



# HARBOROUGH HOME SEARCH ALLOCATIONS POLICY

2014



Harborough Home Search  
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## Contents

	Page No.	
Introduction	3	
Section 1	The Housing Register	6
Section 2	Eligibility to join the Housing Register	7
Section 3	Home Seekers under the Age of 18	9
Section 4	Appeals Process	10
Section 5	Home Seeker Types	11
Section 6	Home Seekers with a Disability or Mobility Need	11
Section 7	Household Eligibility	13
Section 8	Defining bedroom requirements	14
Section 9	Assessing Housing Need	15
Section 10	Advertising Properties	22
Section 11	Bidding for Properties	23
Section 12	Management Allocations	23
Section 13	Difficult to Let Procedure	24
Section 14	Shortlisting Criteria	24
Section 15	Offering a Property	25
Section 16	Joint Tenants	26
Section 17	Feedback Information	26
Section 18	Mutual Exchange	27
Section 19	Agricultural Workers and Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976	28
Section 20	Leicestershire Sub-regional Pool of Properties	28
Section 21	Definition of a Local Connection	29
Section 22	Complaints Procedure, Service Issue	31
	Eligibility Matrix	

## **Introduction**

### **Legal Background**

The Allocations and Lettings Policy has taken into account all legal requirements outlined in the Housing Act 1996, Part VI and amendments made under the Homelessness Act 2002 subject to the issue of any further guidance by the Secretary of State.

### **Statement on Choice**

Harborough District Council operates a choice-based lettings scheme, known as Harborough Home Search (HHS) for Registered Providers under a service level agreement.

Harborough Home Search is part of a Leicestershire sub-regional choice based lettings partnership which comprises the seven district authorities within Leicestershire (this does not include Leicester City). The purpose is to ensure that there is consistency and fairness in the allocation of social housing and affordable rented properties advertised through the Leicestershire choice based lettings scheme.

Harborough Home Search aims to give every eligible home seeker choice in relation to affordable housing options.

The Allocations and Lettings Policy does ensure that those home seekers who are in urgent housing need are given reasonable preference within the choice-based lettings scheme.

### **Equal Opportunities**

Harborough Home Search promotes equal opportunities in the services it provides. Our aim is to implement and maintain services which ensure that no potential or current home seeker is treated less favourably on the grounds of gender, marital status, race, nationality, ethnic or national origin, colour, disability, age or sexual orientation nor is disadvantaged by the application of a rule, condition, or requirement, which has a discriminatory effect which cannot be justified by law.

Harborough Home Search seeks to ensure that it is accessible to all home seekers by ensuring individuals who have difficulty in participating in the scheme receive help. Advice and assistance is available to ensure that all households are able to access Harborough Home Search. Home Seekers (applicants) who are not able to search and bid for properties due to their assessed vulnerability will be assisted with their search either by applying auto-bidding or by providing a search and support service. Information can be translated into different languages, or made available in large print or other formats upon request.

As part of Harborough District Council, Harborough Home Search operates in accordance with the council's equal opportunities policy. A copy of the policy is available from the Harborough District Council, The Symington Building, Adam & Eve Street, Market Harborough, Leicestershire, LE16 7AG.

## **Data Protection**

Home seekers have the right to information on all decisions made about the assessment of their application.

Information held by Harborough Home Search about home seekers will only be used in connection with their application for housing and in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. In normal circumstances, this information is disclosed to partner Registered Providers or other landlords who may be able to offer accommodation. This means that the information will not normally be passed onto any third parties without the home seeker's prior written consent, *or* in exceptional circumstances where disclosure without consent is warranted. These circumstances are defined as follows:

- Where there are over-riding legal, social or public interest considerations, e.g. there is a risk of serious harm to the person themselves or others if the information is not disclosed.
- Where information is required by the police as part of a criminal investigation.
- Where information is required by an authority for the assessment or collection of any tax or duty of a similar nature
- Where, because the Council is under a duty to protect the public funds it handles, it may need to use the information provided by customers, to prevent and detect fraud. The information may also be shared for the same purposes with other organisations that handle public funds.
- The information may also be used for statistical purposes, which means we may pass this information, in confidence, to the relevant government department.

## **Objectives of Harborough Home Search**

- To meet the legal requirements for the allocation of affordable housing under Part VI of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002).
- To ensure appropriate levels of priority are afforded to home seekers
- To ensure priority status on the scheme for home seekers with an urgent housing need
- To offer as much choice to and housing options advice to home seekers as is reasonably possible
- To let properties in a fair and transparent way
- To support and assist vulnerable home seekers so that they are able to actively participate in Harborough Home Search
- To provide feedback to home seekers about homes let through Harborough Home Search
- To encourage and support sustainable communities and social inclusion
- To ensure home seekers are treated fairly, individually and in accordance with the commitment to Equality and Diversity.
- To make best use of affordable housing, to meet the needs of the local community.
- To enable vacant properties to be let as quickly as possible

## Harborough Home Search Service Standards

- We aim to assess completed applications within 10 working days of receipt provided that all supporting information is available.
- If we need more information in order to assess an application we will contact the home seeker within 5 working days of registering their application. They will be contacted by telephone or letter stating the information required before the assessment can be completed.
- When an application is approved the home seeker will be sent a letter confirming their housing need band, unique reference number and information on how to bid for a property.
- We will review applications at regular intervals to ensure that the housing register accurately reflects the housing need of the district. Any advised changes in circumstances will be updated promptly, (if the change of circumstances relates to a change of tenure a fresh application will be required as this is considered to be a significant change in circumstances).
- We will give advice and information about their application to home seekers who request it

Harborough Home Search will monitor performance in respect of these service standards.

## **1. The Housing Register**

1.0.1 Harborough Home Search maintains a register of home seekers who want to be accommodated in the Harborough District and/or elsewhere within the Leicestershire sub-region. Properties that become available to let are advertised through the scheme will normally only be allocated to home seekers on the housing register. The exception to this would normally be where a property has been advertised as available to home seekers on other housing registers within the Leicestershire sub-region and a property has been advertised without a local connection criteria (these properties would normally form part of the Leicestershire sub-regional pool) or where the Landlord has made a management allocation.

### **1.1 Joining the Housing Register**

1.1.1 Any person over the age of 16 can apply to join the housing register. This applies whether they are currently living within the Harborough district or outside of the district providing they have a local connection with the Harborough district. Home seekers aged 16 and 17 will be subject to locally agreed protocols which will determine the type of property and support services that they can be considered for, see section 3.1

1.1.2 Every home seeker must complete a Leicestershire choice based lettings housing application form. The information given on the form must be correct. Harborough Home Search reserves the right to disqualify any home seeker from joining the register, or assist the Landlord to withdraw an offer of a tenancy or recover possession of a property if they have knowingly given false information.

1.1.3 Home seekers will be asked to provide proofs to support their application; for example, they may be asked to provide proof of identity, income, benefits, access rights to children or levels of equity and savings (the application form clearly indicates where proof is required). Without these proofs we will be unable to assess whether a home seeker qualifies to join the housing register or be able to assess their housing need band. Failure to provide the required proofs within 14 days will normally result in the application being destroyed without further notice.

