to a periodic review.

**What if an applicant's medical condition makes the property unsuitable?**

An assessment for aids or adaptations may be a more appropriate course of action than re-housing.

**What if an applicant wants to appeal against a medical decision?**

Applicants can request an appeal of a decision not to award medical priority, or to award priority at the Band 2 level instead of the Band 1 level. The applicant must give their reasons for requesting an appeal and supply any new supporting evidence. If an applicant needs assistance a member of staff can take the details in writing on their behalf.
The appeal will be carried out by a senior member of staff not involved with the original decision. The appeal decision will take into account all the information on which the original assessment was based plus any additional information provided by the applicant or by others on their behalf. The applicant will be notified of the appeal decision in writing within 10 working days of receipt.

All appeals received will be reviewed on a monthly basis to ascertain trends and issues. Any process improvements identified will be implemented immediately.

**What is welfare priority?**

SARH takes welfare needs into account in order to address problems that threaten the ability to live independently or to increase the opportunity to improve the welfare of the household.

An applicant may be considered for a welfare priority if there is a significant risk to the welfare of a member of the household whilst occupying their current home and a move to a different environment is likely to alleviate the situation. The awards are as follows:

**Band 1**

- Victims of harassment or domestic abuse and are at risk of death or serious harm.

Band 1 will be awarded by the Homes and Neighbourhoods Manager. SBC Housing Options Team leader may refer and make recommendations for this band award. Each case will be looked at individually, supporting evidence from relevant agencies may be required and the award of welfare priority will be subject to periodic review.

**Band 2**

- There is a serious housing need because of the threat to remain living independently in the community. Supporting evidence will be required.
- There is a need to move from one area of Stafford Borough to another to be nearer schooling, work or support, and there are no bus routes to accommodate their travel requirements. Proof of an offer of permanent employment over 16 hours per week or an offer of an apprenticeship will need to be provided to enable the application to be considered for this priority.
- Adults and children whose lives are seriously disrupted by domestic violence and harassment including those living in refuge accommodation.

Band 2 will be awarded by the Homes and Neighbourhoods Manager. SBC Housing Options Team leader may refer and make recommendations for this band award.
10. What factors are taken into consideration when assessing priority for housing?

What if the applicant has a carer?

Where the applicant is in receipt of care, it will need to be established if that is sleeping care or waking care. If it is waking care an additional bedroom will not be considered necessary. In some circumstances where an applicant is allowed an additional bedroom for carers then this may be classed as under occupation and housing benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit may be reduced to reflect this. When making an allocation in these circumstances staff will make it clear to the customer that this may affect the affordability of the home if they are dependent on Housing Benefit or Universal Credit. At the moment the reduction in benefit due to under occupation does not affect customers of pensionable age.

Full details of the care provided and of the carer will be required to substantiate the application and whether it is reasonable to travel to provide that support will be considered when deciding if overnight accommodation is required.

Why are applicants referred by the National Witness Mobility Scheme (NWMS)?

The NWMS may refer intimidated and vulnerable witnesses, who need to be moved to safety, swiftly. Access to the support services for the intimidated witnesses during the relocation process, will be facilitated by the National Witness Mobility Scheme.

What if the applicant has access to/contact with children?

Applicants with contact arrangements for a child or children from previous relationships, where they stay overnight more than 3 times a week, then SARH will take such a child or children into account when assessing the applicant’s accommodation requirements under the property eligibility criteria. Proof of contact will be required from the applicant. This may be in the form of a court order, solicitor’s letter, a letter from a professional agency or from the ex-partner.

The banding awarded will reflect the applicant’s actual circumstances and not the children to whom they may have contact, for instance the applicant would not be entitled to any overcrowding points because of the children. The applicant will be able to bid for flats that will accommodate the child or children to whom they have access/contact.

Changes to the welfare benefit system may mean that provision of an extra bedroom in these circumstances will be classed as under occupation and the housing benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit will be reduced to reflect this. SARH believes that in these circumstances the customer should be given the choice as to whether or not the offer is accepted. Any failure to pay full rent due will be considered in line with our arrears recovery policies and procedures.
What if the applicant has foster children?

Where the applicant accommodates foster children on a long term basis (for a period of more than 6 consecutive weeks at a time) they can be considered for a suitably sized property; as if the child or children are living with the household on a permanent basis. Proof will be required from Social Services to identify the permanency of the fostering arrangements.

Changes to the welfare benefit system may mean that provision of an extra bedroom in these circumstances will be classed as under occupation and the housing benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit will be reduced to reflect this. SARH believes that in these circumstances the customer should be given the choice as to whether or not the offer is accepted. Any failure to pay full rent due will be considered in line with our arrears recovery policies and procedures.

What if the applicant is sharing or lacking facilities in their home?

Applicants who have been placed in Bed and Breakfast by SBC or who live in hostel accommodation and are sharing/lacking facilities may be awarded Band 3 priority. Sharing/lacking facilities includes:

- No cold/hot water supply available for use in the bathroom or kitchen available for use by the applicant.
- Sharing or lacking facilities you would expect to use in a kitchen (applies to bedsits).
- Sharing or lacking a living room (also applies to bedsits).
- Sharing or lacking a bathroom/WC or where the toilet is not connected directly to a sewer, septic tank or cesspool.
- No electricity supply to the dwelling.
- No heating supply to the property (this is not applicable if the supply has been disconnected due to non-payment).

