

Proposed Amendments to Homesearch Allocations Policy (change highlighted)

THEME	CURRENT POLICY	PROPOSED AMENDMENT	REASON FOR CHANGE
Local Connection	<p>The applicant or a member of their household has lived in the County in accommodation of their choice for 12 out of the past 24 months or 3 out of the past 5 years.</p> <p>The applicant or a member of their household are employed within the County, where they work within the area and not where the employers head office is. Employment will be deemed to be work that is permanent or long term in nature and is for 15 hours a week or more.</p> <p>The applicant or a member of their household has a family association, (being mother, father, brother, sister or dependent children or adult children) who reside within the County and have done so for the past 5 years continuously. This includes step children and adopted children.</p> <p>There are special circumstances, for example, the applicant needs to be near special medical or support services that are only available in the Monmouthshire area. A local connection</p>	<p>The applicant or a member of their household has lived in the County in accommodation of their choice for 2 out of the past 3 years or 3 out of the past 5 years. For a local connection to apply, an applicant must have lived in Monmouthshire through their own choice.</p> <p>The applicant or a member of their household are employed within the County and they work within the area (i.e. not just where the employers head office is). Someone who is self-employed would need to show that they routinely work in Monmouthshire to qualify. Employment will be deemed to be work that is permanent or long term in nature and is for 15 hours a week or more.</p> <p>The applicant or a member of their household has a family association, (being mother or father (or a person who's acted in that capacity), brother, sister or dependent children or adult children) who reside within the County and have done so for the past 5 years continuously. This includes step children and adopted children. There will be no local connection where the relationship is estranged.</p> <p>There are special circumstances, for example, the applicant or their household needs to be near special medical or support services that are only available in the Monmouthshire area. A local connection established on these grounds is likely to be</p>	<p>The intention is to ensure that established residents of Monmouthshire are given more priority to meet their housing need than applicants who do not meet the defined local connection criteria.</p> <p>Applicants living in refuge in Monmouthshire will be considered as having a local connection; this is being proposed to support safe guarding objectives.</p>

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	established on these grounds is likely to be exceptional.	exceptional. We would consider someone has a local connection where they are living in domestic abuse refuge accommodation in Monmouthshire and it is considered unsafe for them to return to the area that they have left.	
Banding	<p>Band 1 Urgent Housing Need</p> <p>Band 2A High Housing Need</p> <p>BAND 2B Homeless Households</p> <p>BAND 3A Medium Housing Need</p> <p>BAND 3B Homeless Households</p> <p>BAND 4</p> <p>BAND 5 No Housing Need</p>	<p>Emergency Band - Urgent Housing Need</p> <p>Band 1 - High Housing Need</p> <p>BAND 2 - Medium Housing Need</p> <p>BAND 3 - Low Housing Need</p> <p>BAND 4 - No Housing Need</p>	Feedback received from service users stated there were too many bands and it was confusing. We are proposing to reduce the number of bands from 7 to 5 and rename them for ease of understanding.
Children in Flats	<p>BAND 3A - Medium Housing Need</p> <p>➤ Children in Flats</p>	<p>BAND 1 – High Housing Need</p> <p>Children Under 5 Years Old in a Flat and no Lift</p> <p>Applicants who have two or more dependent child (living with them full time) both under the age of 5 and live in a flat above ground floor will gain Band 1. Homesearch will review this once one child turns 5 years of age and applicants will then be placed into Band 2.</p>	Increase in banding to support a quicker move into more suitable housing.
Armed Forces Personnel/Veterans	<p>BAND 3A - Medium Housing Need</p> <p>➤ Leaving Armed Forces</p> <p>BAND 5 - No Housing Need</p>	<p>BAND 1 – High Housing Need</p> <p>Applicants will meet this category when leaving the Armed Forces and are in receipt of their Cessation of</p>	This supports the Council's commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant and ensures those leaving the armed forces

