



Medway Council Allocations Policy 2012

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1. Introduction

In Medway the demand for social housing is far greater than the number of social homes that are available. The aim of the Allocations Policy is to ensure that the limited number of social homes are allocated to those in the greatest housing need as set out in the legal definition of reasonable preference (please see section 3).

Medway Council's Allocations Policy sets out specifically who is and who is not assisted under the scheme, it also sets out how to apply for re-housing and the standard of service that our customers can expect.

The Allocations Policy is designed to meet all legal requirements and support the objectives of Medway's current Housing Strategy 2011 – 2014, which are to:

- Deliver a range of tenures, properties and locations to meet need
- Make the best use of existing housing
- Contribute to sustainable and cohesive communities
- Provide advice across agencies to prevent crisis and increase choice
- Improve the housing offer to better meet a range of housing needs
- Ensure good quality homes that are energy efficient
- Improve and maintain independence and inclusion by providing effective support

The key objectives of the Allocations Policy will be to:

- Provide a fair and transparent system by which people are prioritised for social housing
- Help those that are most in housing need
- Promote the development of sustainable communities
- Encourage tenants to take up employment and training opportunities
- Provide greater flexibilities for the movement of existing social housing tenants
- To assist in the mitigation of the impact of welfare reform
- Recognise applicants that are making a contribution to their local community

2. Legal Framework

Medway Council's Allocation Scheme sits within a tight and complex legal framework of Part VI of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended). This section describes this legal framework.

The 1996 Housing Act (as amended by the 2002 Homelessness Act) requires local authorities to make all allocations (which includes nominations) in accordance with an Allocations policy. A summary of the Allocation Scheme must be published and made

available free of charge to any person who asks for a copy. A summary of the Scheme and general principles is available through Medway Council offices, partner Registered Providers' offices and on the Council's website.

This document is the full version of the Scheme and is available for inspection at Medway Council offices at Gun Wharf and Riverside One.

The Housing Act 1996 (as amended) requires local authorities to give Reasonable Preference in their Allocation Scheme to people with high levels of assessed housing need. This includes homeless people, those who need to move on welfare or medical grounds, people living in unsatisfactory housing and those who would face hardship unless they moved to a particular locality within the local authority's area.

The Act also requires local authorities to state within the Scheme what its position is on offering applicants a choice of housing accommodation, or offering them the opportunity to express preference about the housing accommodation to be allocated to them.

This Allocation Scheme complies with the requirements of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) and takes into account the code of guidance issued by Central Government's Communities and Local Government Department: Allocation of Accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England (June 2012).

The scheme is drafted and framed to ensure that it is compatible with the Council's equality duties including the duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination and to promote good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not. The protected characteristics are age, race, disability, sex, pregnancy and maternity, sexual orientation, religion or belief and gender reassignment.

This Scheme has considered:

- The Council's statutory obligations and discretion as to who is eligible for housing allocation
- The Council's statutory obligation to provide Reasonable Preference to certain categories of applicants set down by law i.e. those who must be given a 'head start' under the Council's Allocation Scheme
- The Council's statutory discretion to grant 'additional preference' and/or to determine priority between applicants with Reasonable Preference
- The general and specific statutory discretions the Council can exercise when allocating housing in support of its Housing Strategy the local flexibility offered through the Localism Act (2011)

3. Reasonable Preference

The Housing Act 1996 (as amended) requires local authorities to give reasonable preference to certain categories of people once placed on the housing register these are:

- a. People who are homeless within the meaning of Part 7 of the 1996 Act (including those who are intentionally homeless and those not in priority need);

- b. People who are owed a duty by any housing authority under section 190(2), 193(2) or 195(2) of the 1996 Act (or under section 65(2) of the Housing Act 1985) or who are occupying accommodation secured by any housing authority under section 192(3);
- c. People occupying unsanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions;
- d. People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds, including grounds relating to a disability; and
- e. People who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the local authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship to themselves or others.

Additional preference may be given to households with urgent housing needs.

A summary of the policy is available free of charge to any member of the public who asks for it. The full policy will be available for inspection at the principal office of the local housing authority to members of the public without charge. The policy will also be made available on the Internet.

4. Aims and Objectives

The Council's Allocation Policy sets out to:

- Meet legislative requirements
- Be fair
- Meet local need
- Meet key performance indicators
- Make best use of resources
- Create balanced and sustainable communities
- Involve service users

To do this we will:

- Consider any appropriate changes to the policy in light of government guidance or best practice
- Ensure that the objectives of the Authority are reflected in the policy and procedures of the allocations scheme
- Produce, monitor and review an annual lettings plan
- Monitor and review targets for void (empty property) turnaround
- Ensure that the proportion of different groups being re-housed reflects demand and the targets set in the lettings plan
- Ensure that the policies meet the requirements of equalities legislation
- Work in partnership with other housing providers in the locality to ensure that nomination and referral arrangements are effective

The following are considered to be “allocations” of accommodation under this policy:

(1) The selection of a person to be a secure or introductory tenant of the Council (including notifying an existing tenant or licensee that his tenancy or licence is to be a secure tenancy).

or

(2) The nomination of a person to be an Assured or an Assured Shorthold tenant of housing accommodation held by a Housing Association or Registered Provider (via the Council's Nomination Rights Agreement with the provider). Often the nomination will be that of a ‘Starter Tenant’ of a provider whereby the provider will grant an Assured Short Hold Tenancy for a set “probationary” period (usually 12 months) and provided the tenant successfully completes the “probationary” period the provider will grant an Assured Tenancy.

The following are not “allocations” under this policy:

- Succession to a tenancy on a tenant's death pursuant to s89 Housing Act 1985
- Assignment of a tenancy by way of mutual exchange
- Assignment of a tenancy to a person qualified to succeed to the tenancy on the tenants death
- Transfer of the tenancy by a court order under family law provisions or under the Civil Partnership Act 2004
- An introductory tenancy becoming a secure tenancy
- Council initiated transfers (e.g. decant to alternative accommodation to allow for major works)
- Re-housing due to being displaced from previous accommodation by the Council or being re-housed by the Council pursuant to the Land Compensation Act 1973
- A person being granted a family intervention tenancy
- Provision of non-secure temporary accommodation in discharge of any homelessness duty or power

Although the requirement for transfer cases to be dealt with outside the rules of Part VI has now been introduced by the Localism Act 2011, for the purposes of the Medway scheme, transfer cases (applicants currently living in social housing that wish to move) will remain as part of the scheme rather than be removed.