Please Note - If the applicant occupies a bedsit or a room in a hostel (i.e. where the accommodation is a single room that is used for both living and sleeping) the application will be assessed and priority awarded for lack of a bedroom.

Priority will not be awarded if the applicant has entered into an agreement to house share (for example student accommodation), individual agreements have been signed and members of the house share are not responsible for each other - this will be treated as if the occupiers have individual tenancies.

What if an applicant has been served with a Compulsory Purchase Order?

SBC Housing Options Team will provide advice and assistance. If any compensation offered takes applicants above the equity threshold in this scheme, they will be placed in Band 4. Band 1 priority for applicants under the equity threshold will only be awarded upon proof being provided of the Compulsory Purchase Order having been confirmed by the Government Office for the West Midlands or in the case of appeal by the Secretary of State.
What if an applicant’s home has been served with a Closing Order or a Prohibition Notice?

A closing order prevents the premises from being lived in and the order will only be lifted if the property is made fit for human habitation. SBC Housing Options Team will provide advice and assistance to the applicant on their rights and housing options. Priority will not be given to applicants subject to a closing order who are living outside the Stafford Borough as it would be expected that their own Local Authority would assist.

What is statutory overcrowding?

SBC investigates complaints of overcrowded houses and for this purpose uses the powers available within the Housing Act 2004. Where a property is allegedly overcrowded, SBC’s Housing Standards Officers will carry out a Housing, Health and Safety inspection and take appropriate action where necessary. The 1985 Housing Act defines the legal standard for overcrowding.

What is unsanitary accommodation?

If housing conditions are so serious due to the threat posed to health or welfare a Prohibition Notice will be served under S.20 of the Housing Act 2004 and the Local Authority will consider the dwelling to be uninhabitable as a result of that Notice. If a property has been served with a Notice through no fault of the applicant, priority because of this may be awarded under the Choice-Based Lettings Scheme.

What if the applicant owns or owned their home and has equity?

The Homelessness Act 2002 allows allocation schemes to give less priority to applicants who are able to secure alternative accommodation at market rent or to buy a home. Therefore, applicants who have a substantial amount of savings or equity that would enable them to obtain accommodation suitable for their needs, will be placed in Band 4.

The equity level will be reviewed annually, based on the average house prices in the Borough.

If an applicant receives a medical/welfare priority award and the expected equity from the house sale is equal to or more than the borough average, they will be placed in Band 4 as it is expected that they should be able to secure their own accommodation to meet their needs.

Similarly, if an applicant’s income shows that they could afford to rent in the private sector they will also be placed in Band 4. This will be based on the average private sector rent for the size and type of property required at the point of application.

Key Workers

It is important to support local enterprise and ensure that Stafford can be economically competitive with a healthy employment market. SARH will support the
local economy by allowing a proportion (quota) of its lets to be given to people who are moving into Stafford to take up employment. The percentage of lets to be used for this purpose will be reviewed on a six monthly basis. Allocation of homes to key workers will not take precedence over other serious cases of housing need.

**Armed services personnel**

Stafford has a strong connection with the Armed Forces with a military barracks in the borough. SARH will work closely with service personnel and their families to support them to meet their housing requirements.

**The current quota of lettings to Key Workers and Service Families will be a number equal to 10% of the number of allocations made in the previous year.**

**What about Local Connection?**

The policy is flexible enough to provide support to those who live in Stafford and who are in housing need. It is not felt appropriate however, to insist on evidence of local connection to be eligible for the allocation of a SARH home. It is important to keep national access to SARH homes so that SARH are able to facilitate mobility for work and other relevant reasons.

Some developments will however have a local connection criteria attached to them.

See Section “What is a local lettings policy?”

**Reasonable Preference Groups**

This policy has been developed to ensure that the banding system complies with the reasonable preference groups set out in s.167 (2) of the Housing Act 1996. The reasonable preference groups are:

- People who are owed a duty under the homelessness legislation.
- People occupying unsanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise unsatisfactory housing conditions.
- People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds, including grounds relating to disability.
- People who need to move to a particular locality in the area and failure to meet that need would cause hardship.


These Regulations are made by the Secretary of State under section 166A (7) of the Housing Act 1996, inserted by section 147 of the Localism Act 2011. Section 166A (7) gives the Secretary of State power by regulation to amend the reasonable and additional preference provisions in section 166A(3) which determine who has priority for an allocation of social housing.

The Regulations provide that allocation schemes give additional preference to the following persons if they fall within one or more of the statutory reasonable preference categories and are in urgent housing need:
a) serving members of the regular forces who are suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is wholly or partly attributable to their service
b) former members of the regular forces
c) bereaved spouses or civil partners of those serving in the regular forces where (i) the bereaved spouse or civil partner has recently ceased, or will cease to be entitled, to reside in Ministry of Defence accommodation following the death of their service spouse or civil partner, and (ii) the death was wholly or partly attributable to their service
d) existing or former members of the reserve forces who are suffering from a serious injury, illness, or disability which is wholly or partly attributable to their service

11. What is specialist accommodation?

Who can apply for Independent Living Housing?

Applicants aged 55 or over can apply for independent living housing. At the point of an offer of accommodation an assessment will be carried out to further ensure independent living housing will suit their needs. Applicants aged under 55 will be considered in exceptional circumstances.

Applicants who are currently in an independent living housing scheme and wish to be considered for a vacancy within the same scheme may be given priority if the move will improve their quality of life or medical need. The applicant should inform their Independent Living Co-ordinator if they wish to be considered for a property that is to become vacant. Moves within a scheme will be based on a medical need, not just the wish to move from one flat to another.

