Homesearch Policy Nov 2026











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1. GENERAL INFORMATION

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Monmouthshire County Council (MCC) transferred its social housing stock to Awen Homes in January 2008. It remains a legal requirement for MCC to run a Housing Register that manages the letting of social rented housing in Monmouthshire.

1.1.2 MCC operate a Common Housing Register (CHR) and Homesearch Policy to allocate social housing, which provides a single point of contact for someone seeking affordable housing in Monmouthshire. Awen Homes administers the CHR on behalf of MCC via a service called Homesearch. MCC has a Service Level Agreement (a formal agreement) in place with Awen Homes to manage this service.

1.1.3 Hedyn, Codi and United Welsh are also a part of the Homesearch partnership and use it to let their social housing in Monmouthshire to applicants in line with this policy and the accompanying procedures.

1.1.4 MCC operates a Choice Based Letting allocation scheme, where available properties are advertised and applicants are required to express their interest in a process called 'bidding'.

1.1.5 Generally, Homesearch applicants are placed in date order into bands that reflect their housing situation. The banding then influences how quickly they are likely to be housed (with the Emergency Band likely to be the fastest band). Also See Item number 16 and Appendix 9.

1.1.6 Homesearch makes key commitments about the service it provides to housing applicants and these are explained in Appendix 5.

1.1.7 MCC must publish a summary of their allocation scheme (this Policy) and provide a copy free of charge if asked.

1.2 Purpose of the Policy

1.2.1 The aims of this policy are to:

a) Allocate socially rented housing fairly, consistently and transparently.
b) Fully adhere to legislation and the Welsh Government's regulatory framework.
c) Provide a service that is easy to access, responds to changing demands and gives high customer satisfaction.
d) Provide easy to understand information about Homesearch and how the scheme works.
e) Work to support balanced and sustainable and resilient communities,
f) Prevent and respond to homelessness with a commitment to the rapid rehousing and support of vulnerable people.
g) Meet local housing need in Monmouthshire (i.e. give priority to applicants in housing need who have a local connection to the area.
h) Emphasise pre-contract advice and provide or sign-post support to help maintain occupation contracts and especially minimise rent loss.
i) Make best use of our housing stock.
j) Maximise choice by providing information about different housing tenures.

1.3 What the Policy covers

1.3.1 The Policy covers social housing rented via Homesearch, which includes:

a) The letting of an occupation contract or introductory contract.
b) Existing contract-holders of a Homesearch Partner who transfer to another Homesearch landlord's social housing property in Monmouthshire.
c) Where a home is let by Awen Homes, Codi, Hedyn and United Welsh in Monmouthshire and undergoes major refurbishment/redevelopment or is demolished/sold, so a contract-holder is required to move out permanently.

1.3.2 Other community landlords such as Muir Group and Aelwyd Housing Association may also use Homesearch as a platform to advertise social housing. If any landlord that is not currently part of the Homesearch partnership let social housing in Monmouthshire, they would be requested to allocate their home(s) in accordance with the Homesearch Policy. In conjunction with MCC they may, however, decide to allocate their social housing in accordance with their own Policies.

1.3.3 The following **are not** covered by the Homesearch Policy:

a) The granting of a standard/secure contract following a probationary period of time on an introductory contract.
b) A sole contract being made into a joint contract (or vice versa).
c) The legal right to 'succeed' to a contract or be 'assigned' a tenancy to someone who would be entitled to succeed.
d) A community landlord secure contract-holder transferring (exchanging) their contract to another secure contract-holder of a community landlord. (Under section 118 of the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016)
e) Where a home is let by a Homesearch landlord and undergoes major refurbishment, and the contract-holder is required to move out temporarily.
f) The letting of temporary housing for homeless households or housing owned by charities not in the Homesearch partnership.
g) Intermediate rent properties (where the rental amount is 80% of the average market rent).
h) Low cost home ownership (where properties are purchased in a more affordable way, compared to buying a home outright on the open market).
i) Homes rented on the open market that receive no public subsidy or funding.
j) A court order to transfer a contract

1.3.4 Further information is contained in Appendix 11 about how intermediate rent properties are allocated in Monmouthshire, providing a separate framework to the Homesearch Policy. The same Appendix also explains the principles that govern the allocation of low cost home ownership schemes in Monmouthshire.

1.4 Responsibilities

1.4.1 MCC retains full responsibility for this Policy. MCC and the other Homesearch partners hold joint responsibility for developing the accompanying Procedures. The administrative functions that the Council has transferred onto Awen Homes are:

a) Managing the receipt of housing applications
b) All assessment matters and decisions regarding eligibility under the scheme
c) Administering reviews of a decision made in line with the Homesearch Policy, Procedures and the Service Level Agreement.
d) Making arrangements to ensure that advice and information related to the Homesearch scheme is available across MCC.
e) To support MCC to monitor the implementation of the social housing register and report on Homesearch's performance.

1.5 Review and Monitoring

1.5.1 This Policy will be reviewed every 3 years or amended and updated as necessary. Any amendments to the Policy will be agreed by all Partners before being implemented. The accompanying procedures will be amended and updated as necessary.

1.5.2 Applicants and contract-holders will be consulted regarding a major change to the Policy.

1.5.3 Homesearch will utilise customer feedback, best practice, performance data, operating experience and respond to legislative changes to continually improve the procedures and where applicable the policy.

1.5.4 Homesearch's performance will be reviewed quarterly (four times a year), by staff representing the Homesearch partners.

2. REGISTERING FOR HOMESEARCH

2.1 Who Can Register for Homesearch

2.1.1 Generally anyone who isn't excluded due to their immigration status, as per the allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (Wales) Regulations, can register for Homesearch. That is as long as they are aged 16 years and over.

2.1.2 Homesearch partners will take independent advice to resolve any issue of eligibility as necessary.

2.2 Housing 16 and 17 Year Olds

2.2.1 Applicants aged between 16 and 17 years old can register for accommodation, however, either a contract will be held in trust or they will have a licence.

2.2.2 All applicants aged 16 or 17 years old will be referred to MCC Social Services for an assessment of their needs (unless a referral is already in place). Where social services provide support, they will be expected to act as trustee.

2.2.3 Where we receive a joint application and one of the applicants is aged under 18 years old, but there is at least one applicant who is 18 or older, the occupation contract will be granted jointly. It will then automatically be held on trust for any applicants aged under 18 by the applicant who is 18 or older. A written statement will be sent to the minor when they turn 18 and become a contract-holder in their own right.

2.3 Registration/Making a Homesearch Application

2.3.1 All applicants will need to register via an online form (including existing contract-holders of Awen Homes, Hedyn, Codi or United Welsh, wishing to transfer to another Homesearch landlord/home in Monmouthshire). In some circumstances we will also complete an application over the phone or if necessary in person, where an applicant is unable to complete the form themselves online.

2.3.2 All applicants will be offered and given appropriate advice and assistance in completing the application form including translation and interpreting facilities where required.

2.3.3 Each applicant will receive notification of their eligibility and information that gives easy to understand and in-depth information on how the Homesearch scheme works, so they can choose and then bid for a home.

2.3.4 When an applicant registers, Homesearch will inform them of which band they are in and why. They will also explain what other groups are in the band and how many bands are above/below them and be given advice on how long theywill wait for housing. NB: an application may be placed in a lower banding initially, prior to Homesearch receiving necessary information e.g. evidence connected to medical priority.

