



MoleValley
District Council

HOUSING OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT

HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY

JUNE 2007

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1. Introduction

The Homelessness Act 2002 abolished the duty placed on Local Authorities by the Housing Act 1996, to maintain a Housing Register and in its place imposed upon them the duty to establish and publish an allocations scheme for the process and prioritisation for allocation of housing.

- The allocations scheme must include existing local authority tenants (*Section 13*).
- The allocations scheme is to provide a mechanism for Local Authorities to exclude from the scheme any applicants they consider to be unsuitable (by virtue of their behaviour or that of a member of their household) to be a tenant (*Section 14*).
- The allocations scheme must provide information for applicants as to their rights under the scheme (*Section 15*).
- The allocations scheme must give “reasonable preference” to categories of applicant as prescribed and may provide a mechanism to give certain applicants lesser preference (*Section 16*).

Mole Valley District Council has decided to maintain a Housing Register to assist with identifying the priority to be awarded to those applying for housing with the Council.

This policy has been established to conform with current legislation and with a view to meeting the following aim and objectives; -

1.1 Aim

To meet the housing needs and, as far as possible, the aspirations of applicants to Mole Valley District Council’s Housing Register, ensuring the best possible use of the Council’s and its partners’ housing stock.

1.2 Objectives

To; -

- Ensure that every application is dealt with fairly and consistently in accordance with the Council’s Equal Opportunities Policy.
- Give priority to people that fall within the Government’s “Reasonable Preference Categories”.
- Ensure that priority is given to those in the highest housing need.
- Maintain an appropriate balance between the needs of homeless households and others in housing need.

- Make best use of the housing stock in the District ensuring
 - ✓ Sustainable and balanced communities are maintained
 - ✓ Difficult to let properties are dealt with and re-let times are minimised
 - ✓ Under-occupation is reduced
- Offer applicants as much choice as possible within the boundaries of high demand for housing and limited availability of resources.
- Assist with sustainable economic development of the District particularly in relation to the recruitment and retention of posts within key services.

2. Allocation Scheme Summary

2.1 The Council holds a single list for people in need of affordable housing. This is called the Housing Register and is used by the Council for allocating all housing under Part VI of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002). This would apply where the Council; -

1. Selects someone to be offered a secure or introductory tenancy by the Council.
2. Nominates someone to be offered a secure or introductory tenancy by another Council (or another body able to grant a secure tenancy).
3. Nominates someone to be offered an assured tenancy from a housing association or other registered social landlord (RSL).

2.2 Not all lettings made by the Council are allocations made under Part VI of the Housing Act 1996. This applies to lettings made in the following circumstances, which will not be covered by this Allocations Policy; -

1. Offers of secure tenancies of their current homes to introductory tenants of the Council.
2. Offers to homeless households of non-secure Council tenancies in discharge of any duty owed under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996.
3. Offers that are made to secure or introductory tenants of the Council at the Council's own instigation, rather than in response to an application from them.
4. Offers of tied accommodation (service tenancies or service licences) made to Council employees.
5. Assignments of Council tenancies.

6. Successions to Council tenancies.
7. Mutual exchanges of Council tenancies.
8. Nominations for offers of any tenancy or licence from a private landlord.
9. Offers of secure tenancies of their current homes made to an individual tenant where there has been (a) a relationship breakdown and the previous tenant has relinquished the tenancy on their behalf and, (b) the remaining tenant will not be under occupying that property.

3. Assessment Procedure

All applicants will have their priority for housing assessed according to the same standard process.

Applicants will initially be assessed for their entitlement to reasonable preference on the basis of their housing need. A standard points scheme will be used.

Applicants entitled to reasonable preference will then be further assessed according to their degree of local connection with Mole Valley District and the financial resources available to them.

4. Eligibility for the Housing Register

All persons aged 16 years or over will be considered eligible for the Housing Register unless they are; -

1. Ineligible persons from abroad (e.g. those subject to immigration control or not habitually resident in the Common Travel Area, see 4.1 below).
2. Households guilty of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable to be a tenant of the Council (see 4.2 below).

4.1 Persons from abroad

Persons from abroad who are subject to immigration control within the meaning of the Asylum & Immigration Act 1996 are ineligible to join the Housing Register unless they are; -

1. In a category of persons specified by the Secretary of State as being eligible for an allocation of accommodation under Part VI of the Housing Act 1996.

2. An existing secure or introductory tenant of a council (or other housing authority).
3. An existing assured tenant of housing allocated to them by a council (or other housing authority).

Most persons from abroad who are not subject to immigration control (including British Citizens) must also be habitually resident in the Common Travel Area and/or have the right to reside in the Common Travel Area in order to be eligible to join the Housing Register. The Common Travel Area consists of the UK, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man and the Republic of Ireland.

4.2 Unacceptable behaviour

This will apply where any member of the household has behaved in such a way that their behaviour would have entitled the Council to a Possession Order had they been a secure tenant of the Council. Furthermore, that they are still unsuitable to be a tenant of the Council because of that person's behaviour.

Examples of such unacceptable behaviour would include;-

- Significant rent arrears or breach of tenancy obligations.
- Serious nuisance or annoyance to neighbours.
- A conviction for using accommodation, or allowing it to be used, for immoral or illegal purposes such as drug dealing.
- Serious damage or neglect of the property.

Each application will be considered on its own merits but where the Council is satisfied that these conditions are met, the applicant will be regarded as ineligible for the Housing Register.

Any applicant regarded by the Council as ineligible to join the Housing Register because of unacceptable behaviour may request a review of this decision (see Section 14 later).

If the review upholds the decision to regard the applicant as ineligible, the applicant may still make a fresh application to the Council at a future date when they believe that they should no longer be regarded as ineligible. The Council will consider this fresh application on its merits. However, unless there has been a considerable lapse of time it will be necessary for the applicant to demonstrate that their circumstances or behaviour has changed significantly.