Who can apply for Extra Care Housing?

Extra Care Housing is housing designed with the needs of frailer older people in mind. Various levels of care and support are available on site dependent upon an individual's needs. It is a popular choice among older people because it can sometimes provide an alternative to a care home. People who live in Extra Care Housing have their own self contained homes and their own front doors but benefit from the communal facilities found in independent living schemes for example residents' lounge and laundry facilities. Extra Care schemes often include a restaurant or dining room, health and fitness facilities and hobby rooms.

Vacancies within Extra Care schemes are designated in three categories of low, medium and high needs. All low needs vacancies will be advertised and let through the Choice Based Lettings Scheme. Medium and high needs vacancies will not be advertised; vacancies will be let through a panel made up of representatives from SARH and Staffordshire County Council Social Care and Health.

Applicants who are aged 55 or over, can apply for extra care housing but applicants aged under 55 will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.
12. How do SARH let a property?

How will properties be advertised?

Properties will be advertised in the following places:

- SARH website
- SARH headquarters
- The Stafford Advice Shop
- Weekly property sheets
- SBC Civic Centre
- Periodically in local newspapers if needed

What will be included in the Property Advertisement?

The property advertisement will include the following information:

- Location
- Weekly rent
- Service charges if applicable
- Number of bedrooms
- The preferred household size that is best suited to that property
- Floor level
- Special features for example adaptations
- Property criteria e.g. If pets are allowed/not allowed, if the accommodation is independent living accommodation for older people or any age restrictions for example, aged over 55 years
- Neighbourhood information
- Council Tax Banding

Which properties will be in the scheme?

The majority of vacant SARH properties will be in the scheme. However a small number of properties (no more than 10% of lettings per year) will be let direct to an applicant as a Management, Key Worker or Armed Forces Personnel Let, appropriate for housing.

SBC has nomination rights to other homes owned and managed by other Housing Associations / Registered Providers. The nomination quota will be monitored by SBC and SARH. These homes will be let through the CBL scheme.

Extra Care properties in the low care category will be in the scheme

Shared ownership properties will be advertised.

What is ‘property criteria’?

Properties will have certain qualifying restrictions placed on them, this is known as ‘property criteria’. Criteria for properties are set to ensure best use is made of the stock and that properties are allocated to the households they are intended for. For example, some properties may have had adaptations for people with a disability.
Properties will initially be offered to applicants who meet the property criteria in Band and effective priority date order. If that list is exhausted, then properties may have the criteria reviewed or be offered to previously ineligible applicants, based on band and effective priority date. For example, a two bedroom bungalow may be offered to a single person if no two person households are interested.

If an applicant has been given an increased priority award e.g. a medical award for an alternative property type to meet their housing needs, they will be bypassed if they bid for the same property type that they already live in, or bid for an unsuitable property type.

A breakdown of the property criteria is listed below:

- **Ground Floor Accommodation** - where an applicant bids for ground floor accommodation, preference will be given to applicants with a medical need for this type of accommodation.

- **Bungalows** - are usually let to people aged 60 or above. But can be allocated to people who have a disability and no other suitable accommodation is available. This means that if a medical priority award is given to an applicant under 60 years of age for ground floor accommodation, to qualify for a bungalow the recommendation needs to stipulate that only a bungalow can resolve that person’s needs. Sometimes it may be necessary to reduce the age restriction on some of the bungalows to manage them effectively e.g. if there is little or no demand from applicants aged 60 or over, this requires approval from the Chief Executive of SARH.

- **Independent Living Accommodation** is usually let to people aged 55 or over. There may be exceptional circumstances where a person under 55 years may benefit from being in this type of accommodation. Each case will be considered individually. The Head of Neighbourhoods and Independent Living will decide if the independent living accommodation is to be allocated to an applicant aged under 55.

- **Alarm linked flats** priority is given by cascading down by age band (i.e. over 60’s, then over 50’s, then over 40’s etc.) to customers with an identified support need.

- **Second Floor Flats** above alarm-linked accommodation (i.e. Averill Road) will only be offered to applicants aged over 40 years.

- **High-Rise flats** e.g. Pennycrofts Court, will not be offered to households who have children under 12 in their household.

- **Low rise flats** will have no age restriction. However, it may sometimes be necessary to put an age restriction on some properties to manage them effectively for example as a result of previous unacceptable behaviour in the block or area.
- **Properties adapted or purpose built for the disabled** - preference will be given to applicants if they, or a member of their household, need the adaptations.

**Can property criteria be amended?**

The Chief Executive of SARH has the authority to amend the criteria for certain estates or properties if it is thought this would benefit the community and contribute to sustainable neighbourhoods. This will be decided in consultation with the Director of Neighbourhood Services. A record of the reasons why any amendment to property criteria made will be kept.

**How do SARH manage existing adapted properties?**

Once a customer is living in a property which has adaptations suitable to meet their needs they will only be considered for a move to another already suitably adapted property. If there are any extenuating circumstances necessitating a move the applicant needs to advise of such circumstances, verification will be required as part of the consideration in making a decision. Any move requiring another set of adaptations will have to be approved by a Director.

SARH will give preference to applicants who are disabled when allocating properties, which have been designed or adapted to meet their needs. This ensures that people with disabilities are allocated the most suitable accommodation possible. An occupational therapist will assess the applicant’s requirements and the suitability of the property.