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	<p>Serving Armed Forces Personnel</p>	<p>Duty Notice or their Testimonial of Military Service Notice and they have a local connection to Monmouthshire. If the applicant has left the armed forces and secured alternative accommodation, they will be assessed on the accommodation they currently occupy. This band is awarded on basis the applicant doesn't own or lease their own accommodation and is threatened with/experiencing homelessness.</p> <p>Applicants who are active participants in operations of the Territorial Army (TA) will not be given extra preference on the Homesearch Register.</p> <p>When assessing sufficient financial resources Homesearch would disregard financial resources connected with being in the armed forces.</p> <p>BAND 4 – No Housing Need</p> <p>Serving Armed Forces Personnel</p> <p>Applicants who are serving in the British Armed Forces can apply to join the Housing Register and will initially be placed into Band 4.</p>	<p>are given a priority for housing, if required.</p>
<p>Households with Children</p>	<p>Single applicants or couples, who do not have children residing with them on a full time basis, will only qualify for two bedroom accommodation providing they can supply written evidence that their child/children have an overnight stay on average at least two nights a week.</p>	<p>Single applicants or couples, who do not have their child/children residing with them on a full time basis, will qualify for an extra bedroom providing they can supply sufficient evidence that they have an overnight stay and providing those child/children are unable to share a bedroom with any other child/children residing at the property. NB: an applicant would only be allocated a general needs flat</p>	<p>Policy updated to consider households where children may have an overnight stay (rather than 2 nights a week) with a parent and households who have access to their children on a 50/50 basis.</p>

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	An affordability assessment will be carried out prior to an offer of accommodation being made to ensure that the applicant can afford the rent	and not a house and this would also be subject to the applicant(s) being able to afford the property. Applicants applying with a household where they are responsible for a child/children on a shared 50/50 basis with an ex-partner will be placed into the household type and band they would be if the child(ren) lived with them on a full time basis.	
Sufficient Financial Resources	We will take into account an applicant's financial resources in determining whether an applicant would qualify for reasonable preference or whether their preference should be reduced. Regard will be given to any resources wherever in the world they are situated. This category applies to households whose gross income from all sources exceeds the threshold for the higher rate of income tax (currently calculated at £34,371 for single applicants or £50,000 for joint applicants) or whose household's capital assets or savings exceeds £50,000. Such applications will be placed into Band 5 and are unlikely to receive an offer of accommodation.	Income/money received as a result of leaving the armed forces or from welfare benefits will be excluded when Homeseach considers financial resources. If a single applicant or joint applicants earn more than £45000.00 per year, they will be placed into Band 4. If cash investments/savings exceed £16,000.00 or if capital assets exceed £50,000.00 they will also be placed into Band 4. The only exception to the above criteria is if applicants are eligible for medical priority.	The amended threshold for sufficient financial resources has been calculated using a Monmouthshire average property price for purchase and rent and consideration of the income required to obtain one of these properties off the open market.
Lettings Quotas	To help ensure that all groups of applicants are given an opportunity to move under this scheme, (based on housing need) and to further promote sustainable communities, letting quotas may be applied if deemed necessary. If applied, quotas will be advertised based on applicant type and quotas periodically reviewed by the MHR partners. Where quotas are applied, property adverts will be used to inform applicants of the quota criteria relating to the individual letting. Where a quota is applied, all appropriate applicants will be considered on the shortlist for bands 1 to 4 (irrelevant of quota) before applicants in band 5 are considered. This criteria,	To help ensure that different groups of applicants are given an opportunity to move and to support sustainable communities, Homeseach reserves the right to use flexible letting quotas to allocate social housing. A letting quota may also be used in exceptional circumstances in response to an emergency e.g. large-scale flooding. Where lettings quotas are used it will be made clear in the Homeseach property adverts.	Includes the use of flexible quotas, which allows us to increase or decrease the number of properties available to certain groups in exceptional circumstances.

