

HomeChoice Policy – Table of Changes 2022

Section/Sub-section	Issue	Amendment
1.5.1 Exceptional Circumstances/Appendix I	New sub-section/additional sentence	North Somerset Council has a limited supply of social units to allocate to, and therefore we are unable to support large volumes of applications from people without a connection to the area or a compelling reason to live here.
2.2.1 Family connections – applicant’s immediate family member (parents, siblings, non-dependent children) has lived in North Somerset for the last two consecutive years and applicant has a need to live near this person to give or receive care or support;	Amendment to criteria added in 2020 to clarify. ‘significant’ should be taken to refer to a higher level of support than most ordinary applicants would benefit from, and this should be demonstrated with evidence where possible. For example, most families would benefit from help with childcare and most people would benefit from low-level mental health support from relatives, however the word ‘significant’ denotes a higher threshold than what most applicants could meet.	Amendments: applicant’s immediate family member (parents/ caregivers , siblings, non-dependent adult children) has lived in North Somerset for the last two consecutive years and applicant has a need to live near this person to give or receive significant care or support;
2.2.3 Homelessness - Have had a main duty accepted by North Somerset Council under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, or; - Is homeless or threatened with homelessness and North Somerset Council has accepted a prevention or relief duty and there would be a main duty if a homelessness application were determined, or;	Removal of distinction between cohorts with prevention or relief duties.	2.2.3 Homelessness - Have had a main duty accepted by North Somerset Council under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, or; - Is homeless or threatened with homelessness and North Somerset Council has accepted a prevention or relief duty.
2.3.6 Applicants who owe any scheme landlord or private landlord more than £200 in rent arrears or other rechargeable debts or owe North Somerset Council more than £200 in Council Tax, will be excluded from the Housing Register until they have made twelve successive monthly repayments as part of an agreed payment plan or they have reduced their outstanding	Increase of debt threshold from £200 to £500 and length of adherence to payment plan reduced from twelve to six months. Inclusion of financial abuse in exceptions.	Applicants who owe any scheme landlord or private landlord more than £500 in rent arrears or other rechargeable debts or owe North Somerset Council more than £500 in Council Tax, will be excluded from the Housing Register until they have made six successive monthly repayments as part of an

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<p>balance to below £200, at which time they may reapply. This will not apply if the landlord is working with the applicant to alleviate their under-occupation, or they fall into one of the homelessness qualifying groups defined in paragraph 2.2.3; or</p>		<p>agreed payment plan or they have reduced their outstanding balance to below £500, at which time they may reapply. This will not apply if the landlord is working with the applicant to alleviate their under-occupation, they fall into one of the homelessness qualifying groups defined in paragraph 2.2.3, or financial abuse has taken place, or</p>
<p>2.4.1 Applicants can complete an initial application form to establish if they qualify for the Housing Register. If they are assessed as qualifying, they can then complete the full Housing Register application form to have their application assessed.</p>	<p>Remove as does not apply/outdated, and replace.</p>	<p>Replacement: Applications are completed online using the Housing Jigsaw website. Application completion is the applicant’s responsibility, however applicants who are not able to complete the online form for age and/or capacity related reasons can request assistance from a member of the HomeChoice team.</p>
<p>3.3.6 Care Leavers</p>	<p>Suggested addition to clarify policy.</p> <p>This award is intended as a one-time award only. The Housing Assessment Team Manager will have the discretion to reinstate this award in exceptional circumstances only.</p>	<p>Addition: This award is intended as a one-time award only. The Housing Assessment Team Manager will have the discretion to reinstate this award following the failure of a tenancy in exceptional circumstances only. This award will not be made in conjunction with a 3.4.8 Band B Supported Housing Move-On award.</p>
<p>3.4.1 Homelessness Relief Duty (RPHN)</p> <p>Except where paragraph 3.6.1 applies, Applicants to whom North Somerset Council has accepted a relief duty under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017) and there would be a main duty if a homelessness application were to be determined;</p>	<p>Removal of distinction between cohorts within this group.</p>	<p>Except where paragraph 3.6.1 applies, Applicants to whom North Somerset Council has accepted a relief duty under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017)</p>
<p>3.4.2 Homelessness Prevention Duty (RPHN)</p> <p>Except where paragraph 3.6.1 applies, Applicants to whom North Somerset</p>	<p>Removal of distinction between cohorts within this group.</p>	<p>Except where paragraph 3.6.1 applies, Applicants to whom North Somerset Council has accepted a prevention duty under Part 7 of the Housing</p>