If two or more suitable households are identified, the property will be offered to the household that can make best use of the property or has the earliest registration date.

If a property has been adapted and the disabled member of the household no longer requires the accommodation, has moved out or has passed away the household may be approached with a view to moving to suitable unadapted property. Band 1 priority will be awarded to assist a swift move to alternative suitable accommodation, to enable the specialist property to be allocated to a household in greater need who would benefit from the adaptations.

**Will SARH adapt a home?**

Any adaptation request will be subject to a needs assessment, availability of resources, other suitable alternative accommodation and partner agency acceptance. More information regarding this can be found in the Aids and Adaptations Policy.

**What is a local lettings policy?**

A local lettings policy may form part of a strategy to manage lettings on new estates, hard to let estates or in areas where there may be social problems and management difficulties.
In determining whether to implement a local lettings policy SARH will have regard to:

1. Whether there is an evidential basis demonstrating a need for a policy e.g. a survey that demonstrates local people would be unable to secure access to suitable housing so demonstrating the policy is responsive to the economic and social environment and linked to regional and local housing strategies.

2. The policy is fair and does not discriminate, directly or indirectly, on racial or other equality grounds.

3. To offering choice whilst giving reasonable preference to those in priority housing need.

Approval should be sought by SARH Board.

Any local lettings criteria will be clearly explained in property advertisements.

Local lettings arrangements and statements can be obtained from the Housing Choices Team.

**Rural Exception Sites**

Where a Section 106 agreement is in place this will restrict the initial and future allocations of these homes further information can be found in the Local Lettings Policy. Approval by SARH board for a local lettings arrangement within a Section 106 or any planning agreement is not required.

**What is the bidding process?**

This is when a property is advertised and applicants actively have to bid online to register their interest in the property.

Properties will be advertised once the current customer has given notice they are going to leave the property. This means the property is often still likely to be occupied or undergoing repair.

Applicants, or advocates bidding on applicants behalf, can bid for properties advertised in one of the following ways:

- On-line via SARH website www.sarh.co.uk (using their UPIN number, last name or DOB)
- By telephone to SARH Customer service centre on 088 111 4554
- In person at one of SARH offices

Each property will be advertised for 6 days from 9.00am on Thursday until Midnight on Tuesday. This will allow applicants 6 days to bid on a property.
At the end of each advertising cycle, bids will be checked to confirm that they match the letting criteria for the property. Ineligible bids will only be considered if there is no demand from an eligible household.

Applicants can express an interest for as many properties as they want. Once an applicant is made an offer of a property all their other bids will be disregarded.

**What is the allocation and sign up process?**

**Pre Tenancy Awareness Sessions**

Pre–Tenancy workshops will be held for new applicants. These workshops are aimed at helping the applicant to become familiar with SARH and provide an opportunity for applicants to understand more about their rights and responsibilities as a tenant and how to manage their tenancy effectively. The workshops will include links to employment, advise on money management and housing benefits.

**How do SARH Short-list and Select an Applicant?**

At the end of each advertising cycle, bids will be short-listed in accordance with the policy. The property will be offered to the eligible applicant in the highest priority band with the earliest priority date. If there are no bids from eligible applicants’ offers maybe made to an ineligible applicant in order to minimise empty homes occurring. For example a two bed roomed flat may be offered to a single person.

**How do SARH make an offer?**

Applicants will usually be contacted by telephone to arrange a pre-offer interview if required prior to an accompanied viewing. The offer of accommodation will be on condition that the applicant is still eligible for that accommodation.

If the applicant refuses the offer, the property will be offered to the next applicant in line.

A provisional offer may be made to an applicant while the property is still tenanted or being repaired. In rare instances the offer may be withdrawn, for example, if the current tenant decides they no longer wish to move.

**What happens when SARH contact the applicant?**

If the applicant indicates they are likely to accept the property, they will be informed when it is going to be ready, so they can start to make arrangements for the move. Arrangements will be made for a pre-tenancy interview to verify their circumstances, assess affordability, and complete any housing benefit or direct debit forms and/or request an Allpay card. They will be reminded that one week’s rent will be due at the sign-up appointment.

**What are the viewing arrangements?**
Applicants short-listed for offer will be contacted to arrange a viewing with a member of staff. If possible this will be during the termination period or whilst the property is undergoing repairs. Where multiple viewing arrangements are deemed appropriate, applicants will be notified of their place in the short-listing, to decide whether to take up the invitation to view.

**What happens if the offer is accepted?**

If the applicant accepts the property, a scheduled time will be made for them to have an accompanied viewing of the property which could be while the property is in repair or if it is ready at the final viewing, to sign off the ‘lettable standard’.

**The lettable standard**

The lettable standard sets out the condition a property will be let, including any statutory fitness and general Health and Safety obligations.

**Accepting the offer**

Applicants will be given a reasonable amount of time to decide whether to accept the property, normally 48 hours.

**Rent payments**

Applicants must bring in the first week’s rent with them when signing for the tenancy. Failure to do so may result in the offer being withdrawn and offered to the next applicant. The first weeks rent will remain on the customers account until the tenancy is terminated.

**Notice Period**

If the applicant is transferring from one SARH tenancy to another, two weeks notice of termination is required.