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	may however, be circumvented where a local lettings plan is applied		
Applicants who Fail to Bid	<p>Homesearch will review non-bidder applications periodically.</p> <p>For applicants in higher bands, partners may instigate assisted bidding. Homesearch reserves the right to reduce priority</p>	Homesearch will regularly review all Emergency Band and Band 1 (high welfare need only) non-bidder applications. If an applicant with this banding fails to bid after 3 months and a suitable property has become available during that time, Homesearch may reduce an applicant's priority/banding. If any applicant no longer wishes to remain on the Homesearch register their application will be cancelled	Homesearch is a needs based system and the expectation is for applicants with a recognised high housing need to bid for all suitable properties to ensure move on.
Automatic Bid for Homeless Applicants	Homeless applicants will be supported in accordance with the relevant Code of Guidance and within the procedures of MCC. Homeless applicants owed a Section 75 duty will generally be expected to bid for advertised properties in the same way as other applicants, although bids may be submitted for suitable properties on their behalf. If within 13 weeks of the date of acceptance of the homeless duty, no suitable offer has been made, MCC may place a bid. If Successful this would discharge the Council's final offer under Section 75 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. An applicant's banding would then be re-assessed as per the allocations policy, dependent on their new circumstances	Homeless applicants owed a full homeless duty (as per Section 75 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014) will generally be expected to bid for advertised properties in the same way as other applicants. However, MCC reserves the right to bid on behalf of any Homesearch applicants with a full homelessness duty who do not express an interest in a suitable property when it becomes available.	This allows the Housing Options Team to bid on behalf of any full duty (S75) homelessness applicants who may not be bidding. This supports the aim of rapid rehousing for homeless households and assists their move from temporary to permanent housing.
Withdrawing Offers	<p>Where the applicant's circumstances have changed, or new information comes to light and this changes their priority or makes them ineligible for the property or makes them ineligible to appear on the Housing Register.</p> <p>Where the property fails to become vacant e.g. withdrawal of notice</p>	<p>Where the applicant's circumstances have changed, or new information comes to light and this changes their priority status for social housing or makes them ineligible for the property or makes them ineligible to appear on the Homesearch Register.</p> <p>Where the property fails to become vacant e.g. withdrawal of end of tenancy notice by the current tenant(s).</p>	Supports efficient management of social housing.

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		<p>Where an applicant is transferring from one Homesearch partner's tenancy to another Homesearch partner's tenancy and the property they are vacating fails a property inspection or debts are connected to the old tenancy and they are not properly addressed.</p>	
<p>Rural Allocations Policy</p>	<p>The Rural Allocations Policy will be used to allocate the first 10 homes on all new housing sites and on all subsequent lettings of these properties (once identified via the first round of lettings) in rural areas.</p> <p>Priority order: Priority will be given, in the first instance, to (a), with (b), (c)</p> <p>(a) Applicants with a housing need who have lived in the community (defined as the Community Council area) for a period of at least 5 years at the time of application, or in the past.</p> <p>(b) Applicants who need to live in the community in order to provide support to a dependent child or adult or to receive support from a principal carer.</p> <p>(c) Applicants who are principally (>20 hours per week) employed in the community (defined as the Community Council area).</p>	<p>The Rural Allocations Policy will be used to allocate the first 10 homes or 80% of the available properties (whichever is greater) on all new housing sites and on all subsequent lettings of these properties (once identified via the first round of lettings) in rural areas.</p> <p>In exceptional circumstances where the number of properties available exceeds those covered by the Rural Allocations Policy, the Local Authority reserves the right to choose which properties that will be eligible for the Rural Allocations Policy. This decision will be made having due regard to the housing need and preferred mix of available properties to meet that need.</p> <p>Priority order: Priority will be given, in the first instance, to (a), with (b), (c) and (d) having equal priority.</p> <p>(a) Applicants with a housing need who have lived in the community (defined as the Community Council area) for a period of at least 5 years at the time of application, or in the past.</p> <p>(b) Applicants who need to live in the community in order to provide support to a dependent child or adult or to receive support from a principal carer.</p>	<p>This proposal supports residents living in rural communities being prioritised over those who do not live in the area for affordable housing.</p> <p>Increasing the number of properties covered by the rural allocations policy and allowing the council to determine which property mix best meets need, contributes to the resilience of rural communities.</p>