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<p>Council has accepted a prevention duty under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017) and there would be a main duty if a homelessness application were to be determined;</p>		<p>Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017).</p>
<p>3.7.2 Emergency Priority Band</p> <p><i>Emergency Priority Band will only be issued to any applicant who requires an 'urgent' move to ensure the applicants safety and welfare for whatever reason. Substantial evidence must exist before such a priority is awarded. This priority may be awarded where circumstances could include where the Police recommend an urgent move to escape violence or threats of violence, or where the applicant, or a member of their household, has suffered a sudden 'traumatic event' and living within their home will cause considerable distress (e.g., serious sexual assault, etc).</i></p>	<p>Entire removal of last sentence due to potential confusion between Band A award and Emergency Priority award on threat of/violence cases following recent complaint.</p>	<p>Emergency Priority Band will only be issued to any applicant who requires an exceptionally 'urgent' move to ensure the applicant's safety and welfare for whatever reason. Substantial evidence will be required before such a priority is awarded.</p>
<p>3.8.2 Effective Date</p> <p>An application's Effective Date is determined by the date that evidence was received for their eligibility for that banding, regardless of when that evidence was actually assessed.</p>	<p>Effective date currently set out in policy as date evidence received. This is unclear as multiple submissions can be made. This will change to 'date of decision' to foster consistency with homelessness legislation, other LAs housing registers and provide clarity. As long as assessment timescales are met then it is reasonable to allow the service this time to assess provided evidence.</p>	<p>An application's Effective Date is determined by the date of decision of the highest banding award.</p>
<p>3.11.4 Suspending Applications</p>	<p>Insertion of new paragraph within 'Cancelling Applications' section</p>	<p>Applications may be suspended for reasons other than those mentioned elsewhere in this Policy, in order to prevent bidding in cases where information that may affect eligibility, qualification, bedroom entitlement or banding is conflicting or requiring clarification and/or evidence.</p>
<p>4.1.3 Children are considered to be resident where they stay with the applicant for more than four nights per week or seven nights each fortnight. This is subject to satisfactory evidence</p>	<p>Addition immediately following on.</p>	<p>Where parents/guardians are separated and a child is co-resident with both parents on a 50/50 basis, if the child is already adequately housed with one parent, they cannot</p>

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<p>being submitted to support access/residency right.</p>		<p>be included on the housing application of the other parent.</p>
<p>4.1.5 For applicants who are pregnant, the unborn child will be classed as a child for the purposes of property size eligibility only. Where a household already has another child (other children), the unborn child will be classed as the same sex as the youngest child. Unborn children do not count towards whether an applicant is lacking in bedrooms.</p>	<p>At what stage do we allow a new pregnancy to affect bedroom calculation?</p>	<p>For applicants who are pregnant, the unborn child will be classed as a child for the purposes of property size eligibility only, from the 20th week of pregnancy. Where a household already has another child (other children), the unborn child will be classed as the same sex as the youngest child. Unborn children do not count towards whether an applicant is lacking in bedrooms.</p>
<p>5.3.3 Homeless Case Properties</p>	<p>Addition</p>	<p>The Council reserves the right to respond to unusually high pressure on temporary accommodation resources through the increased use of direct lets or considering backdating application effective dates for those currently resident in temporary accommodation placements.</p>
<p>5.5</p>	<p>Addition sub-section</p>	<p>It should be noted that all scheme landlords operate their own lettings policies and criteria independently of HomeChoice North Somerset. The Council works closely with them to foster consistency in the discharging of our statutory duties via the allocation of social housing units.</p>
<p>5.6.2</p>	<p>Additional sentence</p>	<p>Applicants not currently owed a homelessness duty by North Somerset Council who have refused one offer of suitable accommodation will have their banding reduced by one band for six months. Applicants in band D who have refused one offer of suitable accommodation will no longer qualify to be registered for a period of six months. Applicants who have refused two offers of suitable accommodation will no longer</p>

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		qualify to be registered for a period of 12 months. The decision on the suitability of a property under offer will be for the Housing Assessment Team to make. This is a reviewable decision.
Appendix B – Medical Assessments	Removal of a circumstance excluded from medical priority consideration	Where the medical condition is as a result of a lifestyle choice (e.g. drug use)
Appendix E#	<p>Appendix E refers to old Thursday morning shortlisting calls conducted by the Officers which are no longer in place.</p> <p>Policy however does not currently cover new requirement to provide evidence of certain circumstances at point of application.</p>	<p>Replace current Appendix E with:</p> <p><i>The HomeChoice scheme will require certain evidence at point of application prior to the assessment and activation of applications for bidding. Applicants will be expected to go to reasonable lengths to submit proof of circumstances, including (but not limited to):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proof of identification for all household members - Evidence of income and financial status - Proof of pregnancy - Evidence of child dependency - Medical evidence - Evidence of welfare circumstances <p><i>Relevant evidence of circumstances will be required during the life of an application if changes to circumstances will result in a change in eligibility, qualification, banding priority or bedroom entitlement.</i></p>
TBC	Insertion of tenancy course incentive	<i>Prospective tenants may be eligible for their application effective date to be backdated by 3 months upon recent completion of a North Somerset Council approved tenancy-ready course, where available.</i>