**When will SARH decide not to make an offer of accommodation?**

Housing Choices Officers may decide not to proceed with an offer if:

- a) The applicant has become ineligible.
- b) Due to a change in circumstances, the applicant has a reduced priority and moved into a lower band.
- c) Where the applicant or member of their household has a mobility need that cannot be met by the property they have bid for.
- d) There is reasonable evidence that to do so might endanger the health, safety or well being of the applicant or neighbouring residents.
- e) The applicant owes money to SARH or other breach of SARH tenancy conditions.
- f) Where previous anti social behaviour has been committed by the household and it would be of detriment to the wider community if the offer was made.
What type of tenancy will an applicant get?

SARH offer a “Starter Tenancy” to all new tenants except those customers who have been allocated a home in an Extra Care or specialist supported housing scheme. This provides for a probationary period of one year and is an assured shorthold tenancy. After one year, the tenancy will become ‘fixed’. The amount of time the tenancy is fixed for will be dependent on specific circumstances.

A ‘Lifetime tenancy’ will be granted where the applicant is being re housed in independent living accommodation or Extra Care or other specialist supported housing.

SARH tenancies will be reviewed after the fixed period. At this point the customer may be given another fixed term tenancy or other suitable accommodation may be offered. The leaflet ‘What about my tenancy?’ explains in detail how the process works.

More information on tenancy types and how they operate can be found in the Fixed Tenure Policy

Where SARH has evidence that a tenancy has not been conducted satisfactorily during the first twelve months, then SARH have the power to end the tenancy quickly by serving a notice and obtaining an order from the court.

SARH would like to give new tenants every opportunity to enjoy their new home and be able to maintain their tenancy.

SARH believe that this will offer reassurance to tenants and others that nuisance and anti-social behaviour is being taken seriously by SARH.

How do SARH feedback on properties let?

SARH will publish weekly feedback on properties that have been let. Feedback information will include:

- The number of bids for each property advertised.
- The band and priority date of the successful applicant.

Do SARH monitor bids?

Applicants who are not bidding will also be monitored and contact will be made by the Housing Choices Team, to ensure that applicants understand the system and provide any further assistance. Homeless applicants will also be monitored by SBC and contacted if they are not actively making bids.

What happens if an applicant refuses an offer?

Usually, if a customer refuses an offer of accommodation through CBL, it will not affect their housing needs band. If a customer refuses three offers their case will be reviewed and appropriate housing advice given. An applicant who places bids and when offered accommodation repeatedly refuses numerous properties for no good
reason will be suspended for 3 months. Advice and assistance will previously have been provided to the applicant and will be repeated at the time of suspension. This is to identify if inappropriate or speculative bids are being made as this could affect other applications and extend the time a property is empty (also see section on Homeless Applicants).

13. What if an applicant needs advice or wants to make an appeal?

How can an applicant get advice and assistance?

On applying for accommodation free advice and assistance is available to any applicant who needs it. This includes:

- Help to complete the online application.
- Written and verbal information to help them understand how their application will be dealt with.
- The opportunity to contact staff to find out whether their needs can be met and, if so, guidance on how long they may have to wait for accommodation.
- Help with reviews, appeals and complaints where appropriate.

Applicants can get advice and assistance by:

- Telephoning the Customer Services Centre on free phone 0800 111 4554.
- Calling into Head office at Parker Court or visiting the Stafford Advice Shop at Greyfriars.
- Writing or e-mailing the Housing Choices Team at housingchoices@sarh.co.uk
- Non-English speakers can contact through Language Line or use an interpretation service. This will be monitored to ensure using this service does not cause any unnecessary delay.

Will details be dealt with confidentially?

All applicants will be dealt with in a confidential manner. Information held under the scheme will not be disclosed to a third party except where:

a) The individual who is the subject of such confidential information has consented to disclosure to a third party.
b) It is permissible to disclose the information under data protection legislation
c) There is a requirement in law to make such a disclosure.
d) The applicant has given consent for any information held on an application to be shared with other social housing landlords and other agencies.
e) The applicant has nominated someone to act/advocate on their behalf.

How do applicants contact SARH?

A list of contact details for the Head Office and the Stafford Advice Shop at Greyfriars can be found in Appendix 6.
Are there any support services available?

Some applicants may need support in setting up, managing and maintaining a tenancy.

Every effort will be made to identify applicants who need some level of support via:

- The housing application.
- Any risk assessments.
- Dependency scale assessments (a Supporting People requirement).
- Referrals from staff and other agencies such as Staffordshire Police, Probation, Social Services and Age Concern.
- Referrals from family members.
- Request from applicants themselves.
- At the ‘Pre Tenancy’ workshops.

The applicant may be contacted to obtain more detail of their needs to decide what type of support they need, for example:

- Advice on the allocation scheme.
- Help to select a property.
- Support in setting up and maintaining a tenancy.
- Money Advice relating to Benefit entitlement and Rent levels.

If the applicant needs help to set up a tenancy, every effort will be made to refer them to the most appropriate housing support services provider. This may include making referrals to other more general support services if necessary. These include Adult and Children’s Service, Health Service providers, Environmental & Health Services and voluntary organisations.

Can applicants get other housing advice?

A number of applicants may prefer to remain in their current home but apply for SARH accommodation because they think they have no other option. These applicants will be given appropriate advice and assistance to help them remain in their own home, if this is possible. For example in the following situations:

A property is in disrepair

A referral or advice to contact SBC Environmental & Health Services Department may be appropriate if:

- A private landlord has not carried out essential repairs.
- The applicant would like information on home improvements.