4.3 Applicants under 18 years of age

Applicants aged 16 or 17 years will be accepted onto the Housing Register providing they are not otherwise ineligible. However, their application will need to be jointly assessed by the Housing Department and Social Services before any offer of accommodation is made. Furthermore a suitable guarantor for the tenancy, until the applicant reaches the age of 18 years, will need to be identified. A person under 16 years of age is not eligible for the Housing Register.

5. Reasonable Preference & Housing Need Assessment

Every application for housing will be assessed using a single points scheme. This is intended to ensure that priority is awarded to all applicants who are entitled to reasonable preference, in accordance with section 167(2) of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002). The reasonable preference categories and the section of this policy relating to the category are as follows; -

- (a) people who are homeless (within the meaning of Part VII of the Housing Act 1996); this includes people who are intentionally homeless and those who are not in priority need (section 5.2)
- (b) people who are owed a duty by any housing authority under section 190(2), 193(2) or 195(2) of the Housing Act 1996 (or under section 65(2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985) or who are occupying accommodation secured by any housing authority under section 192(3) of the Housing Act 1996 (section 5.3)
- (c) people occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions (sections 5.1, 5.2, 5.4)
- (d) people who need to move on medical or welfare grounds, including grounds relating to a disability (section 5.5)
- (e) people who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the housing authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or to others) (section 5.5)

The points scheme is shown below

5.1 Overcrowding

Factor	Points awarded
Bedroom Deficiency	5 points for each ½ bed-space required

For definition of bedroom space see 8.1 below

5.2 Lacking or sharing essential amenities

Applicants are only entitled to one award of points under this category. This will be the highest of the awards that they qualify for.

Factor	Points awarded
Sharing facilities with family/friends	10
Sharing facilities with strangers	20
No fixed abode (these points are inclusive of bedroom deficiency points)	25
Homeless/Roofless (these points are inclusive of bedroom deficiency points)	40
No fixed abode – Institution* (these points are inclusive of bedroom deficiency points)	25

The points are not allowed if the applicant has control over whether or not the amenities are lacking or shared. If members of the household live apart, the “Split Family Unit” points are awarded **instead of** sharing points.

*Institution includes prison, long stay hospital placement, long term rehabilitation placement etc. Applicants in prison out of the district will not be eligible for current residence points. Applicants in hospitals, rehabilitation units, respite placements etc out of the district, will be treated as if they are current residents if they can show that they were placed there from an address in Mole Valley.

5.3 Homelessness or threatened with homelessness

Factor	Points awarded
Insecure private sector accommodation	5 per year to a maximum 20
Notice to Quit from tied accommodation	10
Legal Notice to Quit from landlord (awarded where the notice is served through no fault of the applicant & they would have a local connection with Mole Valley if made homeless, further that they do not own suitable accommodation elsewhere that they could reasonably be expected to occupy)	40
Accepted as homeless or threatened with such and owed a duty by any housing authority under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996	10

If any of the following points are awarded, no other “needs factor” points will be given.

Housed by MVDC in interim accommodation (shared or self contained) on licence (pending decision on homelessness)	Points awarded as for insecure accommodation
Housed by MVDC in temporary accommodation on licence	30
Housed via MVDC placement in non MVDC hostel	30
Living in shared temporary accommodation – placement with or via MVDC	5 per 2 months to a maximum 30

5.4 Disrepair

Factor	Points awarded
Disrepair including defects, dampness and safety. To be determined from a set scale under guidance from Environmental Health	Priority banding up to 20

5.5 Medical & Welfare Factors

Factor	Points awarded
“Split Family Unit” Any couple or children of the household necessarily live apart due to lack of accommodation (instead of, not in addition to, “lacking or sharing” points)	25
Victim of proven anti social behaviour or any form of harassment (evidence from police confirmed with Housing Manager and to be authorised by Housing Needs Manager)	20
Medical factors including those relating to a disability affected by the present accommodation. To be determined by an Occupational Therapist (or other medical advisor) appointed by the Council	Priority banding up to 50 (5 Low; 10 Medium; 20 High; 50 Emergency)
Unmanageably large garden. To be determined by the Occupational Therapist and applies only to elderly and disabled people	5
Other Special Circumstances as determined by the Housing Needs Manager	Priority banding up to 50

5.6 Under-occupancy

Factor	Points awarded
For Mole Valley Council or partner RSL tenants only, transferring from 3/4 bedroom property to a 2 bedroom property where the applicant is entitled to 2 bedrooms under property size eligibility only (see section 11.5)	20
For Mole Valley Council or partner RSL tenants only, transferring from 3/4 bedroom property to a 1 bedroom property	40
For Mole Valley Council or partner RSL tenants only, transferring from 2 bedroom property to a 1 bedroom property	40

5.7 Agricultural Workers

Certain agricultural workers (including retired workers and successors) living in farm cottages, will have security of tenure under the Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976 and the Housing Act 1988. However, a farmer may apply to the local housing authority to have the worker re-housed if the property is needed in the interests of efficient agriculture. In these cases the housing authority will be assisted and guided in the re-housing of the worker by the local ADHAC (Agricultural Dwelling House Advisory Committee).

5.8 Members of the Armed Forces

Members of the Armed Forces who have been living in any accommodation provided by the Armed Forces, and who were living in the Mole Valley district prior to joining the Armed Forces, will be assessed as living in “tied accommodation” and will therefore not be entitled to any points until such time as their discharge date is known. Once the Council has been made aware of this date they will be assessed as living in insecure accommodation within the district and will be awarded Notice to Quit points as well as any other points that may apply.

6. Local Connection

Applicants will be considered to have a local connection with the District of Mole Valley because of

- Current or previous residence in the District, or
- Current employment in the District

Applicants who are entitled to any of the reasonable preference points show in section 5, will have their degree of local connection assessed and be awarded additional points according to the following scale.