3. HOW SOCIAL HOUSING IS ALLOCATED

3.1 Legal Context

3.1.1 How we allocate social housing **must** comply with the law. The entire Policy and the accompanying Procedures are framed by legislation and secondary guidance, including but not limited to:

a) Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016
b) Housing Act 1996 (i.e. part 6)
c) Housing (Wales) Act 2014 (i.e. part 2)
d) Welsh Government's Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness
e) The Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (Wales) Regulations
f) Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (i.e. section 17)
g) Equality Act 2010 (i.e. public sector equalities duty)

h) Data Protection Act 2018

3.1.2 Legal requirements mean that some social housing applicant's circumstances automatically gives them more preference for social housing over other applicants. **Fundamentally the Homesearch scheme must operate to give preference to house applicants who represent the categories in section 167(2) of the Housing Act 1996. This is the basis of the banding system that the Homesearch scheme operates under.** Greater preference is given to homeless applicants; those occupying insanitary, overcrowded or unsatisfactory housing; people who need to move on medical or welfare grounds (including disability) and people who need to move to a particular locality within Monmouthshire where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or others).

3.1.3 Homesearch will maintain a list of all applicants registered for Homesearch, discounting individuals who are not legally entitled to social housing.

3.1.4 This Policy is available on www.monmouthshirehomesearch.co.uk.

3.2 Local Connection

3.2.1 In order to meet local housing need, we will give more priority to house applicants who have a local connection to Monmouthshire.

3.2.2 Local connection is defined as:

a) 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. All existing contract-holders of a Homesearch Partner will also be considered to have a local connection.

b) 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.

c) 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.

d) The applicant has just been or is about to be discharged from the British Armed Forces and has previously lived in the County as defined in 3.2.2(a) immediately prior to joining the armed forces or has met these criteria through service.
The spouse or civil partner of a serving British Armed Forces personnel will be considered to meet the British Armed Forces local connection criteria should a separation occur during service, if they can demonstrate they normally resided with their spouse/ civil partner as part of their household. This would also apply to bereaved spouses or civil partners of serving British Armed Forces personnel.

e) There are special circumstances, for example, the applicant or their household is currently receiving specialist medical or statutory services that are only available in the Monmouthshire area where the travel requirements are detrimental to their wellbeing. A local connection established on these grounds is likely to be 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.

f) The applicant is owed a Homeless Section 73 or Section 75 duty by MCC under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

g) An applicant has been provided with accommodation (at any time) in Monmouthshire, in relation to Section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 or succeeding legislation and in line with Section 81 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

h) An applicant who qualifies under The Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2022 (see Appendix 7, 1.1). The amended regulation makes these groups eligible for homelessness assistance and social housing.

3.3 Applicants Living Away from Monmouthshire

3.3.1 It is possible for eligible applicants who live outside of Monmouthshire to register for Homesearch. In such circumstances we will always seek to verify their circumstances fully. This is because it could influence how their local connection is determined e.g. someone is serving in the armed forces.

3.4 Homelessness/No fixed Abode/Rough Sleepers

3.4.1 The Homesearch Partnership is committed to supporting the strategic and operational delivery of the Welsh Government's Rapid Rehousing approach to homelessness.

3.4.2 Individuals with a history of chronic homelessness and health/social care issues may be considered for an allocation of a home via Housing First (or similar Welsh Government initiative), whereby they are direct let a property (see Section 3.12 below) so they have a stable home from which to rebuild their lives.

3.4.3 Applicants may register for Homesearch where they have no fixed abode (including someone rough sleeping). Either a correspondence/care of address, email address or telephone number would need to be provided to complete their Homesearch application and subsequently bid for Homesearch properties. Assisted bidding would be under-taken as appropriate - see section 8.1.4 below.

3.5 Rural Allocation Policy/New Developments

3.5.1 When new affordable housing is built in rural areas/villages in Monmouthshire, the Rural Allocation Policy will be used to influence the allocation of social housing. See Appendix 1 for further details. When developing in non-rural areas the Homesearch partners will use the criteria contained in Appendix 9.

3.6 Suspensions and Demotions Policy and Procedure

3.6.1 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. See Appendix 3 for further details.

3.7 Bypassing Policy and Procedure

3.7.1 Bypassing means that in some limited situations a Homesearch 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. See Appendix 2 for further details.

3.7.2 Where there is evidence an applicant does not have the mental capacity to understand a occupation contract written statement, for a property allocated via Homesearch (also see the Mental Capacity Act 2005), a Homesearch partner will enact the Bypass Policy and Procedure – see Appendix 2 for further details.

3.8 Housing Availability

3.8.1 Empty homes will be re-let as soon as possible once they become vacant. However, in some instances this is not always possible e.g. as homes are usually advertised before they become vacant it may be necessary to withdraw a property if the outgoing contract-holder does not vacate as expected.

3.8.2 Applicant's may be advised that Homesearch's ability to meet their choice of housing could be reduced in some parts of Monmouthshire, due to levels of demand for social housing.

3.8.3 Estimated waiting times for social housing in different parts of Monmouthshire (based on an applicant's banding) will be available at www.monmouthshirehomesearch.co.uk via an interactive map, which will be periodically updated.

3.8.4 In order to maximise the chance of getting re-housed, applicants will be encouraged to bid for all property types that they are eligible for i.e. both flats and houses.

3.9 Housing Choice

3.9.1 Applicants will be given the widest possible choice of housing to consider, including tenures other than social housing that includes intermediate rent and low cost home ownership. Also see Appendix 11 for further information. However, choice will be constrained by what type of home an applicant is eligible for as well as availability.

3.10 Household Circumstances

3.10.1 Household circumstances will affect an applicant's banding and choice of/access to social housing in Monmouthshire. Examples of important criteria would include (but are not limited to): if someone is homeless; if they need housing with disabled adaptations; their household finances; the size of the household or if there are safety concerns connected with housing someone in a particular area or with remaining in their current home.

3.10.2 Homesearch partners have a small number of allocation criteria that differ slightly in connection with an applicant's household composition. Further details

can be found in Sections 7.3.2 in connection with age and OAP designated housing and 15.1 in relation to the letting of bungalows.

3.11 Purpose Built or Adapted . Accommodation

3.11.1 We are committed to addressing the housing needs of disabled applicants and have a limited stock of purpose built and adapted accommodation.

3.11.2 An applicant's (or a member of their household) disability must match the specification/adaptations of the property to be allocated such a property.

3.11.3 In order to be considered for purpose built or adapted disabled accommodation the applicant (or the member of their household with the disability) will be expected to provide an assessment from an Occupation Therapist or other similar professional person.

3.12 Direct Lets

3.12.1 Most properties will be advertised through the Homesearch scheme, however, in some rare circumstances we may let some properties directly to applicants e.g. if someone has lost their home during a fire. Further information about the reasons for direct lets is available at www.monmouthshirehomesearch.co.uk

3.12.2 The Homesearch partners also have an agreement with several other Community Landlords operating outside of Monmouthshire, called a 'reciprocal transfer agreement'. This means that where someone must move out of an area because they are at serious risk/their life is in danger, one of the Community landlords would directly match a property to that person so they are able to move to a safe location.

3.13 Sensitive Lets

3.13.1 Homesearch partners reserve the right to place additional criteria on a property advert (also see Section 7 for information on Homesearch adverts) in order to promote sustainable communities. Further information about the reasons for sensitive lets is available at www.monmouthshirehomesearch.co.uk

3.14 Housing Serious Offenders

3.14.1 Homesearch will seek to minimise the risk to the community and the applicant where individuals are considered to pose a risk to themselves and/or others (even where an individual has not been convicted of an offence).