1.1.4 Harborough Home Search will make any other enquiries as they deem necessary in order to assess the application. This may involve contacting previous landlords, other local authorities, health or medical advisors, police, etc.

1.1.5 Home seekers will be asked to provide a mailing address to which all correspondence can be sent. The address can be the home seekers home address or an alternative such as a family member or friend.

1.1.6 The final decision regarding whether a home seeker qualifies to join the housing register will rest with the Housing Services Manager and home seekers will be informed in writing of the reason why their application does not qualify. They will have the opportunity to appeal against this decision if they feel it is incorrect.

## **1.2 Review of the Housing Register**

- 1.2.1 Harborough Home Search will undertake a regular review of the housing register. Home seekers will be contacted and asked to confirm whether they want to remain on the register and whether their circumstances have changed.
- 1.2.2 Home seekers will be expected to respond to the review within 28 days. Failure to respond will result in a letter being sent advising the home seeker that their application will be cancelled within 14 days unless there is a response.
- 1.2.3 Failure to respond within the 14 days will normally result in their application being cancelled.
- 1.2.4 Home seekers can ask for their application to be reinstated if they believe that it has been cancelled incorrectly or unreasonably. An example of where an application could be reinstated is where a home seeker has been in hospital for the duration of the review and does not have a mailing contact who could have responded on their behalf. A request to reinstate an application should be made in writing to the Housing Services Manager. If the home seeker does not agree with the decision of the Housing Services Manager they have the right to request a review of this decision (see section 4).

## **2. Eligibility to join the Housing Register**

2.1 Home seekers do not qualify to join the register if they, or a member of their household, are;

### **2.2 Subject to immigration controls under the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996, unless they**

- Already hold a secure tenancy allocated to them by their local Council.
- Already hold an assured tenancy allocated to them by a housing association
- Are in a class prescribed by regulations made by the Secretary of State, these classes include those with
  - Refugee status
  - Exceptional leave to remain in the UK
  - Indefinite leave to remain in the UK
  - Persons subject to immigration control who are nationals of a country that has ratified the European Convention on Social and Medical Assistance (ECSMA) or the European Social Charter

Any application identified as falling under the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 will be assessed in accordance with the Act. Harborough Home Search reserves the right to seek independent advice and assistance to resolve the issue of eligibility.

**2.3 Home seekers from outside the Leicestershire scheme sub-region** will not qualify to join the housing register. Home seekers who have no local connection to any of the seven partner local authorities within the sub-region, will not normally qualify to join the housing register other than in exceptional circumstances.

Exceptions will include:

- Households fleeing the threat of violence and advised not to return to a particular area and (where the host district council has accepted a statutory duty to re-house them as a homeless household and they have been assessed in Priority housing need band)
- Armed Forces and former service personnel or bereaved spouse and civil partners of members of the Armed forces who are leaving service accommodation and the application is made within five years of discharge or who need to move because of serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service

**2.4 Home seekers with the financial means to meet their own housing need** – these home seekers will not qualify to join the housing register unless they can demonstrate that they have a need for supported, sheltered or extra care housing which they cannot purchase or rent on the open market, or, where the home seeker has a need for wheelchair adapted accommodation and they do not have the financial means available (through savings, Grants or Equity Loan) to adapt their existing property or the property is not suitable for adaptation and they do not have a need or meet the criteria for supported, sheltered or extra care housing.

In assessing the home seeker's ability to meet their own housing needs, the joint income, savings and equity of any partner or other adult member moving with the home seeker will be taken into account having regard to the thresholds set for the District.

**2.5 Home seekers who lack the mental capacity to enter into and sustain a tenancy agreement** – home seekers will not qualify to join the housing register if it is considered that they lack the capacity to enter into a tenancy agreement and the obligations and conditions attached to that tenancy.

**2.6 Guilty of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable as a tenant**

When making this decision we will consider:-

- a) What action a landlord, would have taken against the perpetrator of the unacceptable behaviour.

The behaviour must be serious enough that a registered social landlord would have been entitled to a possession order under schedule 2 of the Housing Act 1985 or schedule 2 of the Housing Act 1988. As an example, cases relating to noise problems, domestic violence, racial harassment, intimidation and drug dealing would probably lead to a possession order. Rent arrears often only lead to a suspended possession order.

- b) Whether the behaviour is serious enough to make the home seeker unsuitable as a tenant. As an example, accrual of rent arrears which have resulted from factors outside of the home seekers control, e.g. delays in housing benefit payments or liability for a partner's debts, are not serious enough to make the home seeker



unsuitable as a tenant. However, owing a housing related debt greater than £300 to a Council, Registered Provider, or Private Landlord and there is no evidence of willingness to reduce/repay the debt and no evidence of an overriding housing need (such debts could include rent arrears, court costs, temporary accommodation charges, sundry debts such as clearance, damage or repayment of rent deposit or rent guarantee – this is not an exhaustive list) would mean the home seeker would not qualify to join the housing register or if already on the housing register, would prompt a review of eligibility when such circumstances are known to the authority. Other examples of behaviour that could make the home seeker unsuitable to be a tenant may include having been convicted of violence toward a partner or members of the family, obtaining a tenancy by deception or subletting without permission of the Landlord or committing (or a member of the household committing) certain criminal offences in or near the home, for example drug dealing and/or posing a threat to neighbours, the community staff from the Council, the Council's Contractors or Registered Providers and their Contractors.

c) When the unacceptable behaviour took place, the length of time that has elapsed, and whether there have been any change in circumstances.

2.6 Home seekers may not qualify to join the housing register if all three conditions are satisfied. When making this decision Harborough Home Search will consider whether it is reasonable to exclude the home seeker. We will take into account all relevant factors such as health, dependants or other factors. Home seekers will be informed in writing of the reason why they do not qualify to join the register. They will have the opportunity to appeal against this decision if they feel it is incorrect (see section 4)

2.7 If a home seeker who has been refused entry onto the housing register because of unacceptable behaviour considers that their unacceptable behaviour should no longer be held against them they should complete a new application form. The home seeker will need to show that there has been a sufficient lapse of time, in the opinion of Harborough Home Search, since the previous application was submitted or that his/her circumstances or behaviour have changed.

2.9 If at any time Harborough Home Search obtains evidence that a home seeker already accepted onto the housing register is ineligible then the home seeker will be advised that their application will be cancelled. Home seekers will have the opportunity to use the appeals procedure if they are able to show this decision is incorrect. (see section 4)

### **3. Home seekers under the age of 18**

3.1 Home seekers aged 16 and 17 can apply to join the housing register.

3.2 Home seekers under the age of 18 must provide details of a guarantor. The guarantor must be a responsible person such as a parent or other close member, or a representative from a support agency, such as Social Services.

3.3 Home seekers aged 16 and 17 will be assessed in the same way as all other home seekers joining the housing register.

3.4 When an application is received from a lone parent under the age of 18 Harborough Home Search will seek to carry out a joint assessment of needs and support with Social Services. The assessment will only be undertaken after the home seeker has given their consent. This may be subject to change dependent upon locally agreed protocols.