Factor	Points awarded
Currently resident in Mole Valley District	20
If currently resident in Mole Valley District, each full years residence	10 for each full year to a maximum of 30
Past residence in Mole Valley District where this includes at least 5 out of the last 10 years	30
Employment in Mole Valley District – for applicants who are not currently resident in the district, and who would not be eligible for residence points, but are employed within it	10 for each full year of employment within the District to a maximum of 30
Keyworker/Local Priority Worker (see section 8.4)	10
Rural Parish Connection – for certain properties it is a requirement that priority is given to applicants with a connection to the parish in which they are located. This Factor will not otherwise be used in points assessments.	10

7. Reduced Preference

The supply of rented social housing within the District is limited and the Council cannot provide rented accommodation to everyone who requests it. Reduced priority for housing will therefore be given to applicants where:

1. They do not have a local connection with Mole Valley District;
2. They have financial resources available to meet their housing costs;
3. Their behaviour, or that of a member of their household, affects their suitability to become a tenant.
4. They have refused a reasonable offer of accommodation made to them by the Council.

7.1 No Local Connection

Applicants who have no local connection with Mole Valley, as described in 6 above, will still be entitled to all reasonable preference points that may apply.

7.2 Financial Resources

Less priority for rented units will be given to applicants who:

1. have sufficient income, funds or assets to purchase alternative accommodation suitable to their needs privately or by using the Council's Shared Ownership Schemes, or
2. have within 5 years of the date of their application, disposed of an asset which they could reasonably have been expected to use to resolve their own housing difficulties, or
3. are owner-occupiers that have an asset that could be used to obtain accommodation suitable to their needs

This means that those people who are more able to find their own housing in the private sector will lose some of the points awarded depending on their status and income. The following tables show how this reduction will be carried out in 2 stages.

Stage 1

Assessment based on total income inclusive of gross salary, benefits, tax credits etc			
Single Person Income	Couples Income	Families Income	% loss of points
Less than £30,000	Less than £40,000	Less than £45,000	0
£30,000 plus	£40,000 plus	£45,000 plus	50

Stage 2

Assets (for all household types)	
Capital	% loss of points (2nd deduction)
Savings below £16,000 and no interest in any property	0
Savings of £16,000 - £30,000 or an equivalent interest in a property	20
Savings of £30,000 - £40,000 or an equivalent interest in a property	30
Savings of £40,000 - £60,000 or an equivalent interest in a property	40
Savings of £60,000 plus or an equivalent interest in a property	50

Applicants who have sufficient income to pursue shared ownership will also be given details of appropriate Council's schemes (see section 12 later).

Applicants who have an interest in a property, but are unable to realise that asset for a number of years (e.g. they are unable to sell a family home following a relationship breakdown as the home must be maintained for dependent children), will be treated as if they do not have that asset.

7.3 Unacceptable Behaviour

In accordance with Section 167(2A) of the Housing Act 1996, reduced priority will be given where the applicant or a member of their household:

- a) Is a current tenant of a Council or RSL and has rent arrears and is not keeping to satisfactory arrangements to clear the arrears.
- b) Has arrears from a previous Council or RSL tenancy and is not keeping to satisfactory arrangements to clear the debt*.
- c) Is a Council or RSL tenant who has been served with a Notice of Seeking Possession for rent arrears and whose account has not been clear for at least 6 months.
- d) Is a Council or RSL tenant who has been served with a Notice of Seeking Possession because of nuisance and a minimum period of 12 months has not yet passed without any further instances of nuisance.
- e) Is a Council or RSL tenant who is required to make good damage to their current property.
- f) Is or was a tenant other than in a) above and the Council is satisfied that they have rent arrears which they are not making satisfactory arrangements to repay*.
- g) Is a tenant in the private sector and has been issued with a Notice to Quit (Housing Act 1988 Section 21) under either Grounds 8 or 10 for rent arrears or Ground 14 for nuisance or annoyance.
- h) Was a Council or RSL tenant who has an outstanding debt with that landlord for repairs to, or clearance of, any property previously occupied by them and they are not keeping to satisfactory arrangements to repay*.

Unless there are exceptional circumstances applicants in the above categories will have their points reduced to a fixed total of 10. They will not be entitled to accrue any further points.

- * The Council will deem that a household has made a satisfactory arrangement where there is an established agreement of payment of 12 weeks or more without default. In cases where these applicants are then at the top of the list for an offer of accommodation, they will generally be expected to clear that debt before being made an offer.

7.4 Refusal of a reasonable offer

Any person that refuses an offer of accommodation that fully meets their expressed choices will be entitled to remain on the Housing Register but will have their priority reduced to 50% of their assessment for a period of 12 months from the date of their refusal (see 10.3).

8. Definitions

8.1 Bedroom Deficiency/Bedroom Need

The amount of bedroom space available to the household is compared with the amount of bedroom space needed. The scheme allows 5 points for each half bed space lacking.

The amount of bedroom space available to a household is determined according to the size of each available bedroom, according to the table below. Where more than one living room is available, the bedroom space provided by each additional living room will also be included.

Size of room	Bedroom space
50 – 70 sq ft	½
70 – 90 sq ft	1
90 – 110 sq ft	1½
More than 110 sq ft	2

To determine how much bedroom space is needed by a household, the following amounts of space per person is allowed. Only people who are permanently resident as part of the household will be included for this purpose.

Age of household member	Bedroom space allowance
Child under 8 years	½ bedspace
Person aged 8 years or more	1 bedspace

For the purpose of calculating points to assess bedroom deficiency, a separate bedroom is allowed for each of the following groups:

- Each adult couple living together as partners
- Each single adult who is not a child of the applicant and is not living as a partner of another person
- Children of opposite sex where one of them is over 8 years of age
- Children where there is an age gap between them of more than 10 years
- A person of any age who has to sleep alone on certified medical grounds

- Stepbrothers/sisters who have not previously shared a bedroom (this applies only when 2 separate families have come from different households to live together and where the stepbrothers/sisters are permanently residing within the new household)

All households of more than one person should have a living room in addition to any bedrooms needed.