3.14.2 We will work with the Police and Probation Services to assess and manage risk and will apply special arrangements where cases are referred through the Multi-Agency Public Protection Panel (MAPPA) or any protocol with Probation Services Officers. This may result in restrictions being placed upon the applicant in their choice of property or area, or a direct offer of suitable accommodation being made or an applicant being bypassed for a specific property, if an established risk cannot be managed – also see Appendix 2.

3.15 Local Lettings Plans

3.15.1 Homesearch partners may develop local letting plans for specific areas, estates, or blocks of flats in order to develop and promote balanced and sustainable

communities. For further details see Appendix 10.

3.16 Letting Quotas

3.16.1 To help ensure that different groups of applicants are given an opportunity to move and to support sustainable communities, Homesearch 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. For further details see Appendix 4. Where lettings quotas are used it will be made clear in the Homesearch property adverts.

3.17 Feedback on Let Properties

3.17.1 We will provide feedback on the banding priority of applicants who were successful for previous lets.

3.17.2 The feedback will not provide any personal information relating to the actual successful applicant or any information that would allow anyone to be identified.

4. DECIDING HOUSING PRIORITY BASED ON MEDICAL/WELFARE CRITERIA

4.1 Medical and Welfare Priority

4.1.1 Applicants who have a medical and/or welfare need will be asked to include details of this on the Homesearch application form. If a medical and/or welfare issue develops after the initial Homesearch application, then an online medical/welfare assessment form can be completed. Help will be provided by Homesearch staff to do this if needed. Evidence will be required to support medical/welfare priority. Applicants will only be offered additional priority if their medical condition or that of a member of their household, necessitates a move. Or if their social wellbeing or that of a member of their household, is significantly affected by remaining in their current accommodation.

4.1.2 The medical assessment is not based on the seriousness of an applicant's condition, but is solely based on the impact of their current housing or in exceptional circumstances the location. Welfare issues will normally relate to the location of the property but can occasionally be caused by the physical condition of the property. The assessment is based solely on the impact of their current housing, on social well-being and whether a move to alternative housing would improve their welfare.

4.1.3 Medical priority will be given to homeowners for a social housing allocation, where they can prove that they do not have financial resources or equity in a property to purchase another suitable property (otherwise they will be placed in Band 4 – also see Section 16 for Banding summary and Appendix 9).

4.2 Medical Priority

4.2.1 Applicants may be placed into one of the following bands following an assessment:

a) **Emergency Band – Exceptional Medical Need**, where applicants are unable to continue to occupy their current accommodation. Or the applicant is unable to leave hospital due to their current permanent housing being unsuitable. An

applicant's circumstances will be reviewed after 3 months.

b) **Band 1 – High Medical Need**, where the medical condition and/or disability, is having a significant detrimental effect on the ability to live independently.

c) **Band 2 – Medium Medical Need**, where a move to suitable alternative accommodation would significantly improve their health, or upon the recommendation of Monmouthshire County Council's Social Services, to enable them to live independently.

d) **Band 3 – Low Medical Need**, where there is a low medical condition or disability and a move would improve their health.

e) **No Medical Need** – where there is no medical need or moving accommodation would not address the medical need. Or there is no evidence to suggest a move would produce a significant impact.

4.2.2 The medical assessment decision will not result in an applicant losing priority if they would otherwise have been placed in a higher band due to other circumstances.

4.2.3 Applicants can only re-apply for medical assessment or request that a medical priority already awarded is re-assessed, if there has been a change in their circumstances.

4.3 Welfare Priority

4.3.1 Applicants may be placed into one of the following bands following an assessment

a) **Emergency Band – Exceptional Welfare Need**, where applicants are unable to continue to occupy their current accommodation. Where failure to address this would cause exceptional hardship to themselves or others. An applicant's circumstances will be reviewed after 3 months.

b) **Band 1 – High Welfare Need**, applicants needing to move urgently on welfare grounds or who need to move to a particular locality. Where failure to meet that need would cause serious hardship to themselves or others. This band will be reviewed after six months.

c) **Band 2 – Medium Welfare Need**, where applicants are identified as having a medium need to move on welfare grounds. Where failure to meet that need would result in significant hardship to their social well-being.

d) **Band 3 – Low Welfare Need**, applicants assessed as having a low welfare need and moving to alternative accommodation would improve their well-being.

e) **No Welfare Need** – This is where the applicant is assessed as having no welfare need or moving accommodation would not address the need. Or there is no evidence to suggest a move would produce a significant impact.

4.3.2 The outcome of a welfare assessment will not result in the applicant losing priority if they would otherwise be placed in a higher band due to other circumstances.

4.4 Effective Date for Applicants with a Medical/Welfare Need

4.4.1 Where an application indicates a medical or welfare need on their original Homesearch application form, following assessment, this will be effective from the date of their Homesearch application (NB: this will only be where an applicant has made us aware of this at the time of their application). If an application is

received after the original application has been submitted, the effective date of medical/welfare priority will be the date of receipt of the supporting evidence.

5. OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

5.1 False or Withheld Information

5.1.1 It is a criminal offence for an applicant to knowingly give false information, or to withhold information relevant to their Homesearch application. Where there is suspicion that a person has done so, the application will be suspended pending the outcome of an investigation.

5.1.2 If the outcome of the investigation reveals that they did not provide false information, or the withholding of information was accidental, then the application will be reinstated from the date of registration with Homesearch.

5.1.3 Where the investigation shows that false information was provided on the application form, or was deliberately withheld, then the application will be suspended from the Homesearch register – see Appendix 3 for further details.

5.1.4 Each Homesearch partner landlord will seek to recover a community housing property via court if the occupation contract was obtained dishonestly/illegally.

5.2 Deliberately Worsening Circumstances

5.2.1 Applicants must not deliberately worsen their circumstances to gain greater priority under the Homesearch scheme. We will investigate and use all appropriate/available evidence to check when we believe an applicant has done this.

5.2.2 Where we believe this has happened, the applicant will be awarded the band that they would have been entitled to had they not worsened their housing circumstances.

5.3 Disclosure of Interest

5.3.1 If an applicant (or their close relative) was an MCC Councillor or staff member, or a board member or staff member of a landlord letting social housing through Homesearch, they would need to disclose this on the Homesearch application form. This still applies if the person has left the post less than 12 month ago. Applicants will be neither advantaged nor disadvantaged following disclosure.

5.4 Joint Tenancies

5.4.1 It is for the Homesearch landlord who will be the applicant's landlord to decide whether to allow a joint contract – refer to their individual organisational policy on Joint contracts

6. ADMINISTRATION

6.1 Incomplete Application Forms

6.1.1 If an applicant makes an incomplete application Homesearch will not register the application until it's completed and won't make it 'live' (so an applicant can start bidding for a home) until all necessary information requested has been provided.

6.2 Change in Circumstances, Following Initial Homesearch Application

6.2.1 It is the responsibility of an applicant to notify us of any changes in their circumstances (relevant to their housing application), as soon as possible.
6.2.2 Where Banding priority increases we will back date any new banding decision to the date the change of circumstance form was received.
6.2.3 If an applicant receives a lesser band as a result of a change in their circumstances they will retain their original Homesearch registration date.