#### **4. Appeals Process**

4.1 If a home seeker does not agree with a decision made by Harborough Home Search in respect of their application or in respect of any decision that affects their housing application they have the right to appeal. Circumstances in which an appeal is likely to be submitted include

- Where a home seeker has been advised they do not qualify/are not eligible to join the housing register.
- Where a home seeker believes that their application has been assessed incorrectly and placed in the wrong housing need band
- Where a home seekers application has been cancelled and their request to have the application reinstated has been refused

4.2 If a home seeker has successfully been shortlisted for a property but has been refused the offer of accommodation by one of the Housing Association partners, they can ask the Housing Association to review their decision. Each partner operates its own appeals process.

4.3 Home seekers wanting to request a review of a decision made by Harborough Home Search will need to submit a written request to the following person. The appeal will normally need to be submitted within 21 days of the original decision letter.

4.4 The appeal should be addressed to:-

Housing Services Manager  
Harborough District Council  
The Symington Building  
Adam & Eve Street  
Market Harborough  
Leicestershire,  
LE16 7AG

4.5 The officer considering the appeal will not have been involved in the original decision.

4.6 If the home seeker is not satisfied with the outcome of the appeal they can ask for their case to be considered by a Review Panel. A request for a Review Panel Hearing will need to be made in writing within 21 days of the date on the Appeal Officer's letter.

4.7 The Review Panel will normally carry out the review within 21 days. The Review Panel will include representatives from the Council and the Housing Association partners. It will not include officers who have previously been involved in the case. A

written notification of the decision, including grounds for the decision, will be sent to the home seeker.

- 4.8 All correspondence will be sent to the mailing address on the home seeker's application.

## **5. Home seeker types**

### **5.1 New home seekers**

- 5.1.1 Any existing social housing tenant seeking to move to another social housing tenancy anywhere in the Leicestershire sub-region will be defined as a Transfer applicant. . All other home seekers will be known as New home seekers.

### **5.2 Transfer Home Seekers**

- 5.2.1 All assured tenants of Registered Providers, whose properties are located within one of Leicestershire districts in the scheme, may apply for a transfer.
- 5.2.2 Applicants housed on a non-secure, assured shorthold tenancy or licence basis do not have a right in law to transfer...
- 5.2.3 Unless exceptional circumstances exist, any social housing tenant with an introductory or starter tenancy will not be eligible to apply to transfer through the scheme until their tenancy is converted to a secure or assured tenancy.
- 5.2.4 All household members must normally be leaving their current property for an application to be considered as a transfer. Registered Providers will be consulted before approval of any transfer request.
- 5.2.5 Tenants seeking either larger/smaller or different type of accommodation or who have been assessed as having a social, welfare or medical need to move, will normally be given preference. However where there is evidence that the tenant or a member of their household is in serious breach of their tenancy conditions then an application to transfer may be accepted but given no preference. A serious breach of tenancy conditions could include rent arrears or anti social behaviour (see section 9.5.1)

## **6. Home seekers with a disability or a mobility need**

- 6.1 If a home seeker indicates on their application form that they require ground floor accommodation, accommodation that has been specially adapted or they have a mobility problem, then they will be asked to complete a Medical/Mobility Assessment Form.
- 6.2 The Medical/Mobility Assessment asks a series of questions about the home seekers mobility needs and asks them to self assess their needs by ticking one of the following descriptions:

- A My legs are unable to support my weight and I need to use a wheelchair when indoors and outdoors.
- B I use a wheelchair outside the property but am able to walk to a limited extent. I cannot climb steps or stairs.
- C I do not use a wheelchair but walk with difficulty. I cannot climb steps or stairs.
- D I do not use a wheelchair; I walk with difficulty, but can manage one or two steps.
- E I need a downstairs toilet to address my mobility difficulties.
- F I have a disability or a medical problem, such as kidney dialysis or epilepsy, requiring more suitable accommodation, which does not fall into any of the above categories.

6.3 The mobility self-assessment will be verified by a Housing Advisor at Harborough Home Search, and if necessary, by other suitably qualified medical advisor.

6.4 Harborough Home Search will advertise all vacancies as they become available; this includes those properties that are suitable for the needs of disabled home seekers, or those that have been specially adapted in some way. Harborough Home Search will include information on the level of adaptations and/or accessibility features within the property advertisement.

6.5 Such properties will be assessed by the Landlord according to the level of access or adaptation. The categories that are used are shown below, and will be clearly identified within the adverts:

- A a property that is fully suitable for a wheelchair to be used inside. It will include all the access criteria as listed for a "B" property, plus would have the additional features such as a kitchen adapted to mobility standard, light switches lowered, plug sockets higher, track hoists, etc.
- B a level access property with a threshold no higher than 15mm. The entrance doorways must have a minimum clear opening of 775mm. The approach to the property needs to be level access or ramped. Internal doorways need to have 775mm clear opening.
- C ground floor property with level access into the property by one or more entrances (level access means no steps approaching or into the property), also no steps internally.
- D a property with no stairs, i.e. ground floor only, can be within a complex or a bungalow and has one or more steps at each entrance or approach to the entrance.
- E A property with a ground floor toilet but which has steps and stairs

F a standard property suitable for home seekers that need extra space. These could include such “one-off” examples as, a house with substantial adaptations like bedroom / bathroom extension; or, older terraced type house with ground floor bathroom and two reception rooms downstairs or step in or level access shower.

- 6.6 For those properties labelled with either an “A” or “B” category, normally only home seekers who have been awarded an “A” or “B” status can apply. The remaining categories, “C” to “F”, will serve as an indication to the home seeker of the level of suitability. These properties are also available to general applicants, there is no preference given to Home Seekers with mobility over applicants without mobility needs for properties advertised with mobility keys C-F. The shortlisting criteria remains as per the criteria on the advert, the housing need band and effective date.
- 6.7 Home seekers who apply for either “A” or “B” properties, will be selected on the basis of the level of adaptation suitable for their needs – irrespective of whether they are a transfer or new home seeker. Because there is a limited amount of property of this kind it is only available for home seekers who have been assessed as needing it.
- 6.8 Any home seeker must consider carefully when bidding for a property, whether the property will meet their mobility needs and whether any adaptations or additional adaptations may be required, and whether the property would therefore meet their housing need.

## **7. Household eligibility**

- 7.1 Once accepted onto the housing register, every home seeker will be provided with information about the size and type of properties they are eligible for. For example, a family with 1 child will be eligible for a 2 bedroom flat and 2 bedroom house. They will also be eligible for supported housing if their circumstances warrant the need for this type of accommodation.
- 7.2 Information on eligibility will be individual to each home seeker. Home seekers are advised to check with the Landlord of the property if they are unsure or check their Allocations Policy on either the [www.harborough-homes.org.uk](http://www.harborough-homes.org.uk) website or the Landlord’s own website.
- 7.3 A complete matrix of eligibility for all household types is attached at appendix 1. The matrix takes account of the fact that HHS has a number of Registered Provider partners, all of whom have their own allocations policy.