8.2 Household

The household, for the purposes of this Policy, will be regarded as:

- A sole applicant
- Any 2 persons who wish to live together as a couple
- Any parent(s) and dependant children, permanently residing with them or who would reasonably expect to be permanently residing with them
- Any parent(s) and adult children who are not dependant but have not yet left the family home
- Any parent(s) and adult children who are still living at home because of a care need
- Any adult siblings who wish to live together

As there is such high demand on family sized accommodation in the Mole Valley district, for the purposes of our Allocation Policy, the Council will not accept the following situations of persons as being a "household", unless there are special circumstances, which will be considered on request by the Housing Needs Manager.

- Where two persons are not married, are not currently living together, have not previously lived together and have no children together and are applying for more than one bedroom accommodation, unless there is a proven need for one party to have 24 hour or overnight care.
- Where a father or mother is living separately from their children and the other parent or another party has residence of those children and the home that any children are living in is adequate for their needs. This is unless it would be in the best interest of the child/children to live with the absent parent. This would be subject to appropriate evidence being made available to the Council for consideration by the Housing Needs Manager.

- Where a sibling, parent or other relative is residing with the applicant and has lived there for less than 12 months.

In a situation of joint residence the Council will also have regard to the housing situation in the Mole Valley area when making their decision, the shortage of housing stock and any under occupation which would result for part of the week.

For the purposes of awarding “split family unit” points, the Council will only award those points where;

- A married couple or a couple in a civil partnership are unable to live together due to lack of accommodation.
- A couple who are not married or in a civil partnership have previously lived together for a minimum of 6 months and are unable to continue to live together due to lack of accommodation.
- A couple who have had children together cannot live together due to lack of accommodation.
- Any children of a parent or parents who could reasonably be expected to need to live with that parent but cannot due to lack of accommodation.

8.3 Medical Need

An applicant can apply to have medical priority awarded to their case. They will need to complete a self-assessment medical form. The Council will seek specialist opinion from its Medical Advisor to assess whether or not the application should be given one of the following;

i) Emergency Medical Priority

In very exceptional circumstances an applicant may be assessed as requiring an emergency move on medical grounds. This level of priority may only be awarded by the Housing Needs Manager following a recommendation from the Medical Advisor. An example of such a situation is where –

- An applicant cannot occupy their property because of a medical problem or disability and the property cannot be adapted e.g. a wheelchair user who lives in a first floor flat with no lift
- There is more than 1 member of a household who has a High Medical Need

ii) High Medical Need

This will be awarded where an applicant’s health, or that of a member of the household, is likely to decline very rapidly and lead to

a life threatening situation if they are not moved from their current accommodation within the next 6 months. Examples of this might include –

- An elderly applicant who lives above ground floor without a lift and who has had a series of heart problems, or
- Where an applicant's continued occupation of their current home is likely to cause a marked deterioration in their health e.g. severe clinical depression or mental illness
- There is more than 1 member of a household who has a Medium Medical Need

iii) Medium Medical Need

This level of priority will be awarded where it is recognised that the applicant's health is being affected by their current accommodation but their health is unlikely to deteriorate significantly within a short period of time, or where there is more than 1 member of a household who has a Low Medical Need

iv) Low Medical Need

This level of priority will be awarded where the applicant's health is being affected by their current accommodation but it is not life threatening and/or full recovery is likely within one year.

v) No Medical Need

Where rehousing is unlikely to improve the applicant's health or where accommodation in itself is not affecting the illness then no medical need will exist and no priority will be given on this basis.

8.4 **Keyworkers & Local Priority Workers**

Keyworkers are people that fall within either a) or b) below

a) The current groups included within the statutory definition of a Keyworker are public sector workers employed in a permanent post, full or part time, in one of the following categories:

- NHS Nurses and other clinical staff
- Teachers in schools, sixth form colleges and further education
- Police Officers
- Prison and probation services staff

- Social workers, educational psychologists and occupational therapists employed by Local Authorities
- b) “Local Priority Workers” are people who work in service industries within the district and contribute to the sustainability of the local community, but earn less than the average wage needed to purchase a home, as defined in the Housing Needs Survey. The definition will be reviewed annually as part of the process of reviewing all housing needs and any changes incorporated in this policy.

For 2007/8, a person will be considered to work in a service industry if they are employed in a permanent post, full or part time (for the purpose of this category, part time will be 10 hours or more per week) in one of the following roles:

- in a shop or retail outlet
- within public transport
- in any employment within the public sector not included within the statutory definition of a keyworker
- as a postman
- as a milkman
- in the Fire Service
- in another appropriate role subject to the approval of the Housing Needs Manager

Public sector workers who are based outside the District but where a considerable proportion of their work involves the provision of a service to Mole Valley residents, will also be included, e.g. those who are employed at East Surrey or Epsom Hospitals.

8.5 Special Circumstances

Additional priority on this basis may be awarded where there are particular welfare or social factors, or exceptional circumstances not covered elsewhere. These will usually need to be substantiated by other agencies e.g. the Police, Social Services, Leaving Care Team etc. The award of these points is made by the Housing Needs Manager, following a detailed review.

Priority may be awarded in the following circumstances;

- a) Where an applicant is a relative of a Mole Valley District Council tenant who has died and they were residing with them for at least 12 months immediately prior to their death but they do not have the right to succeed to the tenancy. In these cases additional priority will be

awarded if the applicant does not have sufficient income, funds or assets to purchase alternative accommodation suitable to their needs privately or by using the Council's Shared Ownership Schemes.