6.3 Cancelling Applications

6.3.1 Applications will be cancelled where there is a viable reason and in line with the procedures that accompanies this Policy.
6.3.2 Decisions taken to cancel an application will be reviewed as requested by the applicant.

6.4 Reviews of the Register

6.4.1 In order to keep the Homesearch Register up to date it will be reviewed periodically. Applicants will be contacted and those who fail to respond to a review will be removed from the register (as advised on the correspondence they are sent). An application can only be reinstated within a period of 3 months, following removal. After this time either a change of circumstances form or new application will need to be completed. Following a review applicants will also be informed about any changes to their band or status.

7. ADVERTISING HOMES

7.1 Advertising Social Housing Properties

7.1.1 Properties will be listed on www.monmouthshirehomesearch.co.uk Monday to Friday. Properties will be advertised for a minimum of 8 days and a maximum of 16 days. Properties may be advertised outside of the Housing register e.g. in the local press or via other media. In exceptional circumstances, Homesearch reserves the right to withdraw an advert. This may be due to an error on a Homesearch advert; the current contract-holder(s) deciding to revoke their notice to end their contract (if a contract-holder wants to end their contract, we will advertise a property before they vacate to minimise any delay in re- letting the property), or because of an unavoidable delay with bringing the property up to a lettable standard (this list is not an exhaustive list).
7.1.2 Applicants must check property advert information before bidding. As this will give a description of the property and whether it meets their requirements e.g. adaptations or age or area restrictions, Local Lettings Plans etc.
7.1.3 Adapted properties will be advertised as suitable to applicants with matching

mobility needs and adaptations (this is subject to an assessment from an Occupational Therapist).

7.1.4 Properties which are designated for Older Persons will be advertised as suitable for applicants who meet the age criteria set out in paragraph 7.3.2. An Older Person designated property (not including sheltered) which is a bungalow will be advertised as available for those who meet the age criteria and/or who are disabled (within the meaning of the Equality Act 2010) and who can show that only a bungalow (and no other property type) will meet their need (see 10.2.2).

7.1.5 Applicants who may struggle to participate in the Homesearch scheme will be provided with assistance from staff as appropriate e.g. assisted bidding service.

7.2 Property Adverts

7.2.1 Property adverts will give applicable information about each available property that will be easy to understand.

7.2.2 Property adverts may also include details of how preference will be awarded e.g. if a lettings quota, a local lettings plan, sensitive let or the Rural Allocation Policy is applied.

7.2.3 Applicants viewing social housing properties online will only be able to view the properties that they are eligible to bid on.

7.3 Insufficient Demand and Re-advertising a Property

7.3.1 Where a property does not attract any eligible bids from applicants, consideration may (at the discretion of the Homesearch partner the property belongs to) be given to applicants who would under-occupy the property. A successful applicant would also have to complete an affordability assessment to show they can afford to under-occupy the property.

7.3.2 Older Person's accommodation is for applicants aged 60+ years (for Awen Homes schemes) or 55+ years (for Hedyn, Codi and United Welsh schemes). Older person's designated property may be offered to younger applicants if there is insufficient demand (also see 10.2.2 below). However, age criteria will not be relaxed on 'sheltered' type housing schemes.

7.3.3 Where there is insufficient demand for a property and it is considered 'hard-to-let', a Homesearch partner may use discretion and advertise the property outside of the scheme through other appropriate methods.

8. BIDDING FOR A HOME

8.1 How Applicants Bid for a home

8.1.1 Any live Homesearch applicant will be able to bid for a property they are eligible for, as soon as it is advertised. Bids will be accepted either online or by Homesearch Staff via assisted bidding. Important points to consider during bidding are:

8.1.2 Bids will need to be received during the period where the advert is open and before the closing date on the advert. The onus is on the applicant to ensure that they have placed a bid in time. Requests for late bids will not be considered.

8.1.3 Further information about bidding is available at www.monmouthshirehomesearch.co.uk

8.1.4 Applicants unable to bid themselves can be placed on the assisted bidding service and will be helped by Homesearch to place a bid.

8.2 Applicants Who Fail to Bid for a Home

8.2.1 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 – see Appendix 3. If any applicant no longer wishes to remain on the Homesearch register their application will be cancelled.

8.3 Automatic Bid for Homeless Applicants

8.3.1 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.

9. SHORTLISTING FOR HOMES

9.1 The Selection Process – Short-listing

9.1.1 The Homesearch bidding system will arrange for a list to be created from all those who have bid for a property, which will be placed in priority order (the shortlist) according to:

a) Applicants' banding.
b) Applicable priority/criteria explained in Item number 3 of the Homesearch Policy.
c) An offer of a home will then be made to the applicant in the highest band who has waited the longest, who meets the criteria as per the advert (e.g. for age, adaptations or Local Lettings Plan criteria etc) and in accordance with lettings quotas (if any are applied).

9.1.2 In the unlikely event that two different Homesearch applicants are jointly at the top of the shortlist for a property, Homesearch landlords will use the following selection process to determine the successful applicant:

1st choice – The applicant has demonstrated cumulative (multiple) need
2nd choice - The applicant who can best use the property (i.e. size)
3rd choice - The applicant who applied to the register first
4th choice – The applicant who submitted their bid first

10. VERIFYING AN APPLICANT'S INFORMATION

10.1 Verification

10.1.1 Before making a full offer of accommodation to an applicant, the relevant Homesearch partner/landlord will verify an applicant's circumstances (which

may include a home visit) to make sure that the property is suitable for the household.

10.1.2 If this visit identifies new information, a Homesearch application will be re-assessed, which could affect an application e.g. it may result in an offer being withdrawn, an applicant changing bands or being suspended from the Homesearch register for a period of time (not an exhaustive list). A decision on an application will also be deferred until an applicant provides proof of their circumstances. If there is a delay, this may result in an offer being withdrawn.

10.1.3 In response to changes in welfare benefits and legislation, all new contract-holders will be required to complete an affordability assessment to ensure a property is affordable. Where the property is considered to not be affordable an applicant may be bypassed for an allocation in line with the Bypass Policy - see Appendix 2 for further details.

10.2 Older Person's Housing

10.2.1 Before being offered older person's housing applicants will be contacted and arrangements made to assess their support needs. NB: Further assessment may be required to check suitability, if the property being offered is specifically for an older person or has communal facilities.

10.2.2 Bungalows are in short supply and in high demand. They may be allocated either to older persons (see 7.3.2) or to people who are disabled within the meaning of section 6 of the Equality Act 2010, but in the latter case only where the following conditions are satisfied:

a) There is evidence that the applicant's needs resulting from the disability can be met only by the allocation of a bungalow and that the specific bungalow which the applicant has applied for meets the need. The evidence must clearly demonstrate that no other type of property will meet the applicant's need.
b) The evidence supplied must consider which property types might be suitable for the applicant and if the professional providing the evidence considers that no other type of property will meet the applicant's need, that conclusion must be fully explained.
c) Further information will be sought and investigations carried out into the questions above where necessary.
d) Each application will be assessed on a case by case basis.

10.2.3 The decision whether or not to allocate a bungalow to a person who does not meet the age criteria in 7.3.2 will also take into account the welfare of and the needs of the community within which the bungalow is situated and the individuals within it and we may exercise discretion not to allocate on that ground.