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		<p>(c) Applicants who are principally (>20 hours per week) employed in the community (defined as the Community Council area).</p> <p>(d) Applicants who have left the rural area to access housing, but rely on immediate family members for child care (where family members have lived in the community (defined as a community council area) for a period of at least 5 years).</p>	
<p>Suspensions/Demotions</p>	<p>We may exclude someone from the Housing Register if it is considered proportionate and reasonable to do so, as a result of unacceptable behaviour. We will take into account relevant factors when making these decisions</p>	<p>We may prevent an applicant from bidding for social housing via Homesearch (for a period of time), if it is considered proportionate and reasonable to do so as a result of their unacceptable behaviour. We will take into account relevant factors when making such a decision. We may also demote an applicant's banding (again for a period of time) because of their behaviour. This would mean that they are less likely to be able to secure social housing through Homesearch. Homesearch partners will seek to minimise suspensions and demotions and provide advice and support or facilitate appropriate support in order to do so.</p> <p>To suspend an applicant the following 3 stage test criteria must be met. This test will be applied by the Suspension Panel (a panel of Homesearch landlord's representatives) to determine if the unacceptable behaviour warrants suspension (all answers must be yes):</p> <p>i) Was the applicant's (or household member's) behaviour serious enough to entitle a local authority</p>	<p>Ensures the policy is adhering to current legislation and good practice and offers transparency regarding decisions about suspensions and demotions.</p>

		<p>to obtain a possession order on a secure tenancy in the same circumstances? Normally an outright order should be expected.</p> <p>ii) Was the behaviour serious enough to render the applicant or a household member unsuitable to be a tenant?</p> <p>iii) Is the behaviour still relevant/unacceptable at the time of application (meaning the applicant is still unsuitable)? NB: It is not necessary for an applicant to have actually been a tenant of one of the Homeseach partners when the unacceptable behaviour occurred to warrant suspension.</p> <p>Demotions can be applied where:</p> <p>The circumstances aren't serious enough to meet the three stage test. Alternatively demotion can also take place where an applicant refuses a certain numbers of offers.</p>	
<p>Bypassing Policy & Procedure</p>	<p>Policy Principles:</p> <p>Blanket bans will not be used.</p> <p>A decision to bypass an applicant will only be taken according to the criteria set out in this document.</p> <p>Any local letting agreement must be agreed by all partners and adhere to this document.</p> <p>If a Monmouthshire Homeseach partner wishes to retain bypassing rules outside of the Common Allocation Policy and Procedures e.g. rules relating</p>	<p>Bypassing means that in some limited situations a Homeseach partner/landlord can 'bypass' the highest banded applicant who has bid on a property so an applicant won't receive an offer for that particular property.</p> <p>Where there is evidence an applicant does not have the mental capacity to understand a tenancy agreement, for a property allocated via Homeseach (also see the Mental Capacity Act 2005), a Homeseach partner will enact the Bypass Policy and Procedure</p>	<p>Setting clearly defined reasons for bypassing will support transparency and ensure accurate data collection for monitoring purposes. If an applicant is to be bypassed for a reason other than those listed, it must be agreed by all partners beforehand.</p>

	<p>to the size of the accommodation to be offered, or offers where there are rent arrears or unresolved unacceptable behaviour – these rules will be recorded as an appendix to the Common Allocation Policy and Procedures. They will be transparent, so it is clear when a partner will bypass an applicant and why.</p> <p>All parties have agreed, as far as possible, to set a common set of rules and to keep exceptions to a minimum. All Monmouthshire Homesearch Partners also recognise the need for each body to manage their dwellings appropriately.</p> <p>It is not possible to describe every situation where an applicant may be bypassed. The following list describes the most common:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant not suitable for social housing allocation with communal entrances/facilities. • Applicants who are vulnerable and have high support needs or applicants who require a sensitive letting such as MAPPA case. • Current arrears/former tenancy related debt. • The property is not suitable for a disabled applicant’s long term needs. • Medical needs. • Pending information. • Wrong banding. • Pre void inspection. • Affordability. • Senior Officer Discretion. 	<p>Bypassing Reasons</p> <p>Ineligible for the Property: A household doesn’t meet the criteria outlined in the property advert such as the household size not matching the property size; not meeting an age restriction requirement to live in the property or not requiring disabled adaptations present in the property. We may also bypass because there are reasonable grounds for believing that false information has been given to try and obtain a tenancy.</p> <p>Rural Allocation Policy/Local Letting Plans Applicants may be bypassed where they do not match specific criteria set out via either of these. Both can be adopted for specific areas/homes to ensure social housing is accessible to those who need it in the local community and that communities are as balanced and sustainable as possible. Properties subject to the Rural Allocation Policy/local letting plans will be clearly advertised and priority will be given to those that meet the criteria set out within those.</p> <p>Change in Applicant’s Circumstances: There has been a recent change in their circumstances which makes someone unsuitable or ineligible e.g. banding has changed, change in medical situation, financial situation or a change in the number of bedrooms needed.</p> <p>Property Unsuitable: An applicant is considered not ready to move or to live independently due to social or medical reasons (the support available will also be considered). Or the Homesearch landlord/Occupational Therapist recognises the</p>	
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		<p>example because it is urgently needed for an emergency (e.g. a tenant has lost their home due to fire) or because the previous tenant has decided not to leave their tenancy and retracted their notice to end their tenancy.</p> <p>Condition of Tenancy: Where an applicant is transferring home and an inspection is carried out and the current property they are leaving has been damaged/neglected.</p> <p>Applicant Leaving the Armed Forces – an applicant would be bypassed (if they bid on a property) up to 2 months prior to discharge from the army. Homesearch will notify applicants leaving the armed forces when they are able to bid.</p> <p>Exceptional circumstances/Discretionary Decision: Cases that fall outside the above criteria will need to be discussed by the Suspension Panel; discussions may have to be conducted via email as the panel only meets once a month. The application of a discretionary decision for exceptional circumstances will need to be approved by all partners (via email).</p>	
<p>Rapid Rehousing (Agreement in principle - subject to partner approval)</p>	<p>Not in current policy.</p>	<p>It is a requirement of Welsh Government, as per the Phase 2 Planning Guidance for Homelessness and Housing Related Support, for the Council to have a 'move-on protocol with rapid re-housing at its heart' for re-housing those in emergency/temporary homeless accommodation into suitable permanent accommodation.</p> <p>The Council is required to minimise the number of placement moves for any individual or family that experiences homeless. Settled permanent</p>	<p>This supports the Council in meeting its obligation to provide those in homeless/emergency accommodation with move on into suitable permanent housing as soon as possible.</p>