5. Eligibility

To qualify for inclusion on the Council's Housing Register applicants must be over the age of 16 and be eligible for Social Housing.

A person is not eligible if they are:

- Subject to Immigration control (within the meaning of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996) and not otherwise re-included by regulations made by the Secretary of State
- A person from abroad excluded by regulations made by the Secretary of State

- Not habitually resident in the United Kingdom (other than EEA/EU workers or those covered by an EEA/EU Directive) or required to leave the UK by the Secretary of State.

If the main applicant is eligible and not subject to Immigration control, non-eligible dependent children and other family members will be considered providing that they are resident within the country.

Non-dependent adult children, non-relatives, carers, lodgers and live-in help will not be taken in to account.

For the purpose of this policy a child will be defined as a member of the household that is under the age of 18 and in full time education or, who would be expected to be in full time education.

6. What is the Housing Register?

The Housing Register, for the purpose of this policy, is a record of applicants whose details are held with the Council as the result of the applicant making an application for re-housing.

7. Qualification for the Housing Register

Section 160ZA Housing Act 1996 (as amended) gives power to Local Authorities to define classes of applicants that will be considered as qualifying persons. Medway Council will consider at initial application Eligibility (section 5) and then Qualification as set out below. Eligibility and Qualification may be revisited at the point of offer especially where a considerable amount of time has elapsed between application and offer.

Applicants will not qualify for inclusion on the Council's Housing Register if they fall into one of the following criteria:

- Residency - households who have not lived within the Medway boundaries continuously for the 2 years prior to the application being made. Residency in Medway must be by the applicant's own choice as set out in section 6 of this document (i.e. not placed within Medway boundaries by another Local Authority).
- Income - Applicants that have a high income. A high income is likely to be considered as more than £50,000 per annum per household.
- Assets - Applicants that have a high level of assets. A high level of assets is likely to be considered as more than £50,000.

The Council will notify the applicant in writing of any decision resulting in him or her not qualifying for inclusion on the housing register, and will be advised of the grounds for that decision. Applicants are entitled to request a review of this decision (see section 13) or make a fresh application should their circumstances change.

Applicants will be removed from the Housing Register if they no longer meet the criteria set out above.

Households who do not qualify for inclusion on the Housing Register will be given information about other housing options that may be available to them and will be refused inclusion in the housing register.

In exceptional circumstances Management Discretion (Section 15) will be used in determining whether it is reasonable for an applicant to be excluded from the housing register based on any of the criteria set out above. For example, where, notwithstanding income or capital, it is impossible to secure alternative accommodation e.g. where a specific adaptation cannot be undertaken in the current property but applicants cannot access other appropriate accommodation with the equity they have available.

8. Assessment of Need

Medway Council is required by law to determine the relative priority that housing applicants are awarded. This is particularly important when the demand for social housing is greater than the availability of homes.

The law, as it applies to local housing authorities, requires that Reasonable Preference for housing must be given to those in the categories set out in the Housing Act 1996 (as amended). The statutory Reasonable Preference categories in section 167(2) (a) to (e) of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) are:

- People who are homeless (within the meaning of Part VII of the Act).
- People who are owed a duty by any local housing authority under [section 190\(2\)](#), [193\(2\)](#) or [195\(2\)](#) (or under [section 65\(2\)](#) or [68\(2\)](#) of the [Housing Act 1985](#)) or who are occupying accommodation secured by any such authority under [section 192\(3\)](#).
- People occupying unsanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in 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 district of the authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship to themselves or others.

Section 166A(3) of the Housing Act 1996 gives housing authorities the power to frame their allocation scheme to give additional preference to particular descriptions of people who fall within the statutory reasonable preference categories and have urgent housing needs. All housing authorities must consider, in the light of local circumstances, the need to give effect to this provision. Examples of people with urgent housing needs to whom housing authorities should consider giving additional preference within their allocation scheme include:

- Those who need to move urgently because of a life threatening illness or sudden disability
- Families in severe overcrowding which poses a serious health hazard

- Those who are homeless and require urgent re-housing as a result of violence or threats of violence, including intimidated witnesses, and those escaping serious anti-social behaviour or domestic violence

The Council will use a banding based system to allocate accommodation. In assessing housing need the Council will give Reasonable Preference to those applicants who fall into the defined categories as set out in appendix 1.

Explanation of Priority Bands

Band A – People who are considered to be in reasonable preference and have been granted an additional preference.

Band B – People who have a housing need and fall in to one or more of the reasonable preference categories and meet the criteria to be considered to be a local priority for Medway as set out in appendix 3.

Band C – People that have a housing need that places them in to a reasonable preference category but do not meet the Medway criteria for a local priority.

Band D – Cases that have a need to move and fall in to a reasonable preference but have had their priority reduced due to the reasons set out in appendix 1.

Cases that qualify for the housing register but do not qualify to be in a reasonable preference group (Band A-D) will be held on an inactive housing register. Applicants on the inactive housing register will not be permitted to bid for accommodation. Applicants are registered for statistical purposes, in the event that a housing need arises in the future and to receive targeted housing advice.

Cases on the inactive housing register will not be administered or reviewed unless the applicant can demonstrate a change in their circumstances that would suggest they would now fall in to a reasonable preference category set out in appendix 1[in such circumstances, the applicant's needs will be reassessed to determine whether they fall within a reasonable preference category]. However, the use of the inactive register will be strategically reviewed with revisions of the Allocations Policy.

In the event that a property cannot be let to an applicant in band A to D then the property will be offered to the inactive register starting with the applicant that has been registered for the longest.

9. Medical Priority

Medical priority will be awarded according to the extent of which the health or welfare of one or more of the applying household is affected by their housing conditions and the expected benefits of providing suitable settled accommodation. Cases may be referred to an independent medical advisor where the Council would like to seek clarification around the impact of a condition. In cases where the Council considers it is reasonable and practicable to undertake an adaptation, no medical priority will be awarded.

10. Domestic Abuse

Due to the complex nature of cases involving domestic abuse a different method of assessment will apply. A panel of at least one member of housing staff at officer level and one member of staff at senior level or above will make a decision as to which band, if any, is applicable. This decision will take account of information received from the Police, Independent Domestic Abuse Workers and other agencies involved with the client. Through this process we will also ensure that referrals are made to the appropriate agencies and that other advice and assistance is offered where appropriate.