11. OFFERING, VIEWING AND ACCEPTING OR REFUSING A HOME

11.1 Offer of Accommodation

11.1.1 The applicant who is at the top of the shortlist for a property (subject to any relevant criteria discussed in this Policy) will be provisionally offered the property either in writing or verbally, by the Homesearch partner that owns

The property. If an applicant refuses a property or cannot be contacted the next highest ranking applicant on the shortlist will be offered the property once 3 working days has elapsed.

11.2 Viewing and Signing for the Occupation Contract

11.2.1 A successful applicant will be provided with the opportunity to view the property that they have been shortlisted for before accepting (or refusing) an offer. Viewings will be completed as soon as possible after the offer stage, once the property is ready to view. The Homesearch partner that owns the property will contact the applicant to arrange the viewing. Assuming an applicant wants the property, the same landlord will seek to sign the Occupation Contract as soon as possible.

11.2.2 In most circumstances a rental amount will be payable in advance before the occupation contract can be signed.

11.3 Refusals of Offers or Missed Viewing Appointments

11.3.1 If an applicant does not respond to an offer of accommodation Homesearch will cancel their application once 3 working days has elapsed, following the offer.

11.3.2 Where an applicant does not keep an appointment to view a property and a Homesearch landlord is unable to contact them, once 3 working days has elapsed their application will again be cancelled. If contact is made and there's no valid reason for missing the appointment and the property can't be re-offered at that point, then that will be treated as a refusal. Alternatively the offer may at the discretion of the same landlord be re-instated, provided the property has not already been re-offered.

11.3.3 Where an applicant has refused 2 suitable offers of accommodation within a 12 month period (or 1 offer if a full homeless duty applies), their priority for re-housing may, depending on the circumstances, be demoted. See Appendix 3 for further details.

11.4 Withdrawing Offers of Accommodation

11.4.1 Homesearch partners reserve the right to withdraw offers in the following circumstances:

a) Where we have evidence that the applicant has given false information.
b) 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.
c) Where we require the property for another emergency reason.
d) Where we have made the offer in error.
e) Where the applicant has been asked to provide supporting documentation and fails to do so.
f) Where the property fails to become vacant e.g. withdrawal of end of tenancy notice by the current contract-holder(s).
g) 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 contract and they are not properly addressed.

12. PRE-CONTRACT SUPPORT

12.1 Pre-contract

12.1.1 Homesearch partners will ensure that appropriate advice on affordability is given to an applicant during the verification process. To inform advice, an assessment may be carried out in order to determine an applicant's ability to maintain their contract.

12.1.2 Homesearch partners will seek to operate a consistent approach to pre-contract services.

13. REVIEWING DECISIONS AND RAISING CONCERNS

13.1 Key Principles

13.1.1 Homesearch partners value issues raised as a way to help improve the services we provide.

13.1.2 We will work with an authorised advocate of an applicant to resolve an issue as requested.

13.1.3 We are committed to ensuring we have a straight-forward process in place and that issues/concerns are dealt with appropriately and as quickly as possible. Applicants will also be kept up to date during any review process.

13.1.4 Homesearch Staff will be trained to understand complaint/review processes and their role in them.

13.1.5 Appeals, complaints, reviews and corresponding actions taken will be recorded, monitored and undertaken in line with the Homesearch Policy and accompanying Procedures.

13.1.6 Individuals will be notified in writing about decisions about Homesearch applications and advised of their statutory right to request a review along with details on how to do so. NB: decisions regarding homeless duties and statutory rights will be relayed by Monmouthshire County Council (MCC).

13.1.7 If an applicant disagrees with a decision they will initially be asked to speak to the Homesearch partner who made the decision.

13.1.8 Applicants can raise a concern/make a complaint or request a review of a decision in writing (including via email) or verbally to a staff member at any time.

13.1.9 Statutory based reviews (see section 167 (4A) the Housing Act 1996) of Homesearch decisions will be undertaken by a designated officer who was not involved in the original decision and who is senior to the original decision making officer.

13.2 An applicant will be informed in writing of any statutory review decision. The reply will contain the decision made, the reasons for the decision and the facts taken into account when making the decision.

13.2.1 Applicants can also contact the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales for further advice, if they remain dissatisfied with a decision following the review.

13.2.2 In the event that a legal challenge is brought or an Ombudsman claim made in connection with the Homesearch Policy/delivery of the Policy, MCC would be responsible for responding to this. If the challenge/claim related to the allocation of a specific property then the Homesearch partner that owns that property would support MCC to respond.

14. PROPERTY SIZE AND HOUSEHOLD SIZE – FURTHER CRITERIA

14.1 Eligibility

14.1.1 This section provides important information on the size and type of social housing properties that Homesearch applicants may be considered for based on their household composition – also see Section 15 below and Appendix9 for further information.

14.1.2 All properties that are advertised through Monmouthshire Homesearch will be clearly labelled to identify the household type and size eligible to bid for each property.

14.1.3 Applicants are expected to bid for properties which suits their household size. Homesearch, however, reserves the right to relax size criteria in some instances e.g. on properties where the Rural Allocation Policy applies – see Appendix 1.

14.2 Affordability Assessment

14.2.1 An affordability assessment will be carried out prior to an offer of accommodation being made to ensure that the applicant can afford the rent (also see Appendix 2 for further information about the Bypassing Policy and Procedure and when it may be used in connection with affordability).

14.3 Pregnancy

14.3.1 It is the responsibility of the applicant to contact Monmouthshire Homesearch to update their application with this information. An expected child can be added to the application from week 20 of the pregnancy as soon as proof of pregnancy is provided.

14.4 Households with Children

14.4.1 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.
NB: an applicant would receive equal preference for a two bed above ground floor flat to those with a two-bedroom need. Only a general needs flat would be allocated and not a house and this would also be subject to the applicant(s) being able to afford the property.

14.4.2 Where there is a child/children already resident at the property we would expect the room sharing criteria to apply.

14.4.3 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.

14.5 Three to Four Bed Transfers

14.5.1 Where an applicant currently occupies a Homesearch partner's 3 bedroom

'non-parlour' type property (which means there are 3 bedrooms in the home butt here isn't a separate living area/room such as a dining room or front room) and they are transferring on the grounds of overcrowding, they will generally only be eligible to bid on 3 bedroom parlour (which would have a separate living area/room as well as 3 bedrooms) or four bedroom property. A like for like transfer from non-parlour to non-parlour would only be allowed where the bedroom sizes are significantly larger.

14.6 Monmouthshire Community Landlord Contract-holders transferring to OAP or Sheltered accommodation

14.6.1 Homesearch partner's contract-holders that reside in Monmouthshire and are over pension credit qualifying age and under-occupying their current property by two or more bedrooms, will be eligible to under-occupy by one bedroom in the Homesearch partner's property that they transfer to.