- b) Where an applicant has had to give up an existing Council or RSL tenancy to receive long-term treatment or rehabilitation. Priority may be awarded following confirmation that the applicant has completed the treatment and is in housing need.
- c) Where an application is received to make an existing MVDC secure tenancy joint with another eligible person and it is considered appropriate in the circumstances to do so. Furthermore, that there are no adverse implications from the joint tenancy for the good use of the housing stock and the Council's ability to continue to provide for housing need.
- d) Where a person needs to move to a different locality in order to give or receive care, to access specialist medical treatment, or to take up particular employment or training. Furthermore that hardship would be caused to themselves or others if they were unable to do so.
- e) Where an applicant has a particular special need that causes them to be considered vulnerable, other than on medical grounds. Examples of such applicants would include those with a learning disability, a careleaver aged 18-21 etc. Priority will normally be awarded following and assessment of an applicant's case at a Multi-Agency Special Needs Panel.
- f) Reciprocal arrangements with another social landlord. These apply where one landlord rehouses an applicant from another landlord on the understanding that the landlord who has given up a property will, at some stage, be offered a property for someone from their waiting lists. At Mole Valley a reciprocal will be considered in the following circumstances:
 - Where the applicant is fleeing violence, including domestic abuse.
 - Where special needs accommodation is vacant and there is no one on Mole Valley's housing lists in need of the type of accommodation in question.
 - Where there are exceptional management reasons requiring a move e.g. when a tenant from another authority is to be a witness in criminal proceedings and needs to be moved for their own protection.
 - Where a request for assistance is made through the mobility scheme for the rehousing of victims of violence in accordance with procedures agreed by the Surrey District Housing Authorities.

- Where a request for assistance is made through the mobility scheme for the rehousing of offenders in accordance with the current protocol agreed by the Surrey District Housing Authorities and partner agencies.

Before any agreement is given to a reciprocal a full written report of the circumstances is required from the other Authority. The Council's officers may also need to be satisfied that an applicant in housing need from Mole Valley's list can be housed by the other Authority within a reasonable time. A written commitment is also required from the other Authority.

If additional priority is regarded as appropriate the Housing Needs Manager will decide which of the following awards should be given:

- i) **50 points** will be awarded where, in very exceptional circumstances an applicant is assessed as needing an emergency move, e.g. an applicant's life would be in immediate danger if they continued to live in their current property, or an applicant is unable to occupy their current property due to severe medical problems.
- ii) **20 points** will be awarded where an applicant has an urgent need to move on welfare grounds or because of other special circumstances, or needs to move urgently to a particular locality to avoid hardship to themselves or others and written support for this has been received from an appropriate agency.
- iii) **10 points** will be awarded where an applicant has a less urgent need to move on welfare grounds or needs to move to a particular locality to avoid hardship to themselves or others.

8.6 Home Owners

Any applicant who owns their own home will not be entitled to any priority under the Council's Points Scheme unless they;

- a) Qualify for bedroom deficiency, medical, welfare or disrepair points and do not have sufficient income to purchase alternative accommodation suitable to their needs, or make necessary repairs to their property.
- b) Are unable to reside at the property due to a relationship breakdown, but are still having to maintain the home for dependent children.
- c) Are unable to reside at the property due to violence or threats of violence, including domestic violence.

In any of the above cases the Council will need to be satisfied of the applicant's circumstances before awarding points as described in sections 5 through 7 above.

8.7 Local Authority or Registered Social Landlord Tenants

Any applicant who is a secure tenant of a Local Authority or an assured tenant of a Registered Social Landlord will not be entitled to any priority under the Council's points scheme unless they qualify for any points mentioned in the reasonable preference categories in section 5, and do not have sufficient income to purchase alternative accommodation suitable to their needs.

8.8 Reasonable Offer

An offer is deemed to be reasonable when it meets the stated preferences for area and type of property that an applicant has requested and is of a size that is suitable to their household needs. Applicants are given the opportunity to express their preferences on the application forms and will be asked to confirm these in detail at the home visit.

9. Operation of the Housing Register

9.1 Initial Application

To register an application an applicant must complete the standard application form. These forms and guidance notes are available from:

The Housing Department
Mole Valley District Council
Pippbrook
Dorking
Surrey
RH4 1SJ
Telephone: 01306 879396

Alternatively they can be downloaded from Council's website at molevalley.gov.uk/housing

Housing Needs Officers and Housing Advice Officers based within the Housing Needs Section are able to assist with the completion of forms. Providing the applicant is eligible for the Housing Register and the form has been filled in completely, it will be registered on the Council's computer system for the Housing Register within 5 working days.

The Housing Needs Team will then undertake an assessment against this Policy. Applicants may be asked to provide additional information and/or supporting documentation to verify their situation or eligibility.

From the time that all relevant information has been received, the Council will then write to the applicant within 10 working days to confirm their application reference number and their points total.

The applicant will have been given details of the number of vacancies the Council has in a typical year, and any other details that might assist them to determine when they might be housed, in the Information for Housing Applicants booklet that is sent with an application form. Should any applicant not have received this, they are available as above.

If an applicant has the income to pursue shared ownership they will also be sent details of the Council's Shared Ownership, Homebuy and Starter Home (Keyworkers only) Schemes.

If an applicant does not provide the required proof of income their application will be assessed and the assumption made that their income or capital is above the threshold for a points deduction, and a minimum 50% deduction will be applied.

If an applicant does not provide proof of residence within the district their points for Time in District will be commenced from the earliest demonstrable date.

If the applicant is considered to be ineligible to join the Housing Register, they will be sent a letter confirming this and the reason for this decision.

9.2 Re-registration of applications

Applicants will be invited to renew their application annually on the anniversary of their application and must provide details of their current circumstances and financial situation at this time.

Any applicant who does not renew their application within 28 days of receiving the invitation to do so will be assumed to no longer require housing and their application will be cancelled accordingly. A reminder letter will first be sent to warn an applicant that this will happen and if the Council receives no response from this within 7 days, the application will be cancelled and no further letters will be sent.