### **7.4 Household Definitions - Guidance**

- 7.4.1 The matrix does take account of single person households who have access to children but with whom the children do not reside on a permanent basis. Households in this category must be able to show that they do have access to children by providing at least two nights of secondary care on a regular basis (e.g. weekly).

- 7.4.2 Single person households with access to children cannot normally be considered for properties larger than a 2 bedroom flat within the Harborough district, irrespective of the number of children they have access to.
- 7.4.3 Accommodation designated for older home seekers will be advertised with a minimum age criteria. This can be 55 or 60+ years or other stated age dependent upon the Landlord's policy and properties will be advertised accordingly indicating additional services available (if any). Where joint home seekers are bidding for a property of this type, only one of the home seekers has to meet the age criteria on the advert.
- 7.4.4 Family with a disability refers to a household where at least one of the members has a medical or mobility need and they require an adapted property to help meet those needs.
- 7.4.5 A single parent household is entitled to the same size accommodation as a two parent household with the same number of children.
- 7.4.6 Households that include a pregnant woman are assessed as if the baby has already been born (i.e. the baby is counted as a child), where the expected date of delivery is within three months, exceptions may apply.
- 7.4.7 A child must spend a minimum of 4 nights per week with the home seeker in order for them to be classed a permanent resident. Exceptions will be considered, for example in circumstances where the child resides away from the home seeker on a temporary basis but their permanent home is with the home seeker.
- 7.4.8 A home seeker may add a joint home seeker or household member to their HHS application. Checks will be made to ensure that those added are eligible to join. The home seeker's application will be reassessed and they will be notified of any changes, for example a change in their housing need band.
- 7.4.9 A joint home seeker may wish to leave a joint application and have an application in their own name. In such circumstances the home seeker's new application will be backdated to the date they joined the original joint application.
- 7.5 In exceptional circumstances home seekers who are ineligible for a certain property type or scheme can be considered as eligible. In making this decision HHS will consider the needs of each household and the needs of each landlord to make best use of their housing stock. Ultimately it will be the decision of the landlord as to whether they will make an offer of tenancy.

## **8. Defining Bedroom Requirements**

- 8.1 The partner landlords within Harborough Home Search operate different policies in relation to households who have children of a different sex or a different age sharing a bedroom. Normally the following bedroom occupancy guidelines would be as follows but there may be variations between Registered Providers:-

A separate bedroom is needed for each of the following:

- Every adult couple or single parent
- Any other adult aged 16 years or over

- Any two children aged under 10 years of opposite sex
- Any two children aged under 16 years of the same sex
- Any other child

Transfer home seekers awarded priority on the basis of having a bedroom shortage may be overlooked if they bid successfully on a like for like property. Large families (i.e. those with five or more children) may be given additional priority over smaller households for properties with four or more bedrooms.

- 8.2. Each landlord reserves the right to use their discretion in cases. For example, where the age of the eldest child is only slightly under the age limit the organisation may refuse to consider the household for a property.
- 8.3 Where there is evidence of a need for a member of the household to have a separate bedroom (for example, for medical reasons, or because of behavioural issues), then an additional bedroom need may be allowed.
- 8.4 Where a home seeker has care or support needs that require overnight assistance on a permanent or casual basis, then the need for an additional bedroom may be awarded to permit this. This can include prospective foster carers, on evidence that Children's Services will approve the home seeker as a foster carer subject to availability of suitable size accommodation.
- 8.5 Households that include a pregnant woman are assessed as if the baby has already been born (i.e. the baby is counted as a child), where the expected date of delivery is within three months

## 9. **Assessing Housing Need**

- 9.1 Harborough Home Search, whilst offering choice must take into consideration the housing needs of each home seeker or a member of their household (who reside with them on a permanent basis); to allow those home seekers in greatest need to be given precedence.
- 9.2 The housing needs of each household will be considered and assessed. All home seekers who are eligible to join the housing register will be placed in one of four housing need bands. The four bands are as follows:
  - Low Housing Need
  - Medium Housing Need
  - High Housing Need
  - Priority Housing Need
- 9.3 Home Seekers must notify Harborough Home Search (HHS) of any change in their housing circumstances and once notified HHS may need to undertake further enquiries before reassessing the application. A home seeker's application may move from one housing need band to another or not qualify to be included on the housing register as a result of the reassessment. A re-assessment of housing need would also be undertaken by HHS if information about an applicant was brought to the attention of HHS which could affect their current housing need band or eligibility to qualify to join the housing register.

9.4 If a home seeker feels that their application has been placed in an incorrect housing need band they have a right to request a review of the decision (see section 4).

## **9.5 Band 1: Low housing need**

9.5.1 Applications will be accepted but will normally be given no preference if the home seeker

Has security of tenure and no welfare or medical need for re-housing. This may include private tenants, tied tenants and social tenants (in assured or secure tenancies)

- is guilty of behaviour within the last twelve months which affects their suitability to be a tenant. The behaviour is serious enough that enforcement action would normally have been taken but does not warrant exclusion from the housing register. This relates not only to the home seeker but also other members of their household and they will remain in low housing need category for a period of 12 months. The application will then be re-assessed. If there is a relevant change in the household's circumstances during the twelve month period the applicant can contact HHS to request that their housing need is re-assessed.
- is a joint tenant of a social landlord property where the other party does not wish to move.
- Social housing tenants outside of the Leicestershire scheme with a local connection within the sub-region, but have no medical, welfare or other exceptional need to move.
- only wishes to be considered for low cost home ownership schemes.

9.5.2 Home seekers who have deliberately worsened their circumstances to gain an unfair advantage over other Home Seekers on the housing register will normally remain in the Low housing need band for a period of 12 months. The application will then be reassessed. If there is a relevant change in the household's circumstances during the twelve month period the applicant can contact Housing Services to request that their housing need is re-assessed.

## **9.6 Band 2: Medium housing need**

9.6.1 Preference will be given to home seekers who fall into one of the following categories:

### **Homeless households**

- Homeless households who are deemed eligible for assistance but do not qualify for a full housing duty because they do not have a priority need, or they made themselves intentionally homeless.
- A home seeker who is living in supported accommodation for the homeless and the Council has a formal move on agreement with the housing provider.



- A home seeker who has been assessed as being threatened with homelessness in more than 28 days (but less than 56 days), is considered to be in priority need and has been through homeless prevention options with the Council and all other options have been exhausted.

**Poor housing conditions – households living in insanitary or otherwise unsatisfactory housing conditions.**

This could include:

- **Housing that is not in a reasonable state of repair**

Households lacking adequate toilet, bathing or cooking facilities.

- A property that although not unfit for habitation is in a serious state of disrepair and poses a high health and safety risk to the applicant. This could include properties where there is inadequate lighting, heating and ventilation or where there is ineffective drainage for waste and surface water. This will be assessed in partnership with an Environmental Health Officer (EHO). The EHO will consider using the powers available to secure that the property is made fit.
- In exceptional circumstances other poor housing conditions will be considered. These will be considered where there is evidence that the housing conditions are having a detrimental effect upon the welfare or health of the household.