15. PROPERTY SIZE AND TYPE - ELIGIBILITY

15.1 Table 1 – Property Size and Type Eligibility

Bedroom Size guidelines = single 6.5m2, double = 9.5m2								1x double, 1 x single	2 x doubles	1x double, 2x singles	2x doubles 1 x single	
Household / **Property Type**	**Bedsit**	**1 Bed Flat**	**2 Bed Flat**	**1 Bed Bungalow**	**2 Bed Bungalow**	**3 Bed Flat/Maisonette**	**1 Bed House**	**2 Bed 2-3 Person House**	**2 bed 2-4 Person House**	**3 bed 3-4 Person House**	**3 Bed 3-5 Person House**	**4 Bed (or 3 Bed Parlour^)**
Single Person	✓	✓		*			✓					
Single/Couple with overnight access *(subject to affordability assessment)*		✓	**				✓					
Single/Couple who are pregnant 20+ weeks *(no other children)*			✓					✓	✓			
Couple		✓	✓	*			✓					
Non co-habiting couple *(2 single adults)*			✓									
Single Adult/Couple + 1 Child			✓		***			✓	✓			
Single Adult/Couple + 2 Children (Different sex aged under 10)			✓		***				✓			
Single Adult/Couple + 2 Children (Same Sex under 16)			✓						✓			
Single Adult/Couple + 2 Children (Different Sex, at least one child aged over 10)						✓				✓	✓	

Single Adult/Couple + 2 Children (Same sex, at least one child aged over 16)						✓				✓	✓	
Single Adult/Couple + 3 Children (Under 16)						✓				✓	✓	
Single Adult/Couple + 3 Children (Where at least 2 children are over the age of 16)											✓	✓
Single Adult/Couple +4 or more children											✓	✓
Single Person aged over 55 or 60#	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							
Couple aged over 55 or 60#		✓	✓	✓	✓							
Non Co-habiting Couple aged over 55 or 60#			✓		✓							
Single tenant (partner RSL) aged over 55 or 60# wishing to downsize & move to older persons accommodation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓				
Single/Couple tenant (partner RSL) aged over 55 or 60# wishing to downsize (from a General Needs property) & move to older persons / smaller accommodation		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓				

Notes:

- Single person households or households who have overnight access to children will be subject to an affordability assessment before an allocation of a 2 bedroom property.
- Under housing benefit/universal credit criteria households will be allocated one bedroom for two children of the same sex under the age of 16, or two children under the age of 10 regardless of their sex [further information is available at www.gov.uk or www.understanduniversalcredit.gov.uk
- Some bungalows are suitable for applicants under 60 with a disability (within the meaning of the Equality Act 2010) who can demonstrate that a bungalow (and no other type of property) meets their needs. These bungalows will be clearly identified on the property advert and further assessment of applicants for this property type will be required.
- Note: The Homesearch partners reserve the right to relax property size criteria in Table 1.

Key:

* Single/Couple under 60 with a disability (within the meaning of the Equality Act 2010) are eligible to bid on selected bungalows. Further assessment will be required. Refer to 10.2.2 above.

**Single/ Couple with children who do not reside but stay overnight will be given equal priority for 2 bedroom flats above ground floor, subject to an affordability assessment.

***An additional bedroom may be awarded to those with a disability subject to relevant proof e.g. carer's allowance or GP letter.

^ Parlour definition: see section 14.5 in the Homesearch Policy.

	# Age restrictions apply on older person's accommodation and these may be either 55 or 60 (also see Section 38.2 of the Homesearch Policy). Sheltered housing will only be allocated to applicants over the age of 55 or 60 (exact age criteria dependent on which Homesearch landlord rents the accommodation). The age restrictions are based on a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim as per section 52A(2) of the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 ✓ Single applicants aged over 55 or 60 will only be considered for 2 bed accommodation after all couples in bands 1 to 3 have been considered. ✓As long as the property they are moving to is of a smaller size than their current home, transfer applicants (see Section 3.1 (b) of the Homesearch Policy for a definition) are allowed to under-occupy by one bedroom in their new home.

16. BANDING SUMMARY

16.1 Table 2 – Banding summary

Emergency Band - Urgent Housing Need
➢ Special Management Lettings ➢ People Occupying Unsanitary or Unfit Housing ➢ Exceptional Medical Need ➢ Exceptional Welfare Need ➢ Community Landlord Contract-holders Requiring Decanting
Band 1 - High Housing Need
➢ Lacking 2 or More Bedrooms ➢ Care Leavers / Child in Need ➢ Vacating Adapted or Disabled Property ➢ Transfers Under-Occupying by One or More Bedrooms ➢ Successors who are Under-occupying ➢ Move on from Supported or Shared Housing ➢ High Medical Need ➢ High Welfare Need ➢ Major Disrepair ➢ Foster Carers, Adoptive Parents, Adult Placement and Supported Lodging Providers ➢ Social Services Referral ➢ Displaced Agricultural Workers ➢ Owed Section 75 Homeless Duty ➢ 2 Children Under 5 Years Old, above a Ground Floor Flat and no Lift ➢ Leaving Armed Forces
BAND 2 - Medium Housing Need
➢ Lacking One Bedroom ➢ Intentionally Homeless ➢ Medium Medical Need ➢ Medium Welfare Need ➢ Split Families ➢ 1 Child Under 12 Years Old, above a Ground Floor Flat and no Lift ➢ Caravan Dwellers ➢ Private renting & receiving Discretionary Housing Payment ➢ Families sharing facilities ➢ Owed Section 66 or 73 Homeless Duties
BAND 3 - Low Housing Need
➢ Low Medical Need ➢ Low Welfare Need ➢ Sharing facilities ➢ Reduced Banding due to Refusals 1 ➢ Adequately Housed Private contract-holders with a local connection ➢ Minor Disrepair
BAND 4 - No Housing Need
➢ Home Owners ➢ Serving Armed Forces Personnel ➢ Serving Prisoners ➢ Sufficient Financial Resources ➢ Reduced Banding Due to Refusals 2 ➢ No Local Connection

- Adequately housed community landlord contract-holders

Notes:

- Band is awarded from date of entry into the band. Or alternatively from the date evidence is supplied, when a change of circumstances is received.
- If banding priority decreases, as a result of a change in circumstances, banding date goes from original Homesearch registration date.
- If priority increases following a change of circumstances and then later on decreases after another change of circumstances, the banding date goes from the date the initial increase in priority occurred.
- See Appendix 9 for further information on banding criteria.
- See Section 9 in the Homesearch Policy for shortlisting criteria.

Appendix 1 – Rural Allocations Policy

1. Purpose and application

1.1 The purpose of the Rural Allocation Policy (RAP) is to ensure that affordable homes developed in rural Monmouthshire benefit local people in housing need and that allocation policies reflect this. This policy is to be used in addition to the Homesearch Policy or succeeding allocations policy for letting of affordable housing in Monmouthshire.

1.2 The Community Landlord requires assurance for its future business security that the local connection policy will not be allowed to cause empty properties. There is flexibility built into this policy to allow a broadening of both occupancy levels and geographical connection in order to allow properties to be tenanted swiftly and therefore ensure that the affordable housing resource is utilised.

1.3 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 rural housing developments and on all subsequent lettings of these properties (once identified via the first round of lettings).

1.4 The RAP applies to all rural areas of Monmouthshire. The areas not covered by the policy are listed below:

- The main settlements of Abergavenny, Caldicot, Chepstow, Monmouth and Usk
- The settlements of Croesonen, Llanfoist, Llantilio Pertholey and Mardy within Abergavenny
- The settlement of Wyesham within Monmouth
- The Severnside settlements of Magor, Rogiet and Undy
- All areas within the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park[1] including Clydach, Crucorney, Gilwern, Govilon and Llanelly Hill

1.5 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.

2. Geographical Criteria

2.1 The aim of this policy is to ensure that households with strong links to rural areas are given the opportunity to remain in these communities thus helping to maintain sustainability in the future. The local qualification will be based on villages within the Community Council boundary where the properties are located and then will cascade out to the immediately adjoining communities using community council boundaries.

2.2 As there are some rural areas in Monmouthshire where development is unlikely due to land supply and topography, the Council reserves the right to widen qualification to a neighbouring Community Council on occasions where there is a proven local need.