A Care and Repair Scheme is needed

Elderly or disabled homeowners and private tenants can be referred to the Care and Repair scheme. This is a non-profit advice service run by Orbit Care;
- To enable vulnerable and disabled homeowners to continue to live safely and independently for as long as they wish
- To advise clients on other relevant housing options
- To prevent premature residential care and health related problems connected to poor housing conditions.

A Care & Repair visit can be booked by telephoning 01785 619000 or e-mail staffordcareandrepairadmin@orbit.org.uk.

SARH homes that may require adaptations

Applicants will be referred to the Adult Services Department, within Social Services, if they want to remain in their current home but they need adaptations to do so. An occupational therapist will carry out an assessment with the applicant to decide whether their current home can be adapted to meet their needs. Applicants will also be referred to, or advised to contact the Adult Services Department if it is felt their housing needs could be addressed by having adaptations carried out at the property so enabling them to remain in their current home even if it was an option they had not previously considered.

SARH customers can apply to be considered for a adaptation. However it is considered that houses, maisonettes and flats above ground floor level are not suitable for major adaptations. Options for re housing into other suitable accommodation will be considered first.

There is a need for a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)

A DFG is a local council grant to help towards the cost of adapting a home to enable the customer to continue to live there. A grant is paid when the council considers that changes are necessary to meet their needs, and that work is reasonable and practical.

Customers who need adaptations will be asked to consider moving to more suitable accommodation. However, if they do not wish to move or no alternative suitable accommodation can be found, SBC may process these requests.

Where advice is needed to prevent homelessness

Every effort will be made to identify applicants who may be potentially homeless. Applicant’s details will be forwarded to SBC Housing Options Team who will contact the applicant giving advice and assistance. For example, dealing with the mortgage provider or referring them to Citizens Advice Bureau.

There is a need for Independent Advice

An applicant may want to get independent advice about the allocation scheme or any decisions made about their application.

Shelter, Citizens Advice Bureau and local solicitors are some of the organisations who may offer free, independent advice to people about their housing application.
Can an applicant make an appeal?

Sections 166 and 167 of the Housing Act 1996 contain provisions relating to the rights of applicants to receive advice and information, as well as rights to request appeals of decision made in respect of their application. In operating the scheme, staff will ensure that these obligations are met.

Applicants have the right to appeal against a range of decisions made in the allocation process. These are:

- A decision to exclude an application
- A decision to suspend an application
- A decision about banding on the housing register
- A decision on awarding medical or welfare priority
- A decision to cancel an application
- Any decision about the facts of their application, which is likely to be, or has been taken into account in considering whether to allocate accommodation.

Applicants will be given the opportunity to provide any further information that SARH may be unaware of and reasons why they believe the decision is incorrect.

All requests will be dealt with in the same way. Appeals will be carried out by a more senior member of staff, who was not involved in the original decision. They will either decide to overturn or support the original decision. The applicant will be informed in writing of the decision within 10 working days of the request being received. The reply will contain the decision made, the reasons for the decision and the facts taken into account when making the decision. The applicant will be informed of the complaints process in case they wish to pursue the matter further and advised to seek independent legal advice.

The applicant’s request for an appeal of the decision can be made either verbally or in writing.

If doing so in writing they must give details as to why they want the appeal and provide any other information they wish to be considered.

If an applicant is verbally requesting an appeal to a member of staff the reasons will be written down and the applicant must sign to confirm it is a correct record of the points they wish to be considered.

Can an applicant complain?

SARH has a formal complaints process. A leaflet explaining the process can be obtained from Head Office, the Stafford Advice Shop in Greyfriars, or by contacting the Customer Services Centre on 0800 111 4554 and also on the website. Applicants can use the complaints procedure if they feel:

- SARH have failed to provide an adequate service.
- If the service has not been delivered in accordance with the policy and procedures.
- If they have been treated in an impolite or discourteous manner.
SARH will always try to deal with a complaint immediately or ‘on the spot’. If this is not possible SARH will investigate the complaint and reply to the applicant in writing within 10 working days. The applicant will receive an acknowledgement letter confirming the date that they will receive a full written response by and the name of the member of staff dealing with their complaint.

**How to make a complaint**

You can make a complaint by:

- Speaking to one of our staff at our Head Office or the Stafford Advice Shop or any member of staff out in the community.
- Phoning SARH on 0800 111 4554
- Writing to us.
- Completing the ‘Have Your Say’ form on our website www.sarh.co.uk
- Completing our complaints leaflet available at Head Office and Stafford Advice Shop.

**14. How will the CBL Allocations Policy be monitored and reviewed?**

The Policy aims to:

- Increase customer choice
- Make the most efficient use of the homes available
- Give priority for accommodation to those in greatest housing need
- Ensure equal access to SARH housing for all groups and individuals in the community and
- Provide support for vulnerable groups

In order to ensure these aims are achieved, the Policy will be monitored and reported to SARH Leadership Team, Strategic Board and Customer Board, and SBC Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis. Any areas for change will be consulted on with customers and stakeholders. Any recommendations on changes required will go to SARH Strategic Board and SBC Scrutiny Committee for approval. Operational reporting on the number of lettings and void statistics are provided quarterly to SBC.