11. Existing Social Housing Tenants

Council, housing association and registered provider tenants in the Medway area will be registered and assessed under the scheme in the same way as any other applicant.

Applications from the tenants set out above may be made jointly or by separate tenants who wish to be re-housed together, on the condition that both tenancies are relinquished upon signing up for another property.

On occasion it may be necessary for a Council tenant to move out of their existing home to allow major works to be carried out or because their home is due to be demolished. In these circumstances, the Council will use its management discretion (Section 15) to prioritise a move to a suitable alternative home by placing the tenant in Band A at an appropriate time.

Cases will be awarded the priority attached specifically to transfer tenants who have no other identified need (in accordance with appendix 1) and where their landlord would normally advertise the resulting void via the Homechoice scheme.

Where a transfer applicant has an overriding need to be re-housed resulting in them being placed in bands A, B or C for another reason then this will be regardless of nomination rights in to their current property.

12. Deliberately worsening circumstances

If the Council considers that an applicant has acted unreasonably to make their housing circumstances deliberately worse than their previous accommodation without good reason or with the aim of qualifying for a higher banding, no additional priority will be awarded. Applicants will retain the banding and priority they held before worsening their circumstances

13. Reviews

General Information

Applicants have the right to request such general information as will enable them to assess:

- How their application will be treated and whether they will be given any preference
- Whether housing accommodation appropriate to their needs is likely to become available and how long they may have to wait for an allocation of such accommodation

Information about decisions and reviews

Applicants have the following further and specific rights to information about decisions and rights of review of decisions:

- The right, on request, to be informed of any decision about the facts of their case which has been, or is likely to be, taken into account in considering whether to make an allocation to them.
- The right, on request, to review a decision mentioned in (a) above, or a decision to treat them as ineligible due to unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable to be a tenant.
- The right to be informed of the decision on the review and grounds for it.

Applicants should request a review in writing within 21 days of being notified of a decision. The Council will determine the review within 56 days of the request or such longer period as may be agreed with the applicant. The Council will notify the applicant of the outcome of the review including the reasons if the original decision is confirmed. The Council's decision on review is final and any challenge to that decision can only be made through judicial review proceedings.

Reviews will be carried out by a senior member of staff at Medway Council or delegated to an appropriate officer who was not involved in the original decision.

14. Residency Criteria

Residency criteria within the terms of this scheme will normally mean that an applicant has lived in the Medway area, through their own choice, for a minimum of two years up to and including the date of their application, or the date on which a decision is made on their application whichever is later.

Households placed by Medway authority in accommodation outside of Medway will qualify for the housing register as long as they fulfil the two year residential qualification (time spent placed by Medway in temporary accommodation outside of Medway will count towards time spent in Medway).

People in the following categories will not normally be considered as fulfilling the residency criteria:

- Those placed in Medway in temporary accommodation by another borough
- Those placed in Medway in residential or supported housing by another borough
- Secure or flexible tenants of other Local Authority areas
- Those who do not meet the residential criteria but who have family members in this borough

The following members of the armed forces will not be required to meet the requirement for residency:

- Members of the Armed Forces and former Service personnel, where the application is made within five years of discharge
- Bereaved spouses and civil partners of members of the Armed Forces leaving Services Family Accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner
- Serving or former members of the Reserve Forces who need to move because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service

The qualification criteria relating to income and assets above applies to all applicants applying for inclusion on the Council's Housing Register, including homeless households, to whom a statutory housing duty arises under Part 7 Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002). However, where an applicant is a Homeless Household owed a full homeless duty under section 193(2) or 195(2), they will be exempt from satisfying the criteria relating to residency.

There may be other exceptional circumstances in which the residency criteria may be disregarded. An example would be an applicant from a neighbouring borough but fled to Medway to avoid violence. The management discretion may be applied in these circumstances (Section 15).

15. Management discretion

So far as is it possible the Council will use the Banding system and time spent within the Band to allocate accommodation (see section 8). At times this will also incorporate restrictive labelling of properties through Choice Based Lettings combined with Local Lettings Plans (see section 18) to ensure that the Council is meeting its statutory obligations and is also contributing towards Medway Sustainable Community Strategy 2010-2016.

The Council recognises that there may be exceptional circumstances where the only way an exceptional housing need can be resolved is through the use of discretion. In the interests of fairness to all these applicants these circumstances are kept to a minimum. Examples of exceptional circumstances include, but are not limited to:

- Threat to life
- Emergency cases whose homes are damaged by fire, flood or other disaster may be provided with another tenancy if it is not possible to repair the existing home, or if any work to repair is to take such a long period of time that there will be serious disruption to family life
- Households who, on Police advice, must be moved immediately due to serious threats to a one or more members of the household, or whose continuing occupation would pose a threat to the community
- Cases nominated under the Police Witness Protection Scheme or other similar schemes that the Council has agreed to be part of
- An applicant who has an exceptional need that is not covered in the Allocations Scheme. For example, where child or public protection issues require the applicant to be re-housed or in cases of severe domestic abuse where all other options to remain in the home have been exhausted
- Other exceptional circumstances considered on a case by case basis

If agreed, by management, such cases will be permitted access to the housing register and awarded a level of priority reflective of their circumstance and as far as possible in accordance with the banding scheme set out in appendix 1. If an applicant has exceptional circumstances that are not within a Reasonable Preference category then Assistant Director's Discretion will be required to authorise the applicant being placed in Band A. A list of all applicants given Band A priority, and a subsequent list, under management discretion will be kept, monitored and reported on annually for the purposes of monitoring this policy.

Assistant Director's Discretion (for other exceptional circumstances not covered by this policy)

From time to time a situation may arise that is not adequately reflected in this Allocations Policy but the needs or circumstances are exceptional, and can not be reasonably remedied with the use of Management discretion.

Where a case is considered exceptional but the applicant does not meet any of the Reasonable Preference criteria or it is felt that a higher Banding than the one awarded is more appropriate then the Assistant Director for Strategic Housing reserves the right to override this scheme and allow an applicant to have a higher priority than they would be entitled to under the Scheme. These cases should be few in number, extreme in their severity and will be closely monitored and regularly reported on to ensure that the duty to achieve Reasonable Preference overall is not compromised.

16 Condition and size of accommodation

All accommodation offered will be habitable and in reasonable repair. The size of accommodation for which each applicant will be considered will be dependent upon the size and composition of the applicant's household. The requirements for each size of household are set out at appendix 2.