*(These criteria will be assessed in partnership with Environmental Health Services. Where a home is found lacking in relation to these standards, the Environmental Health officer will consider using the powers available to ensure that the property is made to meet acceptable standards).*

**Medical needs – households with a medical, disability and mobility problem.**

This could include Households with a medical disability or mobility problem including:

- High verified medical need where a move will improve or prevent the deterioration of a condition. This will apply when a home seeker's condition is currently directly affected by their accommodation and a move is needed to have a positive effect on their condition..
- Level access accommodation is required and there is no prospect of adaptations to the home seeker's current property within 12 months. Suitable proof will be required, i.e. confirmation from a local occupational therapist and landlord. The home seeker may be referred to local agencies for assistance with adaptations.

**Welfare need to move**

This could include:

- Home seekers suffering from harassment or neighbour nuisance, such as verbal abuse or damage to the property. The problems will have been reported to the landlord and/or the Police for action but a satisfactory conclusion not found. The harassment is not at a level whereby the home seeker has an emergency need to move. Enquiries will be made to verify the situation.

- The need to be near relatives to give or receive support. This would only apply where NOT moving would cause emotional, physical or financial hardship to either party. Enquiries will be made to verify the situation.
- The need to move closer to specialist educational or other organisation, agency or institution. This would only apply where NOT moving would cause emotional, physical or financial hardship to either party. Enquiries will be made to very the situation.
- Has found permanent employment in the district and needs to move closer to work, to prevent financial hardship. Enquiries will be made; to verify the situation.

*(Applicants who have been assessed in a higher housing need band for these reasons may be restricted to bidding only in areas they have demonstrated a need to move to)*

- Home seekers who are suffering financial hardship through reasons outside of their control and who are having difficulty in meeting their housing costs, examples could include adverse impacts of Welfare Reform such as the Benefit Cap etc.

### **Insecure accommodation**

This would include home seekers who are:

1. Currently renting accommodation privately on an assured shorthold tenancy, or tied accommodation and have been served with a valid notice to leave
2. Living with family, relatives or friends, accommodated as a licensee/lodger
3. Households accommodated for a limited period on non-secure tenancies or on license agreements in hostels or other supported accommodation.
4. Rough sleepers and those of no fixed abode who have not presented as homeless.

## **9.7 Band 3: High Housing Need**

- 9.7.1 A home seeker who has been assessed as having two or more needs from the Medium housing need band. A home seeker will not be placed in High housing need b if the 2 or more needs are from the same section.

The two needs must be from different sections.

- 9.7.2 Home seekers in the High Housing Need band can remain in this band for up to 16 weeks. If no suitable properties come available during the period, or the home seeker has not been successful in their search for accommodation their application will be reviewed. In exceptional circumstances applicants can be granted an extension to the 16 weeks. The length of the extension will be determined by the Housing Services Manager.

9.7.3 The following circumstances will also qualify a home seeker to be placed in the High Housing Need band:

- Home seekers where there is overcrowding by two or more bedrooms short of the assessed need (*the home seeker would not be considered eligible to bid for the same size property as currently occupied*)
- A home seeker who is living in supported accommodation and the Council has a formal move on agreement with the housing provider or their key worker has agreed that independent accommodation would now be appropriate.
- Transfer home seekers who are under-occupying a home which is in high demand from other home seekers and where there may be assistance available from a local tenant's incentive scheme (*the home seeker would not be considered eligible to bid for the same size property as currently occupied*).
- Home Seekers who are under-occupying a home and are affected by Welfare Reform

9.7.4 Home seekers in the High Housing Need Band retain the right to bid for properties of their choice. Home seekers will be expected to consider all suitable properties. Failure to bid for suitable properties or refusal of an offer of suitable accommodation will be taken into account if the application is reviewed at the end of the 16 week period. If no suitable properties come available during the period, or the home seeker has not been successful in their search for accommodation their application will be reviewed.

## **9.8 Band 4: Priority Housing Need**

9.8.1 Home seekers who have been assessed as having an emergency need to move will be placed in the priority need band. Home seekers can remain in this band for a period of up to 8 weeks. If no suitable properties have become available during the 8 week period, or the home seeker has not been successful in their search for accommodation their application will be reviewed. In exceptional circumstances applicants can be granted a further 8 weeks in the priority need band. The length of extension of Priority will be determined by the Housing Services Manager.

9.8.2 Home seekers in the priority need band retain the right to bid for properties of their choice. Applicants will be expected to consider all suitable properties. Failure to bid for suitable properties or refusal of an offer of suitable accommodation may result in priority not being renewed at the end of the 8 week period.

9.8.3 The relevant date for shortlisting home seekers placed in the priority band will not be the date they joined the housing register, it will be as follows

- Homeless households where a full statutory duty has been accepted – their date will be the date they presented as homeless
- All other priority home seekers – the date a decision on priority was made.

9.8.4 Priority need to move will be recognised in the case of:-

- **Homeless Households** to whom the Council has a statutory duty to secure accommodation as described by Part VII Housing Act 1996 and amended by the Homelessness Act 2002.

*The authority reserves the right to place bids for home seekers on suitable properties to meet their needs where they have failed to bid in any advert cycle whilst in Priority band. The authority also retains the right to discharge the authority's statutory homeless duty by bidding on behalf of the home seeker in week 8 of the Priority period to enable one suitable offer of accommodation to be made by a Registered Provider to the home seeker in discharge of that duty.*

- **Emergency Welfare need** – circumstances could include (this is not an exhaustive list)

Home seekers who are subject to severe harassment, threats of violence, or actual violence or threats of physical, emotional or sexual abuse.

Home seekers living in a property where the conditions are classified as unsafe or risk of imminent harm which can not be remedied within a reasonable time (not resulting from damage caused by the applicant).

Home seekers living in a property where they are assessed as statutorily overcrowding

Care leavers and other vulnerable home seekers whose social or economic circumstances are such that they have difficulty in securing settled accommodation. The home seeker will have been through their housing options with Harborough Home Search and all other options will have been exhausted.

- **Emergency Medical need** – circumstances could include (this is not an exhaustive list)

A home seeker with a progressive or chronic medical condition combined with other difficulties such as the need for adapted accommodation or the inability to be discharged from hospital to their current accommodation.

- **Complex needs**

Would include a number of factors which when assessed in isolation would not indicate an emergency need to move but when viewed as a whole would. This could, for example, be a combination of severe physical and learning disabilities combined with stress caused by harassment.

- **Management need** – circumstances could include (this is not an exhaustive list)

Tenants needing an emergency transfer because their current property is in need of urgent repair (includes demolition)

Home seekers succeeding to a tenancy that is not suitable to their needs and they have lived in the property for at least the last twelve months

Home seekers who have no right in law to remain in their current Housing Association or Council accommodation, i.e. they have no right of succession but the applicant has lived in the property for at least the last twelve months

Tenants occupying a wheelchair adapted property they no longer need but which could be used by somebody else.

- **Displaced agricultural workers** who qualify for assistance under the Rent (Ag) Act 1976

## **9.9 Moving between housing need bands**

9.9.1 A home seeker's housing need band will change if their level of need changes (see Section 9).

9.9.2 When a home seeker moves up to a higher housing need band their effective date will change to the date they moved in to the higher band. The exceptions to this rule are as follows

- Home seekers moving to the priority band because the Council has a full homelessness duty to them will have their effective date changed to the date they presented as homeless.