9.3 Changes of Circumstance

Applicants who move to a new address or whose circumstances change after they have been accepted onto the Housing Register (e.g. someone joining or leaving the household, or a change in income or employment etc.) should immediately contact the Housing Needs Section and arrange to complete any necessary forms.

9.4 Home Visits

Where practicable, applicants (who are not already tenants of the Council or any RSL within the Mole Valley District) will be visited at home to verify their circumstances, choices and preferences prior to any

offer of accommodation made. Applicants will be invited to be specific regarding their choices and will also be given the opportunity to express any negative preferences they may have. The paperwork completed at this visit will be passed to the Council's Housing Management Team or relevant RSL for their information on any new tenants. Where this is not possible, e.g. those applicants are of no fixed abode or living outside of the district, they will be asked to attend at the Council offices so that these checks can be carried out.

Where practicable, applicants who are currently in an institution (prison or hospital etc) will be visited by a member of the Housing Advice Team for a Housing Options Interview. Where this is not possible, those applicants will be invited to attend an Options Interview within a week of their release/discharge.

Applicants who are already Mole Valley District Council tenants will be visited by their Area Housing Manager for a Pre-Transfer Inspection of their property, to ensure that the Council's Lettable/Leavable Standards are being met, prior to any offer of alternative accommodation being made.

Applicants who are assured tenants of any RSL within the Mole Valley district can expect that their Landlord will be contacted by the Council to ensure that that Landlord is happy for that tenant to be re-housed by the Council, before any offer of alternative accommodation is made. This may include that landlord making arrangements to inspect the applicant's current property.

9.5 Removal or Cancellation of applications

If information is obtained that gives the Council reason to believe that an applicant who has already been accepted onto the Housing Register is, in fact, ineligible to be on the Register, the applicant will be informed in writing. The applicant will be given 28 days to provide information to show that they are eligible. If they do not reply within this period, or if they reply but the Council still believes them to be ineligible, they will be removed from the Housing Register.

Applications will be cancelled when an applicant fails to respond to correspondence sent to them by the Housing Needs Team where a response is required. In these cases applicants will be given notice that this will be the case and will be given 28 days to respond.

Applications will be cancelled at an applicants' written or verbal request. In these cases the Housing Needs Team will confirm the cancellation in writing.

Applications will be cancelled if the Housing Needs Team are made aware that an applicant has moved and that applicant has not provided a forwarding address. In these cases no written notice or confirmation will be given.

9.6 The Housing Needs Team

For the purposes of the Allocation Policy, the Housing Needs team comprises such Housing Needs Administration Officers, Housing Needs Officers, Housing Advice Officers, Senior Housing Needs Officers and Housing Needs Managers as are employed by the Council at any given time. Applications will be dealt with by relevant officers as detailed in the following table

Application stage	Officer involvement
Receipt and registration	HN Administration Officer
Acknowledgement and requests for further information	HN Administration Officer
Initial assessment	HN Administration Officer or HN Officer or Senior HN Officer
Further assessment	HN Administration Officer or HN Officer or Senior HN Officer
Medical assessment	Medical Advisor or Medical Advisor & Senior HN Officer or Medical Advisor & HN Manager
Special circumstances assessment	Senior HN Officer or HN Manager
Re-registrations	HN Administration Officer or HN Officer
Application cancellations	HN Administration Officer or HN Officer
Home visits	HN Officer or Senior HN Officer
Shortlisting and offers of accommodation	HN Officer or Senior HN Officer
Refusals of offers of accommodation	Senior HN Officer or HN Manager
Reviews	Senior HN Officer or HN Manager
Monitoring	Senior HN Officer & HN Manager

10. Applicant Choice

10.1 Free Choice

The Council wishes to ensure that choice is extended as widely as possible to all applicants. Most applicants are therefore able to freely choose the type of accommodation that they wish to be considered for with regard to the following factors:

1. Whether they wish to be considered for Council and/or housing association tenancies.
2. The types of property that they want to live in (i.e. bungalow, house, maisonette, flat, studio flat or sheltered accommodation).
3. If applicable, the floor level of property they want to live in.
4. The location of property that they want to live in. The District is divided into 10 allocation areas for this purpose.

These choices are however subject to some restrictions which are described in sections 10.2 and 10.3

10.2 **Restricted Choice**

Because some households need to move very urgently, it will not always be possible to meet all of their preferences for particular types of property or arrears of the District. Restricted choice will therefore apply to the following groups of applicants:

1. Emergency Cases – see 8.3 (i) & 8.5 earlier
2. Statutorily homeless households

Arrangements for implementing restricted choice for each of these groups are detailed below.

1. **Emergency Cases**

These applicants will be made one suitable offer of accommodation within the District.

In determining the suitability of the property, consideration will be given to any medical needs that the household has, the location of employment, schooling and support networks, mobility and transport issues and any proven issues of violence or harassment.

If the applicant refuses a suitable offer of accommodation they will no longer be entitled to the emergency points awarded. Any further allocations will then be made in accordance with the normal procedure regarding choice (see 10.3 later). Providing that the first offer did not fully meet the applicant's expressed preferences, they will be made a further offer.

2. **Statutorily homeless households**

In line with good practice, the Council wishes to give homeless applicants as much choice as possible about where they live. However, if applicants were able to remain in temporary

accommodation until their ideal property was available this would lead to problems with the supply of temporary accommodation for other homeless people.

Households that have been accepted as homeless and placed in temporary accommodation by the Council will therefore be allowed to freely choose their preferred landlord, property type and area for a period of 6 months only. If the applicants preferred property has not become available within this period they will then be made a suitable offer of vacant property anywhere within the District. In determining the suitability of a property, consideration will be given to any medical needs that the household has, the location of employment, schooling and support networks, mobility and transport issues and any proven issues of violence or harassment.