Larger accommodation than specified in appendix 2 may be considered in exceptional circumstances on the recommendation of a specialist advisor, for example the Council's Medical Adviser, Occupational Therapy Service, or senior social worker.

In calculating the number of bedrooms available within properties the Council will treat every habitable room as a bedroom except kitchens, bathrooms and one room for use as a living room. The Council will normally consider additional downstairs rooms in houses for use as bedrooms in accordance with Housing Benefit regulations or subsequent government guidance. There may be circumstances where a current Medway Council tenant is moved outside of the Allocations Policy. Any cases will be treated under the management discretion within section 15. These moves should however not be at the expense of others. Therefore their move will only be to the same size and type of accommodation as they currently occupy regardless of their actual housing need.

Council tenants who have to move because major works are required to their home will have the option of moving back to their original home once the works have been completed. This intention will need to be stated at the point that the tenant has been required to vacate their existing home.

17. Choice and Constraints

The amount of choice that the Council is able to offer may be limited by the housing pressures it faces and responsibilities it has to some groups in housing need such as those found to be statutorily homeless. The Council believes that any applicant considered to be eligible under this policy should be able to express a preference over the type of property and the area in which they would like to live. However applicants should be aware that the Council's ability to satisfy their expressed preference may be severely limited.

The majority of applicants will be able to bid for properties in any location across the Area. There are some circumstances in which this might not always apply. For example, in some homeless circumstances (see section 21 on choice and homeless households), and for younger people and childless couples, due to age restrictions or scarcity of some property types i.e. wheelchair adapted bungalows.

The Council also requests that the applicant states those areas where they believe they cannot live due to fear of violence, harassment or domestic abuse. The Council must be satisfied such factors exist and that it is reasonably necessary to allocate accordingly.

18. Restrictive labelling

Medway Council reserves the right to apply restrictive labelling in order to identify suitable applicants in particular circumstances. Restrictive labelling will take the form of Local Lettings Plans or corrective action to meet the Annual Lettings Plan (published separately). Where a property is advertised with restrictive labelling, the letting will be made to the bidder with the earliest priority date in the highest Band that meets the criteria set by the restrictive labelling.

The Council reserves the right to apply any criteria while meeting the statutory obligations for Reasonable Preference. The Council may, in the interests of promoting balanced and sustainable communities, agree for its own stock and with participating Housing Providers local lettings plans for specific areas, estates, or blocks. This is to ensure that there are local lettings policies that are tailored to the needs of an area, which protect the interests of existing residents and the wider community.

The principles in applying Local Lettings Policies (LLPs):

- Local Lettings Policies may be developed to meet the particular needs of a local area.
- LLPs must be evidence-based and there must be a clear need (this may take the form of recurring antisocial behaviour issues, high child densities or a concentration of older residents – see examples provided below.)
- LLPs must be developed and approved in accordance with an agreed procedure that must have specific aims and will be reviewed on an annual basis.

The decision to implement a local lettings plan will be developed and approved either solely by Medway Council or jointly by both the Senior Officer responsible for Medway Council's Allocations Scheme and a Senior Manager of the relevant housing provider for whom the Council has nomination rights for properties held by that housing association or registered provider. Any decision to implement a local lettings policy will always take into account the implications for equal opportunities and the need to ensure that the Council is able to meet the allocation needs of those owed a reasonable preference.

Where a property is advertised in accordance with a Local Lettings Plan (LLP), the letting will be made to the bidder with the earliest priority date in that group who meets the eligibility criteria of the LLP and also meets the entitlement rules around size eligibility.

Examples of Possible Local Letting Policies:

The following are examples of local letting policies that could be employed in Medway covering an area, estate, or block:

- Age restrictions
- Transfer applicants with a positive tenancy history in respect of no rent arrears and exemplary behaviour
- Policies that are geared towards encouraging applicants who work or volunteer to live in an area
- Lettings to employed persons where there is a high concentration of existing residents who are out of work
- Restrictions on lettings to vulnerable households where there is already a concentration of supported tenants/residents
- Lettings to childless households where there are high concentrations of children and young people living in a specific estate or scheme

Local Lettings Schemes will be published and subject to a review at least every 12 months, or as and when changes to an estate, area or block, necessitate such a review.

19. How the Council Allocates properties

Medway Council is part of the Kent Homechoice Partnership and maintains a Choice Based Lettings system jointly with other local authorities.

Applicants placed on the active housing register and placed in bands A to D will be able to take part in the scheme and register bids against properties on a fortnightly basis (or other interval as agreed by the Kent Homechoice partnership).

The Council is committed to letting the vast majority of its properties via the Kent Homechoice scheme. For all advertised properties the eligibility of a bid will be reviewed against the advertised criteria and the labelling in the advertisement. Any ineligible bids will be discarded.

Eligible applicants will be sorted on the shortlist for each individual property in the following order;

- Priority banding (A being the highest through to D being the lowest)
- Priority banding effective date (the date that the applicant was placed in to their priority banding)

Nominations or offers from shortlists are to be made in descending order starting with the person that is first on the shortlist. Where any applicant is bypassed this reason must be recorded and justified via the Kent Homechoice System. Bypass reasons will be regularly interrogated to ensure that they are only used where necessary and justified.

The Council or Housing Provider will seek to verify the housing circumstances to make sure that family composition and housing circumstances still reflect those of the application or most recent review.

As the success of the system is dependent on applicants bidding for accommodation applicants who do not bid for accommodation for a period of six months will be reviewed and

may be placed in to band D for a period of 12 months. If the applicant has still not bid after a period of 12 months the Council will consider whether the applicant should be made inactive.

All offers of accommodation will be deemed reasonable unless the following circumstances apply:

- Emergency hospitalisation of a member of the applicant's household prevents viewing, and therefore acceptance, of an offer;
- The death of a close family member at the time the offer is made;
- Other circumstances at the discretion of Medway Council.

20. Refusals for non-homeless applicants

Applicants will be entitled to refuse two suitable offers of accommodation before the Council will reduce the priority banding of their application for a period of 12 months.

Where accommodation has been offered through the Homechoice Scheme an applicant would usually be expected to accept a property that meets their specific needs. Suitable offers would be those that reasonably meet the housing and medical needs of the household.

The Council will always seek to take into account an applicant's special or particular needs but it will not always be able to meet these needs. In considering what accommodation is suitable the Council will give regard to the overall supply and availability of accommodation and the demands placed on it by all priority groups.