9.9.3 Home seekers who move to a lower category will retain their registration date or the date they were previously in that housing need band.

## 10. **Advertising Properties**

- 10.1 All vacant properties will be advertised through Harborough Home Search. The advert will contain basic information about the property and the eligibility criteria that home seekers must meet. Property adverts may be restricted to receiving bids from certain types of applicant, where this is in line with local lettings policies. For example property adverts may be restricted to home seekers by:
- Home seeker type (New/Transfer)
  - Support needs (i.e. Sheltered, Extra Care and Supported)
  - Banding
  - Home Seeker Age
  - Mobility
  - Household type and size
  - Village connection
- 10.2 Within the Harborough district two, three and four bedroom houses and general need bungalows will normally be split between transfers and new home seekers on a 50/50 basis. The split will operate in individual villages and towns. The partners will maintain a record of properties that have been advertised to ensure accuracy.
- 10.3 Studio flats, one-bedroom properties, two bedroom flats and all supported accommodation (including sheltered and extra supported schemes) will be advertised with equal preference to new and transfer home seekers. Short listing will be completed on the basis of the property criteria, home seekers' housing need band and effective date
- 10.4 Properties will normally be advertised in accordance with the home seeker eligibility matrix. In exceptional circumstances a Housing Association partner may need to advertise a property in accordance with a Local Lettings Policy. A Local Lettings Policy will normally be used when there are issues of sustainability and there is a need to create a balanced community. Properties advertised under a Local Lettings Policy will be allocated in accordance with normal Harborough Home Search procedure, i.e. on the basis of housing need category and effective date
- 10.5 Harborough Home Search reserves the right to change the quota of properties advertised for new and transfer home seekers without prior notice.
- 10.6 All home seekers will be able to view the weekly property adverts on the [www.Harborough-homes.org.uk](http://www.Harborough-homes.org.uk) website or can view a display copy of the property adverts at one of a number of local display points in the district. Details of these display points will be sent to home seekers when their application is accepted onto the housing register, (the display points are also listed in the Housing Options Scheme Guide and on the website). Available properties can also be viewed on the Housing Options Kiosk in The Symington Building in Market Harborough.
- 10.7 Home seekers living in the district in the, High and Priority housing need bands who are unable to view the property adverts on line themselves or with help from relatives/friends/support worker and are unable to visit a local display point should contact Harborough Home Search To discuss alternative ways of viewing adverts and

placing bids. Home seekers who are eligible to receive a copy of the Housing Options Booklet through the post are as follows:-

- In High or Priority housing need and
- Both main and joint applicants are aged 75 and over and
- Have no access to a display point or housing options kiosk and
- Have no support network and
- Auto-bid is not a viable alternative and
- Do not meet the criteria for the 'search and support service'

10.8 The housing options booklet will include details of other affordable housing options in the district such as low cost home ownership and Homebuy options.

## **11. Bidding for properties**

11.1 Home seekers are responsible for bidding for properties that are advertised. Home seekers will normally be able to bid on up to two properties (they are eligible to bid on) in each weekly cycle of adverts. 11.2 Home seekers are responsible for ensuring that they bid on properties by the closing time and date published..

11.2 Home seekers can bid for properties in a number of ways. Details of how to bid will accompany the property adverts but normally bids can be made on-line or by telephoning the automated bidding line.

11.3 Home seekers can make up to two bids per edition of adverts. Home seekers are not penalised if they fail to bid on properties advertised unless they are in Priority or High bands which are both time limited. However, if a home seeker does bid and they fail to respond to three suitable offers of accommodation or fail to attend three arranged viewings or refuse three offers of tenancy, they will have their application suspended for up to six months.

11.4 Harborough Home Search reserves the right to change the frequency of advert publication.

## **12. Management Allocations**

12.1 Harborough Home Search aims to give all home seekers choice in where they live. In exceptional circumstances it may not be possible to offer the applicant choice and in certain circumstances a direct offer of accommodation, or a Management Allocation, may be made.

12.2 A Management Allocation may be made in one of the following circumstances (this list is not exhaustive)

- When a tenant of a Housing Association partner needs to be decanted from their property because it requires major refurbishment or repair

- Where a property has been compulsory purchased and there is a legal requirement to offer the household a specific property
- Where the Housing Association partner has decided that this is the best use of stock. This would only take place in exceptional circumstances, following discussion with Harborough Home Search.
- Home seekers who could pose a risk to individuals or other members of the community

12.3 Properties being allocated on a Management Allocation basis will be advertised through HHS but labelled Management Allocation Do Not Respond. Home seekers will not be able to register a bid on the property. These properties are advertised in order to demonstrate the transparency of the lettings scheme.

### **13. Difficult to let procedure**

Where properties prove to be difficult to let the Landlord may for example alter the eligibility criteria on the next advert to encourage home seekers of a different age or household type to bid. HHS will work with the landlord to identify and encourage home seekers to bid who would meet the revised criteria.

### **14. Shortlisting criteria**

14.1 For all properties advertised, unless they are advertised on a “best fit basis”, home seekers who have bid for and meet the criteria for that property, will be shortlisted in the following order:

#### **Home seekers in the priority housing need category**

If more than one home seeker bids for a property they will be shortlisted in the following order

- i) By local connection qualification
- ii) By housing need band
- iii) By effective date (=date of registration or more recent date of change of band)

If more than one priority home seeker from each group bids for a property the home seeker who has been in the priority band for the longest period of time will be shortlisted first. If both joined the priority band on the same date the home seeker who has been on the housing register the longest will be shortlisted first.

14.2 In the event of two home seekers with the same registration date applying for the same property, Harborough Home Search will make a decision between both cases taking into consideration the housing circumstances of each case.

14.3 This will generally mean home seekers who receive no preference (Low housing need band) are less likely to receive an offer of accommodation.



- 14.4 Non standard properties, for example those that are suitable for wheelchair users assessed with an A/B mobility key, will be advertised on a 'best fit' basis. These properties will be exempt from the shortlisting process outlined in 14.1 above. Home seekers who bid and have been assessed with an A/B mobility key (have a need for wheelchair accessible accommodation) will be invited to view the property and an assessment of each of the home seekers needs in relation to the facilities the property offers will be made and a recommendation of who would be the best fit for the property will be made to the Landlord.
- 14.5 Where a disabled home seeker applies for accommodation which does not meet his or her access needs, Harborough Home Search will take into account whether it is reasonable and practicable to adapt the property when assessing his or her bid. If Harborough Home Search takes the view that it is reasonable and practicable to adapt the property, the disabled home seeker will be considered for the vacancy on the same basis as other applicants who have submitted a bid.