		<p>accommodation following a short period of time in emergency accommodation is the desire for all partners when working together to eradicate homelessness and promote sustainable tenancies.</p> <p>MCC will work closely with the Monmouthshire Housing Partnership to facilitate adequate availability of social housing stock through local housing associations to help meet local homeless need through the flexible quota arrangement within the existing Monmouthshire Homesearch Housing Allocation Policy. The Council is committed to RSL's having the guarantee of immediate Intensive Resettlement Housing Support for those needing to be accommodated via the homeless route. In the short-term this will be provided through an interim reconfigured Housing Support Grant funded service provided by Pobl. It is acknowledged that not all applicants may be suitable for all vacancies and there may be occasions where an allocation is considered as too high risk. In these rare circumstances the applicant can be bypassed, however, all such bypasses and the reasons why, must be reported to the Council at the time of bypass for monitoring purposes.</p> <p>Should this support not be available this may prevent the Council from moving some applicants on to permanent accommodation.</p> <p>On a homeless determination and a 2B Banding status assessment under the Homesearch Allocation Policy, Housing Options Officers will work closely with Homesearch Officers to ensure registration of housing applications and minimise delays in</p>	
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		<p>processing applications. The allocated Support Worker will be involved by providing individual support plans to illustrate the intensity of support to be delivered, as well as the individual's commitment to working towards a successful tenancy.</p> <p>Any barriers to an offer of accommodation, such as previous rent arrears, will be negotiated by this triage, and if necessary, the Council will utilise the Homeless Prevention Fund to reduce/refund arrears. Any support issues such as previous behaviour or substance misuse issues which could inhibit an offer being successful, will be addressed via the support plan and evidenced by the involvement of the Substance Misuse Assertive Outreach Worker (also part of MCC bid), and Mental Health services.</p> <p>To further support individual clients, the Council or support providers will refer clients into the multi-agency Housing Intervention Panel to consider and identify solutions. The Council, housing associations and support providers are committed to both referring clients and attending meetings.</p> <p>As the Temporary Accommodation and Resettlement Support Service are delivered through the same Providers, there will be a seamless move with support during the resettlement process. High-intensity flexible, client-led support will be provided for between 12 to 16 weeks, with ongoing support being provided via the RSL or generic floating support service after this period.</p>	
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Intermediate Housing Framework	Not in current policy.	The framework sets out what type of housing is intermediate housing, the eligibility for each type and the how the scheme will be administered.	Sets out the overarching principles and ensures consistency in relation to allocations.
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