As a guideline the Council would typically consider a property suitable if:

- It was located in an area close to or in an area that the applicant had expressed a desire to live in, or an area that the Council determines is reasonable.
- It is sized in accordance with the criteria set in appendix 2.
- It complies with any realistic recommendation made by a medical or other relevant advisor.

In any case whereby a banding is reduced in accordance with the Allocations Policy the date that the applicant is re-instated to their previous banding will become the applicants new effective date.

21. Choice and Homelessness

For cases where the Council has accepted a full homeless duty under sections 193 (2) or 195(2) of part VII Housing act 1996 (as amended) applicants can utilise choice via the Kent Homechoice scheme if an applicant is successful during this time period then this offer will be treated as a final offer to end the Council's homelessness duty.

At any time the Council reserves the right to make a direct offer of accommodation to an applicant to end the Council's homelessness duty in either the social or private housing sector.

- Where this offer is in the private sector it will be in accordance with the Council's "Discharge in to the private sector" policy. Available from the Council Website.
- Where this offer of accommodation is in the social housing sector it will be made only against a property where by the applicant has sufficient priority to be re-housed.

The quota of properties made as a direct offer of social housing will be monitored to ensure that it never exceeds more than 20% of the properties allocated in Medway, and wherever possible will be a flat or maisonette.

22. Decisions

All decisions taken under this policy will be by fully trained housing officers within the Council's Housing Service unless otherwise specified. Housing Officers are supported by Team leaders and Senior Managers.

23. Requests for assistance

Requests for housing assistance must be made to the Housing Service. The Council aims to notify applicants of the result of the assessment of their priority under the Allocations Policy within 14 days of all relevant information needed to make an assessment being received. However, in cases where a medical assessment or other special assessment is required, it may take longer to notify the result.

24. Persons eligible for assistance

Persons entitled to assistance must be members of the applicant's immediate family who normally reside with the applicant. Any other person or persons will only be considered as entitled if the Council is satisfied that it is reasonable for that person to reside with the applicant. Verification of this may be sought e.g. proof that a member has lived with the applicant for an appropriate length of time. This will normally exclude lodgers or anyone sub-letting from the applicant.

The Council may also refuse to consider an application for assistance or someone's inclusion in an application if the person concerned (i.e. other than the applicant) has made a separate housing application.

25. Evidence of identity and housing circumstances

All applicants must provide satisfactory evidence of identity and past and current residences for themselves and all household members. The Council will request documentary evidence from each applicant and will conduct such further enquiries as are reasonable in the circumstances. An application will be cancelled if the applicant has failed to provide documentary evidence or other information reasonably required by the Council in order to validate the application.

In some circumstances the Council will carry out a visit to an applicant's residence if their priority is sufficient for an allocation of housing under this scheme. Visits conducted will include an inspection of the accommodation and facilities and are normally, but not necessarily, arranged by appointment.

Evidence will also be requested by Housing Associations and Registered providers at the point of offer of accommodation to verify the current circumstances are still those reflected in the banding of the application at the time of the offer.

Any offers of accommodation that are made will be subject to withdrawal (if before the tenancy commences) or possession proceedings (after the tenancy is signed) if it is found that circumstances have changed. Grounds for this action may include but are not limited to:

- Falsifying information or giving misinformation or a lack of information as part of an application.
- Failing to notify the Council of a change in circumstances (e.g. reduction in family size or improvement of a medical condition).

26. Income and Savings

All prospective new tenants will be required to supply evidence of their financial income and resources. Verification of income and savings may be required prior to applicants being offered accommodation.

27. Changes in circumstance

Once placed in a priority band, applicants should notify the Council in writing of any material change in their circumstances that will affect their priority for housing, for example:

- A change of address, for themselves or any other person on the application
- Any additions to the family or any other person joining the application
- Any member of the family or any other person on the application who has left the accommodation
- Any change in income or savings
- Any other changes that may be relevant to the banding of the application

Applications may be temporarily suspended while the Council assesses the information provided by the applicant and completes further enquiries that may be necessary. If the banding of an application changes then the banding effective date will be amended to the date that the applicant is placed in the new band.

The Council will carry out an assessment of each applicant's entitlement to and priority for re-housing on the basis of information that has been provided by the applicant or otherwise received in connection with the applicant.

28. Investigation of Fraud

The Council recognises its duty to protect the public resources it administers. Detailed enquiries about applications will therefore be made in order to guard against misrepresentation and fraud. Such enquiries will be made in all cases where applicants appear to have sufficient priority for an offer for re-housing, and in other cases as resources allow and may be made at any time either at the time of application or subsequently including after any grant of tenancy. Applications will be suspended if there is evidence of misrepresentation or fraud until enquiries are completed.

Any applicant seeking to obtain accommodation by making a false or misleading statement or by withholding relevant information or by failing to inform the Council of any material change in circumstances is liable to have his/her application cancelled. Prosecution will be considered where it appears to the Council that a criminal offence has been committed. Proceedings for possession will be taken to recover any tenancy granted in consequence of a fraudulent application for housing.

29. Members of the Council, staff members and their relations

In order to ensure that the Council is seen to be treating all applicants fairly, any application for housing or re-housing from members of the Council, employees of the Council or associated persons must be disclosed. These applications will be assessed in the normal way but any allocation of housing will require special approval by a manager in the Housing Service.

30. Equal opportunities

The Council is committed to the principle of equal opportunities in the delivery of all its services. The Council is committed to eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation and promoting relations between different groups who do not share a Protected Characteristic.

Applicants will be invited to indicate if they wish to make use of the Council's translation and interpretation services, or if they require other special services as a result of visual impairment, hearing difficulties or other disability.

Confidential interview facilities are provided at all housing offices. There is full access to both Council offices at Gun Wharf and Riverside One for people who use a wheelchair. Home interview services are available for applicants who are elderly or who experience mobility difficulties.

The Council will seek to ensure that its Allocations Policy is being operated in a manner that is fair to all sections of the community regardless of nationality, ethnic origin, marital status, age, gender, religion, sexual orientation or disability. The information provided will be kept confidential and treated with respect. The Council believes it is important to understand the different communities who apply for housing and it is only by asking these questions that we can check we are operating a fair system.

All applicants for housing or re-housing will be asked to provide details of ethnic origin, faith, sexuality and disability. However, this will not be a requirement for acceptance of an application. Equalities records will be kept and monitored on a regular and systematic basis to ensure properties are being offered and allocated fairly.