The policy will be reviewed every two years
## Appendix 1 - Housing Needs Bands

### Band 1 – Urgent Housing Need
(Your need to move is urgent, for example you can no longer live in your current home)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>You are a tenant of SARH and need to be moved out of your current tenancy on a temporary basis, so major repairs can be carried out to that property, that cannot be done whilst you live in that property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>You have been referred by the National Witness Mobility Scheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>You have been awarded medical 1 priority because you or a member of your household need to move because of a serious medical condition and either cannot return to your home from hospital, cannot get into or out of your home or cannot reach essential facilities within your home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>You are living in statutory overcrowded or unsanitary accommodation as determined by SBC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>You are a tenant of SARH and under occupy your current property by 2 or more bedrooms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>You are a SARH tenant and live in an adapted property that you or your household no longer need.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>You have been awarded Welfare 1 priority. These are exceptional cases e.g. Victims of harassment or domestic abuse and are at risk of death or serious harm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>You have been served with a Compulsory Purchase Order; and have been provided with confirmation of a set date for development by SBC’s Environmental Health Services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Band 2 – High Housing Need
(You need to move soon to address your housing needs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>You have been accepted as Statutory Homeless in accordance with homeless legislation and are in priority need (letter of confirmation required) and not intentionally homeless.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>You have been accepted as having a local connection and are living in temporary supported accommodation in the borough and you are ready to ‘move on’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>You would benefit from a move on medical or welfare grounds to reduce the effects of your current housing situation on your health or welfare.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>You are a SARH tenant living in a decommissioned independent living scheme and wish to move to alternative independent living or extra care accommodation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>You are overcrowded in your current property and require 2 or more additional bedrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>You are a tenant of SARH and under occupying your current property by 1 bedroom.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Band 3 – Housing Need
(You need to move to more appropriate accommodation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q</th>
<th>You are living in a flat above ground floor level, where a member of the household is pregnant or there is a child aged less than 10 years old and there is no lift in the building</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| R | Threatened with Homeless  
1. You have been accepted as having a local connection and working with the homelessness prevention service, to try and prevent homelessness. You have been assessed as having a priority need and are not intentionally homeless.  
2. You have been assessed by SBC as in priority need but intentionally homeless. |
| S | You are living in a House of Multiple Occupation, Bed and Breakfast, or hostel accommodation and are sharing/lacking facilities |
| T | You are homeless but with no priority need under the homeless legislation |
| U | You are overcrowded in your current property and require 1 additional bedroom |
| V | You are a carer who needs to move closer to a relative or friend to provide that care or where the applicant needs to move and failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or to others) |

### Band 4 – No Housing Need
(There is no current housing need but you would like to move)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>W</th>
<th>Your current home meets your needs but you would like to move</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>You have equity in your current accommodation, which is above the Borough’s average house price and you have the ability to secure your own independent accommodation to meet your housing needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2 - Bedroom Standards Table

This table clearly sets out SARH bedroom need standard. Priority banding will be awarded to applicants whose current bedroom arrangements fall short of this minimum standard. Each application will be assessed on bedroom arrangements in the accommodation currently occupied by the applicant and his or her household, taking into account the needs of all other people living in the property.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHO SHOULD OCCUPY</th>
<th>BEDROOM REQUIREMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married/ Co-habiting couple</td>
<td>1 bedroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Parent, (Single parent is defined as a mother or father who has at least one child permanently living with them)</td>
<td>1 bedroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other persons over the age of 18</td>
<td>1 bedroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each 2 people of the same sex up to the age of 18</td>
<td>1 bedroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each 2 children aged 8 and under (different sexes)</td>
<td>1 bedroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each child aged 9+ (where children are of different sexes)</td>
<td>1 bedroom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3 - Property Eligibility Criteria

Property Size

Different types and sizes of households are eligible for different sizes and types of property e.g. a single person will be allocated a one-bedroom property and will not normally be considered for larger accommodation. Women who are 16 weeks (or more) pregnant will be classed as having a dependant child.

The size of accommodation a household will be eligible for can be assessed using the ‘property eligibility table’. Where there is no demand from an eligible household other households may be considered. For example:

- For 2 and 3 bedroom houses preference will be given to households with children
- For 4 bedroom houses preference will be given to households who will fully utilise all the rooms, for example a household with 4 or more children.
- Bedrooms - if there is a severe shortage of certain property types in the area, priority will be given to households who need all the bedrooms in a property. It is considered that the following have their own bedroom:
  - A couple (including husband and wife or partners of the same or opposite sex)
  - Each child aged 9 years and over of age of different sexes.
  - Lodgers
  - Sleeping carers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person Type</th>
<th>Eligible for property type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elderly Single Person</td>
<td>1 bed bungalow, 1 bed independent living, 1 bed flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly Couple</td>
<td>1 / 2 bed bungalow, 1 /2 bed independent living, 1 /2 bed flat/ maisonette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly single person or couple with sleeping care worker</td>
<td>2 bed bungalow, 2 bed independent living, 2 bed flat/ maisonette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Person or childless couple (under 60 years of age)</td>
<td>1 bed flat, bedsit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single person or couple with baby due</td>
<td>2 bed house/flat/maisonette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single person or couple with sleeping care worker</td>
<td>2 bed house/flat/maisonette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household with access to children</td>
<td>2 / 3 bed flat/maisonette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 or more adults without children who are not in a relationship</td>
<td>2 / 3 bed flat/maisonette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family (1 or 2 parent) with</td>
<td>2 bed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Child</td>
<td>House/Flat/Maisonette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family (1 or 2 Parent) with 2 children (same sex)</td>
<td>2 or 3 bed house/flat/maisonette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family (1 or 2 Parent) with 2 children (different sex)</td>
<td>2 or 3 bed house/flat/maisonette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family (1 or 2 Parent) with 3 children</td>
<td>3 bed house/flat/maisonette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family (1 or 2 Parent) with 4 children</td>
<td>3 or 4 bed house/flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family (1 or 2 Parent) with more than 4 children</td>
<td>3 or 4 bed house/flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family with sleeping care worker</td>
<td>As applicable dependent on household size</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Property Size and Local Housing Allowance**