## **15. Offering a property**

- 15.1 The shortlisting results for each property will be nominated to or accessed directly by the Registered Provider landlord. They will be responsible for contacting home seekers who have been shortlisted for a property and for allocating the property in accordance with their own Allocations Policy. Each landlord will work from the shortlist results provided by HHS. Home seekers who are contacted regarding a property will be asked to provide proof to confirm the circumstances detailed on their Harborough Home Search application form.
- 15.2 Home seekers who owe a housing related debt to a Council, Registered Provider or private landlord (see section 9.5.1) may be advised that any offer of accommodation is subject to the remainder of the debt being paid in full. Home seekers may be asked to provide evidence to prove the debt has been paid.
- 15.3 If the home seeker is unable to provide proof of their circumstances or if their circumstances have changed to an extent that they are no longer eligible for the property then an offer of a tenancy will not be made.
- 15.4 If the home seeker is able to provide the Registered Provider with the proof requested then the home seeker should be offered the tenancy of the property. .
- 15.5 The Registered Provider will complete the tenancy agreement with the home seeker. This agreement is the formal contract between the landlord and home seeker, and sets out the details of the property, rental charge, the full names, and the start date of the tenancy.
- 15.6 Home seekers should be given sufficient time to consider an offer of a tenancy.
- 15.7 Home seekers who are identified as vulnerable may be given longer to consider the offer of a tenancy. Examples of this will include home seekers who are currently in hospital or in some form of temporary accommodation, such as a hostel or refuge. A

decision will be made by the individual landlord according to the circumstances of the home seeker.

- 15.8 Home seekers will be penalised if they fail to respond to three suitable offers of accommodation or fail to attend three arranged viewings or refuse three offers of tenancy. If a home seeker refuses three suitable offers of a tenancy or fails to attend three arranged viewings their application will be suspended for up to six months (during which time they will be unable to bid for properties)..
- 15.9 Home seekers in the Priority housing need band may jeopardise their priority status if they refuse a reasonable offer of a tenancy. In the case of “homeless” priority households, if they fail to respond to properties that would be considered suitable for their needs, or if they refuse a reasonable offer of accommodation within a seven week period, their priority status will not be renewed and the homelessness duty will be discharged by making them one reasonable offer of accommodation within the final week of their Priority status.
- 15.10 The Registered Provider partners within Harborough Home Search reserve the right to withdraw any offer of accommodation. Offers will only be withdrawn when there is just cause. The Registered Provider will explain why the offer has been withdrawn. The home seeker will have a right to appeal against the decision (see section 4.2)

## **16. Joint tenants**

- 16.1 Home seekers seeking a joint tenancy should make a joint application to join the housing register.
- 16.2 The partner landlords within Harborough Home Search encourage joint tenancies.
- 16.3 If one home seeker of a household is ineligible to join the register (i.e. would be excluded as per section 2), then a joint tenancy cannot be granted.
- 16.4 The partner landlords will consider offering a joint tenancy to household members who have long term commitments to the home, for example when adults share accommodation as partners (including same sex partners), friends or unpaid live-in carers.
- 16.5 When a joint tenant serves notice to quit the partner landlords can, at their discretion, grant the remaining joint tenant a tenancy in their sole name. In exercising their discretion the landlords will consider whether this is making best use of their stock. The former tenant may join the housing register as a new home seeker.

## **17. Feedback information**

- 17.1 Harborough Home Search seeks to provide every home seeker with feedback information on previous allocations. This helps home seekers to make informed choices when bidding for properties.

- 17.2 Every property that is allocated through Harborough Home Search will be included in the feedback information. This information is published in the weekly Housing Options booklet and on the [www.harborough-homes.org.uk](http://www.harborough-homes.org.uk) website.
- 17.3 The feedback information will include details of the number of home seekers who bid for the property, the effective date of the successful home seeker and their housing need band.
- 17.4 When bidding on-line home seekers will be able to see their position on the shortlist at that point in time..
- 17.5 Harborough Home Search will seek to contact home seekers who have not bid for a property in the last 12 months to ensure they understand how Harborough Home Search works and discuss their housing needs.

## **18. Mutual Exchange**

- 18.1 Assured tenants of the partner Registered Providers have the right to exchange their property with secure tenants of any other Council, or assured tenants of any Registered Provider.
- 18.2 Harborough Home Search will facilitate and maintain a Mutual Exchange Register for moves within the Leicestershire sub-region. To apply to join the mutual exchange register home seekers must complete a housing register application form and mutual exchange form.
- 18.3 The Register will be made available to view in a number of formats. Harborough Home Search will advise tenants about how to register for a mutual exchange and how to view properties on the mutual exchange register.
- 18.4 You can search the Mutual Exchange Register on-line at [www.harborough-homes.org.uk](http://www.harborough-homes.org.uk)
- 18.5 The partner landlords will normally consent to a mutual exchange in line with the lettings matrix set out at Appendix 1. The tenant must receive written consent from their landlord before any exchange takes place. The landlord may withhold consent on the following grounds: -
- There is a valid Possession Order with a date for the tenant to leave the property
  - Notice of seeking possession has been issued and is still in force or repossession proceedings have been started.
  - There is a Demotion Order in place
  - The tenancy is an introductory or a starter tenancy
  - Property is much larger than new occupier would be normally eligible for. Seven Locks Housing will use the eligibility matrix when determining the number of bedrooms and property type a home seeker is entitled to
  - Property has been adapted or is specifically built for people with disabilities
  - Property is within a sheltered complex or extra care scheme and the incoming tenant does not require the facilities.

- 18.6 Rent arrears or other breach of tenancy conditions are not grounds for refusal but permission may be given subject to any breach being rectified in advance of any exchange.
- 18.7 Mutual Exchanges are undertaken by way of a Deed of Assignment. Properties are accepted in the condition they are in at the time of the Exchange; in most cases the housing association has no liability to undertake repairs to tenant's fixtures and fittings.

## **19. Agricultural workers and the Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976**

- 19.1 Under the Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976 Harborough Home Search has a duty towards agricultural workers who are required to leave their tied accommodation.
- 19.2 When considering an application from a displaced agricultural worker Harborough Home search will need to be satisfied that :-
- the property from which the worker is displaced is needed to accommodate another agricultural worker.
  - the farmer cannot provide suitable alternative accommodation for the displaced worker
  - to rehouse the vacating worker would be in the interests of efficient agriculture

All 3 conditions need to be satisfied.

- 19.3 In reaching a decision Harborough Home Search will seek the advice of the Agricultural Dwelling-House Advisory Committee (ADHAC). The ADHAC will advise whether or not the applicant should be asked to vacate the tied accommodation and make recommendations as to the urgency of their rehousing.
- 19.4 If Harborough Home Search is satisfied that the case is substantiated the home seekers application will be placed in the priority housing need band.
- 19.5 If the case has not been substantiated then Harborough Home Search will assess the application in the standard way.

## **20. Leicestershire Sub-regional Pool of Properties**

The seven local authority districts which make up the Leicestershire Sub-region are:  
Blaby District Council  
Charnwood Borough Council  
Harborough District Council  
Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council  
Melton Borough Council  
North West Leicestershire District Council  
Oadby & Wigston Borough Council

- 20.1 **Local homes for rent** - Each authority will advertise Local social and affordable rented properties in their area which are available to home seekers who have been

accepted onto the housing register of the host district/borough (ie.the district or borough where the property is located) or they have an established local connection to that district or borough.