Allocation policies and any changes to them will be reviewed regularly to ensure they do not operate in ways that discriminate against or disadvantage any particular group.

31. Confidentiality Agreement

The Council will take disciplinary action against any employee who makes use of any information obtained in the course of their employment for personal gain or benefit, or who passes it to others who might use it in such a way. A report to the Police will be made if it appears that a criminal offence has been committed.

The disclosure of information about any housing application to a third party is prohibited except on a "need to know" basis in the following circumstances:

- To plan and provide assistance jointly with health and social services agencies in appropriate cases
- For the purpose of fraud detection, the prevention of crime, and the promotion of community safety

- To enable efficient administration of offers of re-housing, lettings, housing association nominations, and rent and benefit accountancy etc
- Where disclosure is a legal requirement

32. Access to Data

The Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) provides individuals with a right to request access to any of their personal data held by the Council, and a right to know where the data came from, how it is used and why it is held. Such a request is called a “subject access request” and applies to personal data in housing files.

Subject access requests should be made in writing to the Head of Housing and must describe the information sought. Applications must state their name and provide proof of their identity, such as a copy of a passport, driving license, or recent utility bill.

Any applications made by third parties on behalf an applicant (for example by a lawyer acting for a client) must be accompanied by written evidence of authority to act. If this is not possible by reason of disability then the Council should be contacted in order to make alternative arrangements.

The Council may charge a fee to handle a subject access request. Any fee will be in line with the charges set out in Medway Council’s Freedom of Information Policy.

Once the Council has received the information, documentation and fee (if charged) referred to in the above paragraphs, it must begin processing the request and respond within 40 calendar days. There is a limited range of exemptions from the right of subject access.

Housing files may contain information about other people (third parties), such as details of complaints made by other tenants, or comments made by housing staff. If the Council cannot respond to a request without giving information about other people, it is not obliged to include this information in its response unless those other people consent, or unless it thinks it is reasonable in all the circumstances to disclose this information without their consent.

Under the DPA applicants may also have the right to challenge the information held on them and may request the correction of records which they believe to be inaccurate. Such challenges should be made in writing and addressed to the Head of Housing.

33. Access to other information

Anyone has the right to request access to recorded information held by the Council, either under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) or, for environmental information, the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs).

Requests under the FOIA must be made in writing, must include the applicant’s name and a correspondence address and must specifically describe the information requested. Requests under the EIRs must also comply with these regulations except that they can be made verbally. Please address requests under the FOIA or EIRs to the “FOI Officer” at the Council’s postal address or to foi@medway.gov.uk.

Once a valid request has been reviewed the Council must usually respond within 20 working days.

Requests made by individuals for their own personal data will be treated as “subject access requests” under the DPA (see section 32 above).

35. Gypsy and traveller pitches

Medway Council has one permanent residential site in Cuxton. The site first opened in 1962 and has provided an opportunity to allow travellers a permanent place to stay and bring up their families. The site consists of 11 plots occupied by 10 families, as one of the pitches is a double plot. There are mains services with individual washrooms for each pitch and the residents are expected to keep their own plot clean and tidy at all times.

Any applicant wishing to apply for a plot must make an application over the phone to the Senior Neighbourhood Housing Officer. Applications for a plot will be prioritised by waiting time and are allocated in consultation with the other residents to ensure cohesion on the site.

Appendix 1 – Banding Structure

Band A – Additional preference cases. An urgent need to move to alternative accommodation	
<p>Those who need to move urgently because of a life threatening illness or sudden disability where the applicant's property is directly contributing to the deterioration of an applicant's health.</p>	<p>Where an applicant's condition is expected to be terminal within a period of twelve months and re-housing is required to provide a basis for the suitable provision of care.</p> <p>The condition is life threatening and the applicant's existing accommodation is a major contributory factor.</p> <p>The applicant's health is so badly affected by their current accommodation that it is expected to be life threatening.</p> <p>An applicant is unable to mobilise adequately in their current accommodation and requires re-housing in to accommodation suitable for their use.</p> <p>The applicants accommodation is directly contributing to the deterioration of an applicant's health such as a severe health condition requiring intermittent hospitalisation as a result of chronic dampness where the condition of the property cannot be rectified within an appropriate time scale – usually 6 months.</p> <p>Where the overcrowding of a property leaves an applicant at risk of infection.</p>
<p>Families in severe overcrowding which poses a serious health hazard</p>	<p>Applicants whose housing circumstances render them three bedrooms short of The Bedroom Standard.</p>
<p>Those who are homeless and require urgent re-housing as a result of violence, including intimidated witnesses, and those escaping serious anti-social or domestic abuse behaviour</p>	<p>Applicants who need to move due to domestic abuse, extreme violence or extreme harassment.</p> <p>Extreme violence or harassment will be verified by the Police and/or other agencies as necessary. This may include where a move is necessary to protect a witness to criminal acts.</p> <p>Agreed in exceptional circumstances due to significant problems associated with the tenant's occupation of a dwelling in the social or private rented sector and where there is a high risk to the tenant or their family's safety if they remain in the dwelling/area. For social housing tenants transfers will be to properties of the same size or smaller if they are under-occupying and type where required, but locations or areas are likely to change.</p>

Appendix 1 – Banding Structure

<p>Subject to Parliamentary approval. Certain Members of the Armed forces or Reserve forces the also fall in to a reasonable preference category as defined in <i>Draft Regulations laid before Parliament under section 172(2) of the Housing Act 1996, for approval by resolution of each House of Parliament.</i></p>	<p>Applicants who have one or more criteria as set out in band B and;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Are a former member of the armed services b) Serving members of the armed forces who need to move because of a serious injury , medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service c) Bereaved spouses and civil partners of members of the armed forces leaving Services Family Accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner d) Serving or former members of the reserve forces who need to move because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service
<p>Private sector properties unsanitary or unsuitable for occupation. Those living in unsanitary conditions where the conditions pose an ongoing and serious threat to health.</p>	<p>Private sector tenants and residents of dwellings that the Council's Private Sector Housing Team has determined that the property poses a category 1 hazard under the Health and Safety fitness rating and the Council are satisfied that the problem cannot be resolved by the landlord within 12 months and as a result continuing to occupy the accommodation will pose a considerable risk to the applicant's health. This includes a property that has severe damp, major structural defects including subsidence, flooding, collapse of roof, or have living conditions which are a statutory nuisance, and there is no prospect of the problems being remedied within a 12 month time period.</p> <p>A private sector property either owned or rented where a statutory notice has been issued by the Private Sector Housing Team that an unfit property is to be demolished under the Housing Act 2004.</p>
<p>Under-occupation (In Medway area only)</p>	<p>Where a secure Council tenant will release a home with two or more bedrooms by moving to a property with fewer bedrooms than they currently have.</p> <p>Housing association tenants who will release a home with two or more bedrooms are eligible if their landlord agrees that the vacated property can be used for a nomination by the council</p>
<p>Major works or demolition</p>	<p>Where a council tenant has to move either temporarily or permanently whilst major works are undertaken or where their home is due to be demolished.</p>