From April 2013 Local Housing Allowance entitlement will take account of the number of bedrooms and the age, gender and relationships of the family members. A much stricter ‘bedroom standard’ set by the government, than that of SARH will be used to assess who would be expected to share a bedroom. In some cases SARH may match customers with homes for which families may not be eligible for full payment of the rent by Department of Work and Pensions and an amount of rent will be due. In these circumstances the customer will be made aware of this and left with the choice if accepting a property where the rent will not be fully met by housing benefit so requiring them to pay the outstanding amount. Applicants will also be made aware of SARH arrears recovery policy for non-payment of rent which can ultimately lead in eviction for persistent non-payment.
Appendix 4 - Glossary of terms

Band - Applicants will be placed in a priority band, which reflects the current housing circumstances. There are four bands in this scheme.

Bid - Applicant's way of showing an interest in a property advertised. Applicants are allowed to place an unlimited amount of bids per advertising cycle.

Bidding deadline - The deadline for placing bids each week. This is Midnight every Tuesday.

Customer Needs Assessment – Before an offer is made a customer needs assessment will be made. Further information may be sought from external agencies, such as Police, Social Services.

Housing Associations, also known as Registered Social Landlords or Registered Providers, who also provide housing services such as housing for rent and sometimes shared ownership at affordable prices.

Housing Register - This is the list of applicants.

Lettable Standard – This tells you in what condition an applicant can expect to find a property offered to them by SARH. It also informs that SARH are meeting any statutory obligations, including fitness and general Health and Safety.

Management Lets - Most homes will be advertised through the CBL scheme. However, in certain circumstances, SARH will let a home directly to a customer and not advertise the home. Feedback will be provided showing all properties let in this way.

Shortlisting - This is the list of applicants who have placed a bid on a property. This list is used to offer the property to the applicant with the highest priority in line with the Lettings Policy.

Key workers – These are applicants who are designated as requiring a home to enable them to work in the borough, these workers are usually moving to the area to satisfy a specific skills shortage.
Appendix 5 - A step-by-step guide to applying for housing for customers

Choice Based Lettings is a new way of letting properties. Here is a step-by-step guide to how it works.

If, for any reason, you have any difficulty making an application or using the service, please contact us and we will help you.

Step 1
You will need to fill out an application. You can complete the on-line application via the internet or you can phone us on 0800 111 4554 and complete the application over the telephone with a member of staff.

Step 2
Once you have signed up, SARH will give you a registration number (also called a UPIN number)

SARH will tell you what band you are in (see pages 36 and 37) and the size of the property (in terms of the number of bedrooms) for which you are eligible.

Step 3
Every week properties will be advertised on the SARH website or in our free sheet. Keep a look out for the property you are interested in.

You can use a computer at our Stafford Advice Shop, Mobile Office or our Head Office to access our website. Local libraries will also have computers available for you to use.

You will also be able to request a copy of our weekly free sheet at our offices. We can also arrange to send this free sheet through the post if you have difficulty accessing the services.

Step 4
You tell us what properties you are interested in. This is called ‘bidding’. You can bid for as many properties as you are eligible for in each weekly advertising cycle. You can also arrange for someone else to bid for properties on your behalf.

In order to bid, please contact us in the following ways, remembering your UPIN number.
- Visit our website at www.sarh.co.uk
- Phone 0800 111 4554

Make sure you bid before the deadline, which will be at Midnight every Tuesday.

Step 5
We close the advertising and then complete a short-list. If you have bid for a property and have been short-listed SARH will invite you to view the property.

At this stage SARH will check your application thoroughly. This could include visiting your home and asking for additional information.
If the property does not suit your needs you can refuse the offer and look for another property you would like to bid for.

If you have not heard from us within 10 days of the deadline for the advertisement, your bid has not been successful.

**Step 6**  
We will publish information about the properties let each week on our website and in the free sheet. Personal details of the successful applicants will not be included.
Appendix 6 - Contact Details

SARH Headquarters
“The Rurals”
1 Parker Court
Staffordshire Technology Park
Beaconside
Stafford
ST18 0WP

Open Monday – Friday 8.30am - 5.00pm

FREEPHONE 0800 111 4554
01785 216789
housingchoices@sarh.co.uk

Stafford Advice Shop
56 Greyfriars
Stafford
ST16 2RG

Opening times are:
Monday 9.00am - 5.00pm
Tuesday 9.00am - 5.00pm
Wednesday 9:00am - 12:30pm
Thursday 9.00am - 5.00pm
Friday 9.00am - 5.00pm

Stafford Borough Council
Civic Centre
Riverside
Stafford
ST16 3AQ

Opening Times

Monday to Thursday 8.30 to 5.00pm
Friday 8.30 to 4.30pm

Telephone
01785 619000
Web www.staffordbc.gov.uk
Email housingadvice@staffordbc.gov.uk

Stafford Borough Council’s Housing Options Team operates a ‘drop in’ service which is open from 9.30am to 11.30am Mon to Fri at the Civic Centre