- 20.2 **Sub-regional homes for rent** - Each authority will also advertise social and affordable rented properties which have been selected for advertising to all home seekers within the sub-region. Where the property advertised may be in high demand locally, the housing register administrator for the host area may apply a preference for those with a local connection to their district on the advert criteria.
- 20.3 Property vacancies in the sub-regional pool will be open to all home seekers in the sub-region, subject to any restrictions stated in the advert. In normal circumstances equal priority will be given to home seekers in the same band and with a connection to any part of the sub-region. However, where this is supported by a local lettings policy, preference may be given in some circumstances to home seekers with a district connection to the host area. For example, larger properties, wheelchair adapted properties and some village properties, which are in short supply locally.
- 20.4 Applicants with a connection to more than one district should have the same priority for property vacancies in any of the areas to which they are connected.
- 20.5 Only one housing register application need be made. The applicant must choose which district to apply to (that district will then host their application). The application form will identify those district areas where the applicant claims an additional local connection. The housing register administrator will verify with the other districts that the applicant has a valid connection. The register will hold a record of each connection. The applicant will be able to see and bid for all the locally advertised properties in each district as well as the sub-regional selection.
- 20.6 The host housing register administrator will determine the priority banding and all other relevant factors for the applicant.

## **21. Definition of a Local Connection**

Priority will be given to applicants who have one or more local connections as defined below. Property adverts may also identify what type of local connection priority must be met.

### **21.1 Sub-regional Connection**

Home seekers from outside the Leicestershire sub-region will not qualify to join the register unless they have a valid local district connection with one of the Council's who are part of the this scheme or if exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated. Examples of exceptions might be households fleeing the threat of violence or Armed Forces and former service personnel where the application is made within five years of discharge, or bereaved spouse and civil partners of members of the Armed forces who are leaving service accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner, serving or former members of the reserved forces who need to move because of serious injury medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service within the last five years. A sub-regional connection is defined as a connection to any one of the seven district council areas in the sub-region.

Equal priority will be given to any applicant who has a sub-regional connection (ie. a connection to any one of the district areas) for properties advertised in the sub-regional pool. However, there is an option available to give preference to those with a district level connection, where the property type may be in short supply locally.

## 21.2 District Connection

Those housing vacancies not advertised in the sub-regional pool may be given priority to those home seekers with a host district connection. A district connection is established by one or more of the following:

- (a) they have normally resided in settled accommodation in the District for at least six months
- (b) they have lived in the district for at least six months in the last twelve months, or for at least three out of the last five years
- (c) they, or a member of their household is employed on a permanent basis or a temporary contract running for a minimum of twelve months, within the district (confirmation will be required from the employer)
- (d) they have parents, brothers, sisters, or adult children (those over 18 years) who have been living within the district for at least five years. Step equivalents will be allowed.
- (e) They have no local connection but are fleeing violence or threats of violence and have been accepted as priority homeless by the Council.
- (f) Other special circumstances may exist, and all applications will be considered on their individual circumstances.

21.3 Exceptions to the rule of establishing local connection will normally apply as follows:-

- Time spent in any prison or secure unit
- Time spent in hospital
- Time spent in any institution such as a refuge or rehabilitation centre
- Armed forces personnel (see 21.1 above)

## 21.4 Parish Connection

For some village housing schemes there are planning restrictions requiring that vacancies should go in the first instance to people who have a connection with the village or parish. Each of the districts has its own local policy. These vacancies will not feature in the sub-regional pool of properties.

21.5 The factors used to determine a village connection will be as follows, where the main home seeker or joint home seeker can answer 'yes' to any one of the following:-

- I have lived in the village for the last five years
- I work permanently in the village (at least 15 hours a week)
- My Mother was living in this village when I was born or previously lived in the village for 5 years or more
- I have close relatives who have lived in the village for at least five years (close relatives are defined as parents, children, siblings, grandparents or grandchildren)
- I need to move to the Parish to be close to a relative or other person in order to

provide or receive significant amounts of care and support

## **22. Complaints Procedure, Service issue**

- 22.1 If a home seeker wishes to register a complaint about the service provided by Harborough Home Search, or if they feel they have been treated unfairly by one of the landlords within the partnership, then the home seeker should be encouraged to register their dissatisfaction through the complaints procedure
- 22.2 The Home Seeker should advise the Home Search Adviser, (with whom they have been dealing), of the nature of their complaint. The complaint can be made in person or in writing. The Adviser will then acknowledge and record the complaint. All complaints will be investigated and wherever possible, a full response will be sent to the Home Seeker within 20 working days from receipt.
- 22.3 If the complaint relates to the service offered by the Officer they have been dealing with, then the home seeker should bring their complaint to the attention of the Housing Services Manager who will conduct all enquiries relating to the complaint in a fair and sensitive way.
- 22.4 If the complainant is then not satisfied with the response received he/she may write to Mr S Pointer, Strategic Planning Services Manager, Harborough District, The Symington Building, Adam & Eve Street, Market Harborough. LE16 7AG, setting out the following details:-
- name, address and telephone number
  - the nature of the complaint
  - the date the complaint was first made and to whom
  - the reason for dissatisfaction with the response received
  - how they would like to see matters put right
  - copies of correspondence (if any) relating to the complaint
  - any additional relevant information to that already received
- 22.5 Where possible the Officer will aim to complete their enquiries and respond to the complaint within 28 working days.
- 22.6 All correspondence will be sent to the complainant's home address or a mailing address of their choice. If the complaint is of no fixed abode then the correspondence can be collected from The Symington Building. Correspondence will be kept by Harborough Home Search for a period of 28 days.
- 22.7 If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the service they may request a review of their complaint by the Chief Executive which will follow the procedure set out in Harborough District Council's Official Complaints procedure.
- 22.8 Details of Harborough District Council's Official Complaints procedure can be obtained from the Customer Services Desk, The Symington Building, Adam & Eve Street, Market Harborough or by telephoning 01858 828282.

## **Glossary and Definition of Terms**

Allocation Policy	This explains the rules relating to joining the housing register and how Harborough District Council and partner Districts in Leicestershire will operate the Leicestershire choice based lettings scheme
Choice Based Lettings	A scheme that enables home seekers to choose a home (subject to meeting the eligibility criteria on the property advert)
Eligibility	The term used to describe factors your household must meet in order to be shortlisted for i.e. the size of household and number of bedrooms in the property
Home Seeker	This is the term used for applicants who have joined the housing register and are searching for housing
Mutual exchange	A swap of accommodation between two social housing tenants which relies on each tenant moving permanently into the other's property with the permission of their landlord
Registered Provider	A Housing Association or not-for-profit company registered by the Tenants Services Authority to provide social housing
Shortlist	A list of home seekers that have bid for a particular property advertised by Harborough Home Search
Social Housing	The term used to describe affordable rented accommodation owned by a Registered Provider
Succeeding to a tenancy	When a tenant dies, the tenancy would normally pass to a joint tenant or member of the family if they have been living with the tenant for the preceding 12 months and are still living in the property at the time of death of the tenant. Anyone who takes over a tenancy in this way is called a successor.