3. Under Occupation

3.1 Priority will be given to applicants who have a local connection and who fully

occupy a property in line with local housing allowance size criteria. If there are no applicants meeting that criteria then one spare room may be accepted and two considered according to circumstances. Under occupation by two spare rooms will not normally be allowed, however in exceptional circumstances this may be agreed by the Homesearch Partnership.

4. Rural Housing Lettings Criteria

4.1 Priority will be given, in the first instance, to applicants that meet the following criteria:
Applicants with a housing need who have lived in the community council area for a period of at least 5 years at the time of application, or in the past.

Priority will then be awarded equally to the following criteria:

(a) 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.
(b) Applicants who are principally (>20 hours per week) employed in the community (defined as the Community Council area).
(c) 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).

4.2 Applicants will be prioritised using the above criteria and will be shortlisted by housing need in accordance with the Homesearch Policy. If more than one applicant has the same priority, the applicant who has lived (or previously lived) in the community council area for the longest and will fully occupy the property, will be given priority.

4.3 Households already living in affordable housing and considered to be adequately housed in the community council area or neighbouring community council areas, (should cascading out be necessary) will not be eligible to apply unless they are downsizing.

4.4 In the event there is no suitable applicant from the community council area, these criteria will then be applied in the same order to applicants from immediately adjoining community council areas as set out above. Following this, any remaining properties will be allocated in line with the Homesearch Policy.

4.5 It should be noted however that the Homesearch Partnership reserves the right to nominate applicants for rural vacancies who do not meet the above criteria, where it is considered that the circumstances of the individual case warrant special consideration. Such cases can only be considered for the offer once the decision has been agreed by the Homesearch Partners and the Strategic Housing Manager.

5. Evidence of Local Connection

5.1 In all cases, at the request of the Community Landlords, the applicant will be expected to demonstrate their local connection within 7 working days of an offer being made by the Community Landlord. If no verifiable evidence has been produced within that time period the applicant may be overlooked and the household next in line will be made an offer. Applicants living at home with parents and looking to leave home for the first time would be expected to provide evidence to show that they have a local connection. This may include evidence

that their parents have achieved the local connection. Suitable supporting evidence includes:

- Bank statements
- Utility bills
- Medical registration documents
- Education records

5.2 If an applicant does not have any of the above forms of supporting evidence we may accept:

- Letter confirming the necessary local connection from the Clerk on behalf of the Community Council
- Letter confirming the necessary local connection from the local Elected Member

5.3 Applicants not living in the Community, but who are applying for reasons of employment must provide evidence to show that they are principally employed (working > 20 hours) within the area, including the date of commencement of employment and confirmation from their employer of employment status, and whether this is likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

5.4 Applicants not living in the Community, but who are applying for reasons of providing support to a dependent child or adult or receiving support from a principal carer must provide evidence such as:

- Social Services care package
- Carer's allowance/attendance allowance
- GP letter

5.5 Applicants will also be asked to consent to the landlord making enquiries of the electoral register, council tax records and Experian credit checks should it be necessary to confirm local connection.

5.6 An offence may be committed if an applicant knowingly gives false information or knowingly withholds information which has been reasonably requested. An offence is also committed if the applicant allows a third party to provide false information on his or her behalf, or at his or her instigation.

5.7 Where there is suspicion, or an allegation has been made, that a person has either provided false information or has withheld information, the application will be suspended pending the outcome of an investigation. If the outcome of any investigation shows that false information was provided or was deliberately withheld, then the application may be removed from the register and there will be no right to re- register for a period of 12 months. Applicants giving false information may be subject to investigation through the organisation's fraud processes.

6. Future Voids

6.1 The properties identified for each site will remain ear marked for all future lettings. Therefore, all future lettings for these properties will also be carried out as per this policy.

7. Monitoring and Review

7.1 The Council will ensure that lettings through this policy will not dominate the main allocation scheme. The Rural Allocations Policy will be monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure that overall reasonable preference for allocation in Monmouthshire is given to applicants in the reasonable preference groups.

7.2 The policy will also be monitored in order to assess its impact, the outcome of which will be regularly reported.

7.3 The policy will also be monitored to ensure that void properties are re-let to qualifying households who satisfy the Rural Allocations Policy.

8. Rural Allocations Policy - Cascading Process

8.1 The table below shows the main villages within each community council area and neighbouring community council areas that rural properties will be offered out to.

Community Council	Villages within Community Council	Neighbouring Community Councils
Caerwent	Caerwent Crick Dinham Llanvair Discoed St Brides Netherwent	Mathern Portskewett Shirenewton
Crucorney[2]	Bwlch Trewyn & Old Castle Cwmcoy Forest & Ffwddog Llanvihangel Crucorney Pandy	Grosmont Skenfrith
Devauden	Devauden Kilgwwg Itton Llanvihangel Tor-Y-Mynydd	Llantrisant Fawr Mathern Mitchel Troy Shirenewton St. Arvans Trellech United Wye Valley
Gobion Fawr	Llanddewi Rhyddech Llanfair Cilgydyn Llangattock-Nigh-Usk Llanvapley	Goetre Fawr Llanarth Llanfoist Fawr Skenfrith Whitecastle
Goetre Fawr	Goetre Wharf Goytre Llanover Nant-Y-Deri	Gobion Fawr Llanarth Llanbadoc Llanfoist Fawr
Grosmont	Grosmont Llangattock Lingoed	Crucorney Skenfrith
Llanarth	Bryngwyn Clytha Kemeys Commander & Llancayo Llanarth	Gobion Fawr Goetre Fawr Llanbadoc Mitchel Troy Raglan Whitecastle
Llanbadoc	Glascoed Little Mill Llanbadoc	Goetre Fawr Llanarth Llangybi

	Monkswood	Llantrissant Fawr
Llanelly[2]	Clydach Darrenfelin Gilwern	Llanfoist Fawr
Llanfoist Fawr[2]	Govilon Llanfoist Llanellen	Gobion Fawr Goetre Fawr Llanelly
Llangybi	Coed-Y-Paen Llandegfedd Llangattock Nigh Caerleon Llangybi Llanhennock Tredunnock	Llanbadoc Llantrisant Fawr
Llantrisant Fawr	Gwernsey Llangwm Llansoy Llantrisant	Devauden Llanbadoc Llangybi Mitchel Troy Raglan Shirenewton
Mathern	Mathern Mounton Pwllmeyric	Caerwent Devauden Shirenewton Portskewett
Mitchel Troy	Cwmcarvan Dingestow Mitchel Troy Pen-y-Clawdd Tregare Wonastow	Devauden Llanarth Llantrisant Fawr Raglan Trellech United Whitecastle
Portskewett (inc Sudbrook)	Leechpool Portskewett Village Sudbrook	Caerwent Mathern
Raglan	Gwehelog Kingcoed Llandenny Raglan	Llanarth Llantrisant Fawr Mitchel Troy
Shirenewton	Earlswood & Newchurch Shirenewton & Mynyddbach	Caerwent Devauden Llantrisant Fawr Mathern
Skenfrith	Cross Ash Llanvetherine Skenfrith	Crucorney Gobion Fawr Grosmont Whitecastle
St. Arvans	St Arvans	Devauden Wye Valley
Trellech United	Catbrook Llanishen	Devauden Mitchel Troy