10.3 Offers of Accommodation

A formal offer of accommodation will be made to applicants in writing. This letter will set out the address, type, number of bedrooms, weekly rent and name of landlord of the property being offered. The letter will also include details of approximate tenancy commencement dates.

An information leaflet will be sent with each formal offer setting out what the applicant and the Council should do once an offer has been made. Applicants will be expected to contact the Housing Needs Team to either confirm or decline the opportunity to view the property.

If the applicant wishes to view the property their details will be passed to the relevant landlord who will then make those arrangements directly with the applicant.

If the applicant does not wish to view the property they must inform the Housing Needs Team as quickly as possible and complete and return a Refusal Form (which is part of the information leaflet sent out with the formal offer).

Apart from the exceptions described in 10.2 above, every effort will be made to ensure that all offers of accommodation match the applicants choices of landlord, area and property type.

10.4 Refusals of Offers of Accommodation

Any person that refuses an offer of accommodation, either before or after viewing the property offered, that fully meets their expressed choices, will need to put their reasons for the refusal to the Council in writing. A senior officer who has not been involved with that applicants' case will then review the offer to determine whether the offer was suitable and then determine whether the refusal is reasonable in the circumstances. If the refusal is found to be reasonable then the applicant will be made a further offer. If the refusal is found to

unreasonable the applicant will be entitled to remain on the Housing Register, but will have their priority reduced to 50% of their assessment for a period of 12 months from the date of refusal.

All applicants who refuse an offer of accommodation will be given the opportunity to discuss their choices and preferences again with a Housing Needs Officer.

11. Allocation Procedure

All vacancies that are available to the Council in the circumstances described in section 2.1 earlier will be allocated from the Housing Register in accordance with the following procedure.

11.1 Standard Selection Process

- When a property becomes available the Council will use a computer programme to generate a specific list of eligible applicants from the Council's Housing Register. This list will only include applicants who have specified a preference for that landlord, property type and area and who need that size of property.
- Applicants with free choice will only appear on the list if they have chosen to consider properties with that landlord and of this type and area.
- Applicants with restricted choice will appear on the list if they have chosen to consider properties with that landlord and of this type and area, or if the Council considers the property to be suitable for the applicant's needs.
- Properties will be allocated to qualifying applicants in points order, starting with the applicant with the highest points (in accordance with the Lettings Plan).
- Where eligible applicants have the same number of points, the applicant with the earliest registration date will be considered to have the highest priority.
- Eligibility for different sized properties is determined according to the Council's matching criteria shown in Section 11.4 later.
- Not all applicants are eligible or certain types of properties. Specific eligibility criteria that apply to these properties are shown in Section 10.3.

11.2 The Lettings Plan

The Council has drawn up a lettings plan that specifies the proportion of vacancies that should be allocated to the different categories of applicants on the Housing Register. The aim of the Lettings Plan is to ensure that an appropriate balance is maintained between the needs of homeless households and others in housing need.

The Lettings Plan is intended as a guide for determining which category of applicant should be offered a specific vacancy. It is not intended to be rigid and variation from the set quotas of + / - 5% is considered acceptable.

The Lettings Plan will be updated annually to reflect current issues and needs. The Plan for 2007/08 is shown below:

LETTINGS PLAN 2007/08

Properties with 2 or more bedrooms

Category of applicant	Proportion of vacancies to be allocated
Homeless applicants	10%
Transfers	35%
Housing Register	50%
Special Circumstances/Emergency	5%

Properties with 0 or 1 bedroom

Category of applicant	Proportion of vacancies to be allocated
Homeless applicants	5%
Transfers	25%
Housing Register	65%
Special Circumstances/Emergency	5%

In addition to the above lettings plan, Mole Valley District Council is committed to ensuring that at least 5% of all vacancies are allocated to special needs groups e.g. applicants with physical disabilities, learning disabilities, mental health problems, care leavers etc.

11.3 Exceptions to the standard selection process

In certain circumstances it may not be appropriate to offer a property to the applicant with the highest priority. Examples of such situations may be where:

- The applicant at the top of the list does not yet have sufficient support to live independently
- The applicant at the top of the list is not suited to, or is not eligible for, the vacant property (see 11.4 below under sheltered housing, special sheltered housing, supported housing and keyworker housing)
- The applicant at the top of the list has rent arrears that they are unable to clear and they are unable to
- The allocation of the tenancy is likely to result in serious estate management difficulties
- A mix of applicants is required to establish a balanced mix of people with different levels of support needs is required
- The vacancy is subject to a local allocations policy (see 11.5 below

Allocations made under one of the above mentioned exceptions must be approved by the Housing Needs Manager. A record must also be made to confirm why the exception was made.

Nominations to Housing Association vacancies will generally be made in accordance with the same criteria as that used for the Council's own dwellings. However on some occasions the Housing Association may themselves have eligibility criteria that the Council will need to apply when selecting a suitable household for the vacancy.

11.4 Eligibility for Vacancies

i) Houses

Priority for houses will be given to households with at least one dependant child under 16 years of age. This means that households with older children still living at home will not be considered for a house whilst there are qualifying households with younger children, unless there are exceptional needs.

ii) Ground floor flats

Priority for ground floor flats will be given to applicants who have been awarded priority for this type of property on medical grounds unless there is no suitable applicant with medical priority.

iii) Sheltered housing

Applicants for sheltered housing (and if applicable their partner) must normally be aged 55 or over, or have a disability. All applicants for this type of housing will be assessed to determine the applicant's suitability for sheltered housing before being made an offer.

iv) **Special sheltered housing**

Applicants for special sheltered housing (and if applicable, their partner) must also be aged 55 or over, or have a disability. All applicants will be assessed to determine their need for the higher level of support this type of accommodation offers, compared with that of ordinary sheltered housing.

v) **Older persons flats**

Some blocks of flats are designated for people aged 60 or over. Allocations of these properties will only be made to people who meet the age criteria.

vi) **Supported Housing**

The Council does not have any supported housing units itself, but is occasionally asked for nominations for this type of accommodation, and is sometimes able to request nominations from providers of such accommodation. Before an allocation of a supported housing unit is made, consideration will be given to each applicant's housing need, their need for support and their suitability for a particular vacancy. Allocations will then be made in accordance with an agreed priority order, in discussion with the housing provider and other relevant agencies as appropriate.

vii) **Keyworker Housing**

Some units of accommodation are designated as keyworker housing. Usually funding for these units is provided on the basis that they are allocated only to keyworkers (see section 8.4 earlier). Allocations to keyworker housing will be made in priority order but only to applicants who meet the definition in 8.4 or any amended definition that is required by Government regulations or may be approved at the time by the Chairman of the Community Committee.