Appendix 1 – Banding Structure

Foster carers referred by Medway Council's Children's Service	Foster carers approved by the Council whose housing prevents them from being able to start, or continue, to provide foster care.
Band B Need to move + Local Priority	
Homeless Households owed a full homeless duty under section 193(2) or 195(2).	People who are owed a duty under section 193 (2) or 195 (2) of the 1996 Act (or under section 65 (2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985) -- This means households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness and in priority need.
Overcrowded by the Bedroom standard.	Whereby an applicant is lacking 2 bedrooms under The Bedroom Standard.
Applicants living in unsatisfactory housing lacking basic facilities.	<p>Applicants without access at all to any of the following facilities. No access to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a bathing or washing facilities or kitchen an inside WC hot or cold water supplies, electricity, gas or adequate Heating <p>Applicants who occupy a private property which is in disrepair or is not suitable for occupation and is subject to a Prohibition Order and recovery of the premises is required in order to comply with the Order as defined by Section 33 of the Housing Act 2004.</p> <p>Applicants who only have access to shared facilities in shared accommodation will not qualify under these criteria.</p>
Medical grounds	Where an applicant's housing is unsuitable for severe medical reasons or due to their disability, but who are not housebound or whose life is not at risk due to their current housing, but whose housing conditions directly contribute to causing serious ill-health.
Hardship or welfare need to move for care or support	Those who need to move to give or receive care that is substantial and on-going and are unable to provide or receive care via another method.
Older People	Older or disabled applicants seeking Extra Care or Sheltered housing.
Ready to move on from Medway Council commissioned Supported housing and or care schemes	An applicant is ready to move to independent settled housing on the recommendation of the support worker or equivalent.
Existing Foster carers approved by the Council willing to provide care for an additional child	Where a Foster carer already providing a home for at least one foster child offers to provide care for an additional foster child
Transfer tenants with a positive tenancy record	Current occupants of social housing in the Medway area. The landlord of the tenant must be agreed for the Council to advertise the resulting void via the Homechoice scheme for the case to be considered as a transfer.

Appendix 1 – Banding Structure

Band C need to move but are not considered as having a local priority	
Applicants in this band will have need to move to alternative accommodation (reasonable preference) but are not assessed as having a local priority as defined in Appendix 3 of the allocations scheme. If a local priority is established then the applicant will be placed in to band B.	
Band D Need to move but have a reduce priority	
Cases not owed a full homeless duty under sections 193 (2) or 195(2) of part VII Housing act 1996 (as amended)	Any applicants that are homeless or threatened with homelessness but who have been found to be non-priority, intentionally homeless or without a local connection to the Medway area.
Rent arrears	Applicants with lawfully recoverable arrears or other housing related debt, substantial enough to make them unsuitable to be re-housed. Discretion may be given where an applicant can demonstrate that they have reduced their arrears to a reasonable level (£500 or under) and are maintaining regular payments for 6 months or more.
Anti-social behaviour	Where an applicant or member of their household has been found guilty of anti social behaviour that would render them unsuitable for re-housing. Cases will be reviewed once the applicant can demonstrate that this behaviour has been addressed. This will usually take the form of a period of time (minimum 2 years) of improved behaviour and successful tenancy record. References may be sought to verify/
Two refusals of accommodation (for a period of 12 months)	Where an applicant has bid for and refused accommodation via the homechoice scheme on two occasions. (applicants who refuse a property as it cannot be adapted to meet their needs will be excluded from this process).
Applicants not bidding for accommodation	If an applicant has not bid for accommodation in six months their priority will be reduced for a period of 12 months. The availability of appropriate accommodation will be considered in exercising this penalty.
The Inactive Housing Register	
All other applicants that submit an application and fulfil the qualifying criteria set out in section 7 will be held on an inactive housing register. In the unlikely event that a property cannot be let to an applicant in bands A-D then properties will then be offered to applicants by date order starting with the applicant registered the longest.	

Appendix 2

Deciding bedroom need

The size of the accommodation that an applicant will be allocated is dependent on the size of and circumstances of the applicants household at the time of allocation.

The size of property that an applicant will be offered is set out below;

Family size	Size of property
Single person	Bedsit/one bedroom
Couple without children	1 bedroom
A couple expecting a child or with one child	2 bedrooms
A couple with two children of the same sex	2 bedrooms
A couple with two children of opposite sex one of whom is over ten	3 bedrooms
A couple with three children	3 bedrooms
A couple with four children (all of the same sex or two of each sex)	3 bedrooms
A Couple with with two children one under the age of 16 and the other over the age of 16	3 Bedrooms
A couple with four children (three of one sex and one of the opposite sex)	4 bedrooms
A couple with more than four children	4 bedrooms
A couple with three children and one dependent adult	4 bedrooms
In the event that a 5 bedroom property is advertised applicants who need that size property in accordance with bedroom standard will be considered.	

For the purpose of this policy a child will be defined as a member of the household that is under the age of 18 and in full time education or would be expected to be in full time education.

Applicants that are moving from a social housing property located in Medway that is three bedrooms in size or larger will be permitted to move to a property that has 2 bedrooms.

Requests for additional bedrooms because of medical need will only be granted once they have been agreed by either an independent medical advisor or the Homechoice and Allocations Team Manager (or equivalent). Where an applicant requires 24 hour care, requests will be considered and investigated on a case by case basis to determine whether a larger property needs to be allocated outside of the guidelines set out above.

Independent children over the age of 18 who are financially able to resolve their own housing circumstances will not be considered in determining bedroom need or overcrowding assessments.

These guidelines reflect the how Medway expects housing providers to allocate accommodation. Some housing providers however, will operate their own allocations policies in respect of accommodation.