11.5 Property size eligibility

The number of bedrooms an applicant can be considered for is decided by looking at the size and structure of the household. The size of property that a typical household will normally be allocated is shown below:

Single applicant	-	bedsit or 1 bedroom property
Couple	-	1 bedroom property
Household with 1 child	-	2 bedroom property

Household with 2 children	-	2 or 3 bedroom property (see section 8.1 earlier)
Household with 3 children	-	3 bedroom property
Household with 4 children	-	3 or 4 bedroom property (see section 8.1 earlier)
Household with 5+ children	-	4 bedroom property

Because of the shortage of larger properties, applicants who are eligible for 4 bedroom properties may also be offered large 3 bedroom properties on occasions.

Any person wishing to be included as part of an applicant's household must satisfy the Council that they are a permanent member of the applicant's household and that it is reasonable for them to reside with them (see section 8.2 earlier).

In exceptional circumstances, the Council will consider allocating properties of alternative sizes to applicants. Such decisions will only be authorised by the Housing Needs Manager following advice from the Council's Medical Adviser or support from other statutory agencies.

11.6 Local Allocation Policies

On new estates there is often a need to ensure that there is a mixed and balanced community. This is difficult to achieve if all the allocations are made to people in high need. The possibility of adopting a local lettings plan/policy for initial lettings on new estates will therefore be considered during the development of new housing schemes of 10 properties or more.

Rural exception sites require affordable dwellings to meet the needs identified within the rural area in question. There may also be other rural sites where it is considered preferable to allocate to meet the needs of the rural community. Local lettings policies negate the need for complex cascade arrangements within planning agreements. A planning agreement would just need to reference that dwellings should be let in accordance with the local lettings policy. The possibility of adopting a local lettings policy for initial lettings will therefore be considered during the development of all new rural housing schemes regardless of size.

The Head of Housing would be required to agree any proposed policy following discussion with the Chair of the Policy Committee prior to allocation of the units.

12. Shared Ownership

The Council operates the HOMEBUY Scheme in conjunction with Thames Valley Housing Association to assist those applicants who wish to purchase their own homes but who do not have the full financial capacity to do so. It may also receive nomination rights to other low-cost new-build developments in the District.

To qualify for shared ownership, an applicant must be able to show;

- a) An ability to sustain the commitment to a mortgage and the rental on the retained equity, as well as adequate savings to finance the purchase i.e. survey fees, legal costs.
- b) Clear evidence that the applicant could not be expected to purchase a home outright in the current market conditions.

The funds available for Shared Ownership are usually limited and priority for nomination will therefore be given to households according to their degree of housing need.

Once nominated to Thames Valley or another Housing association, an applicant will be provided with full details of the procedure to be followed and details of any restrictions on purchase, which may apply.

For further details please refer to the Shared Ownership Allocation Policy.

13. Performance monitoring and amendments to the Policy

13.1 Monitoring of the Policy

This Policy will be reviewed annually to;

- Consider whether the aims and objectives (listed on page 1) need to be amended
- Determine if the Policy is meeting the objectives that have been set.

A Best Value Review will also be carried out every 5 years and will follow a survey of customers and other stakeholders aimed at identifying any problems with the current policy.

13.2 Monitoring of allocations

The Housing Needs Manager is responsible for ensuring that allocations are made in accordance with the agreed policy. He/she will make random checks to confirm that allocations are being made appropriately and will take corrective action should this be found not to be the case.

13.3 Ethnic monitoring

A report giving the breakdown of allocations according to ethnic origin will be made annually to Members of the Policy Committee.

The Council subscribes to a language translation service. This service will be used to ensure that the process of applying for housing and the main details within this policy are available to those from different ethnic backgrounds.

13.4 Local Performance Indicators

The success of this allocation scheme will be judged against the following local performance indicators;

- The proportion of black and ethnic minority applicants housed in relation to the proportion of such groups within the population.
- The average re-let time for vacancies (also a national BVPI)
- The number of tenants housed each year who were under-occupying family homes.

Performance against each of the above indicators will be assessed annually as part of the review of this Policy.

13.5 Changes to the Policy

The Head of Housing Operations is authorised to make minor changes to this Allocations Policy. However these changes should not significantly affect large numbers of applicants. The reasons for making any changes must also be documented and available to the public.

Any significant changes to the Policy are to be approved by the Policy Committee.

14. Rights to Information and Reviews

Every applicant has the following rights regarding the provision of information;

- The right to request general information that will enable them to assess how their application will be treated including whether they are likely to be eligible for reasonable preference.
- The right to request general information that will enable them to assess whether housing appropriate to their needs is likely to be

made available and if so how long it is likely to be before such accommodation becomes available.

- The right to be informed of any decision about the facts of their case which are likely to be taken into account in considering whether to allocate housing to them.
- The right to be informed of any decision that they are unsuitable to be a tenant which is likely to be taken into account in considering whether to allocate housing to them.

All applicants have a right to ask for a review of a decision in the following circumstances;

- Where they have been refused entry to the Housing Register.
- Where their application has been given no preference due to a decision regarding their behaviour.
- Where their application has been cancelled.