Due to the shortage of Social Housing where parents have shared custody of children, provision will only be made for the applicant claiming Child Benefit for the children. In the

Appendix 2

event that no parent is eligible to claim child benefit then an assessment will be undertaken to determine whom it would be most reasonable to provide housing for in order to provide housing for the child.

Appendix 3

Local Priority – How is it decided?

Local Priority

People who play a part in making their neighbourhood strong, stable and healthy – those who help make it a good place to live, work and play – are valuable people. They are the backbone of their community, and the Council believes such people should be considered for an allocation of social housing to continue contributing to sustaining local communities in the area where they contribute.

The Local priority scheme is a Medway Council policy which gives the main applicant or partner increased priority for housing when they have reasonable preference and qualify under the Local Priority criteria described below. These applicants will be placed in Band B by virtue of this award.

Local priority Awards – How they work in practice

Either the lead or joint applicant must have a *current positive residence history* to qualify for a Community contribution award.

1. No on-going culpable involvement in anti-social behaviour or criminal activities.
2. No breaches of tenancy within the last 3 years
3. No outstanding lawfully recoverable housing-related debt over £100.
4. Not have an outstanding unspent conviction

Increased priority for housing is given to those applicants who demonstrate a commitment to contribute to Medway's economic growth as working households or who make a contribution to their communities.

Applicants can access increased priority for housing in five ways;

1. Working Households.

This policy aims to support the economic growth of Medway. The council aims to encourage people who can work, to work and raise levels of aspiration and ambition. We will offer increased priority to applicants who are working but are on a low income and will therefore find difficulty in accessing outright Home Ownership or Low cost home Ownership. Applicants who have reasonable preference can receive increased priority to Band B by virtue of their "working" status for the purpose of this policy, low income set at less than £12,000 per annum for a single person or couple or £20,000 per annum for a family

Definition of Working Households

Households where at least one adult household member is in employment. For the purposes of this Allocations Policy employment is described as having a permanent contract, working as a temporary member of staff or being self-employed. Applicants will only qualify if the worker has been employed for 6 out of the last 12 months. Verification will be sought at point of application as well as point of offer under the same terms. Applicants must provide payslips, P60, bank statements or a verifying letter on headed paper in order to qualify.

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2. Volunteering

Volunteers must have been volunteering for a continuous period of at least 6 months up to the point of application and the same at point of offer. Volunteering must be for a not-for profit organisation that is registered with an agency that is recognised by the Council, or a charity that is registered with the Charity Commission or is funded by the Council or another local authority or a faith based community group or organisation. Tenants and Residents Associations which are constituted are classified as not-for-profit organisation. They must be registered with Medway Council or a Registered Social Landlord to qualify. Volunteering must be for a minimum of 10 hours per month.

Evidence required for voluntary work.

A letter on the organisation's headed paper from the manager responsible for volunteers confirming the applicant's involvement in a minimum of 10 hours per month of voluntary work for at least 6 months. This person must not be related to the applicant in any way.

3. Training or Education

We want to encourage people to improve their chances of gaining paid employment by gaining employability skills and becoming job ready. This may be achieved by attending higher or further education or by accessing a longer vocational course of study or engaging in a programme of work-related training courses. In all cases the course of study must lead to achieving accredited qualifications and / or certification by a registered awarding body.

Study or training may be undertaken at a range of recognised institutions and organisations such as: Further Education College; registered Private Training Provider; registered Voluntary Sector Organisation or University.

A person must have been studying or training against the eligible criteria and definition outlined, for a continuous period of at least 6 months up to the point of application and the same at point of offer. Applicants eligible for out-of-work related benefits must also be registered with Job Centre Plus and accessing mainstream job brokerage provision, thus actively seeking work (this may not apply to full time students dependent on the hours they are studying). This training must be in addition to, or supplementary to any mandatory training required and may be undertaken in conjunction with volunteering to gain further knowledge and experience.

Some people undertaking training are not actively seeking work. Where the Benefits Agency can confirm that the applicant is not required to actively seek work because of their circumstances, for example they have caring responsibilities, their training can be recognised in this policy.

All training must be a minimum of 10 hours a month.

Evidence required for Training element

Further/higher education candidates must supply evidence of :

Appendix 3

- A letter from college or university confirming participation in course of study for period of 6 months

For vocational training award the following evidence must be provided:

- an agreed employment action plan developed through a recognised training provider/ service plus verification of steps taken towards achievement of action plan targets
- certificate or letter from a registered awarding body for the course or by a recognised training provider as evidence of gaining a recognised vocational qualification or successfully completing accredited work related training (over a continuous period of at least 6 months)

4. Ex service personnel

Applicants who have served in the British Armed Forces and lived in Medway for at least 6 months immediately prior to enlisting, will qualify for a community contribution award automatically, with the exception of those who have been dishonourably discharged. This includes people who have served in the Royal Navy, Royal Air Force and British Army. Service with the armed forces will be confirmed with the Royal British Legion.

5. Registered Foster Carers

We recognise the contribution that Medway foster carers make towards ensuring that children in Medway's care receive a good service. In order to qualify for a community contribution award under this policy, applicants will require a letter from the Council's Children's Service confirming that they have been approved as a Medway foster carer and that they are in a position to take one or more placements.

6. Carers

Applicants who undertake formal care of dependents and are in receipt of DLA higher rate or carers allowance or care element DLA will qualify for the Local Priority award under this policy.

7. People with disabilities and older residents

Whilst many older people and those with disabilities work or volunteer, there may be circumstances in which frailty or a disability prevents this, or means that the full eligibility criteria set out above cannot be met. Housing Officers will consider such cases on an individual basis and use their discretion to award a Local Priority where they consider this is appropriate.

8. Young people

Generally young people (applicants aged 25 and under) will be required to meet the full Local Priority criteria outlined above. However housing officers will have discretion with regard to the length of time a young person has been in employment.

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In addition where a young person is able to participate in volunteering and is not in employment or training the number of hours per month required is 20 hours.

Young people referred by Children's Services

In some circumstances a young person in supported housing may not have a full current positive residence history. Where the scheme manager is satisfied that the young person is no longer in breach of their tenancy agreement or licence and is complying with the conditions of the tenancy Housing Officers will consider such cases on an individual basis and use their discretion to award a Local Priority where they consider this is appropriate.

Where a young person has been referred by Children's Services the following will qualify for community contribution award:

- firm offer and proof of acceptance onto formal study or training,
- in employment,
- volunteering for 20 hours per month. Volunteering defined in the volunteering section above.