	Penallt The Narth Trellech Grange Trellech Town Whitebrook	Wye Valley
Whitecastle	Llangattock Vibon Avel Llanvihangel-Ystern-Llewern Newcastle Penrhos Rockfield & St Maughans Whitecastle	Gobion Fawr Llanarth Mitchel Troy Skenfrith
Wye Valley	Llandogo Tintern	Devauden St. Arvans Trellech United

[1] Properties within the BBNP are subject to individual allocations criteria which will be detailed in the Section 106 agreement of the respective planning permission

[2]only applies to areas outside the BBNP

Appendix 2 – Bypassing Policy and Procedure

1. Introduction
1.1 Bypassing means that (in some limited situations) a Homesearch partner landlord can 'bypass' the highest banded applicant who has bid on a property; so they won't make an offer to let that one particular property to that person (when they would otherwise have received the offer). The reasons this can happen are explained in this document.
2. Policy Principles
2.1 All of the landlords that let properties via Homesearch follow this Policy and Procedure. If there were any exceptions to this, it will be recorded and reviewed and the Bypassing Policy and Procedure would be updated as appropriate. We are committed to minimising the number of bypasses made.
2.2 This document applies to all Homesearch applicants.
2.3 Other key principles include: supporting equal treatment for all applicants; being sensitive to applicants' individual needs and acute housing need and tailoring our approach where reasonable do so; keeping a record of bypasses and the reason for them; monitoring and reviewing them regularly and having a fair appeals process.
2.4 We will not routinely notify the applicant that they have been bypassed for a property unless they raise a specific query.
2.5 Applicants will not end up being bypassed because of a lack of pre-offer planning, resulting in an offer not being made because of a lack of information (excluding where an applicant does not supply requested information). Nor because an appropriate support package hasn't been offered/facilitated by the Homesearch landlord who owns the bypassed property.
2.6 Each bypass will be assessed on a case by case basis with the relevant and available information taken into account.
2.7 Joint applicants will be bypassed, where only one applicant or member of their household causes the bypass. If the applicants decide the person causing a bypass will no longer form part of a household, a Homesearch landlord has discretion to proceed with an offer on a case by case basis (providing supporting evidence is sufficient).
2.8 Bypassing of rapid rehousing applicants (see Appendix 12): bypasses and the reasons why will be reported to the Council at the time of bypass.
3. Bypassing Reasons
3.1 **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 an occupation contract.
3.2 **Rural Allocation Policy/Local Letting Plans (see Appendix 1 and Appendix 10:** 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.
3.3 **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.
3.4 **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 property is not suitable for their support/medical/mobility needs (including longer-term needs) e.g. the property they have bid for cannot be adapted to meet their needs or it has unsuitable communal facilities or they are likely be too vulnerable (e.g. lack mental capacity) or pose a risk to themselves or others (e.g. MAPPA case). Another reason could be a recent history of significant anti-social behaviour (from the applicant or their household members) which would make them unsuitable for the property.
3.5 **Rent Arrears/Debt:** Applicants can be bypassed where they have current or recoverable (non-statue barred) former debt with a Homesearch partner (which they can't pay in full). This would be where the arrears/recoverable debt are above £500. We would exclude arrears included in a Debt Recovery Order as applicable. NB: also see Appendix 3 – if arrears are above £1000 the applicant could be suspended and so won't be able to bid for a property; £500 to £999 they should be demoted. An applicant won't be bypassed if they've kept to the actions given to them as part of their suspension/demotion – see Appendix 3 (or we consider there's exceptional circumstances – as agreed by the Suspensions Panel). Applicants with a housing related debt of less than £500 rent should have agreed to a repayment plan (where they can't pay the debt in full) and there should be evidence that they are actively following the plan. Statutory homeless applicants will generally not be bypassed (although we reserve the right to do this on a case by case basis i.e. if there is another bypass reason/reasons considered serious enough). Where information of pending or outstanding chargeable debt with a total value of over £500 only emerges after an offer has been made, that offer may be withdrawn by the relevant Homesearch partner. This could be applicable, for example, to charges for repairs works/court costs. The case would first be referred to the Suspension Panel (see Appendix 3) to agree the withdrawal.
3.6 **Affordability:** Where it cannot be proved that welfare benefits will be paid to an applicant to sustain a contract or a person hasn't been employed for a minimum of three months (with an income sufficient to sustain a contract) or does not have sufficient enough savings to sustain a contract for at least 12 months, an applicant will be bypassed.
3.7 **Information is Pending:** Homesearch partners have not received information requested from an applicant in conjunction with the Homesearch Allocation Procedures.
3.8 **Property Advert Withdrawn:** Some properties advertised for letting may need to be withdrawn for example because it is urgently needed for an emergency (e.g. a contract-holder has lost their home due to fire) or because the previous contract-holder has decided not to leave their home and retracted their notice to end their contract.
3.9 **Condition of Contract:** Where an applicant is transferring home and an inspection is carried out and the current property they are leaving has been damaged/neglected.
3.10 **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.

3.11 **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).

4. Sharing Information

4.1 We will work collaboratively with other partners e.g. the police and probation services and other agencies to share information as appropriate. Also see Appendix 6.

5. Information We'll Consider Before Bypassing

5.1 The type of information to be considered (not exhaustive):

- Details of any long-term illness, health problems or disability that requires specific or specialist housing, care or support.
- Details of other care and support needs, for example because of vulnerability due to learning difficulties.
- Details of proposed, existing and previous packages of care provision provided by statutory or other bodies where known.
- Relevant and reasonable information with regard to previous history of anti-social behaviour that might impact on the safety of the community.
- Any other criminal history.
- Any mental capacity assessment (e.g. by social services). Where a person is going to be bypassed for an allocation because there is evidence an applicant lacks mental capacity, social services will be approached to discuss a capacity assessment urgently, to inform the bypass decision. An allocation will be held until a decision is reached.
- Type of accommodation moving from and any additional available accommodation history.

5.2 Where a 'high risk' assessment is carried out and there are serious risks which relate to the applicant being placed in a particular property or area. For example the police advise the move to the property should not take place (due to criteria in Section 3.14 of the main Homesearch Policy). Each Homesearch partner should operate their own internal risk assessment controls (to reduce the risk) – which will address which staff need to be included in the risk assessment and the deadlines given to external agencies to respond. Both the property and person will be risk assessed together.

6. Appeals Against a Bypass

6.1 An applicant can appeal against the decision to the Homesearch partner that made the bypass decision. A successful appeal will not result in the applicant being made an offer of that property, owing to the short timescales within which properties have to be let. It could, however, enable the applicant to bid in the future and not be bypassed under the same circumstances (assuming the appeal is upheld and there is no change in circumstances).

6.2 Homesearch partners will liaise with any advocate/support professional on behalf of an applicant to resolve an appeal (with the relevant permission in place).

7. Responsibilities

7.1 The overall responsibility for this policy lies with Monmouthshire County Council's Strategic Housing Manager, and the Homesearch Partnership.

7.2 It is down to each Homesearch partner to decide when to bypass the applicant for their property, liaise with the Suspension Panel (see Appendix 3) if needed and also resolve Bypass issues. The Homesearch landlord bypassing an applicant would seek to deal with any complaint informally before escalating to Monmouthshire County Council.
7.3 Each partner landlord should notify the Homesearch Partnership of bypasses.
7.4 Monmouthshire County Council/Homesearch will provide sufficient training for staff of the partner landlords who implement this policy and procedure.
8. Monitoring and Reporting
8.1 Monitoring will be performed by staff representing each partner landlord that forms a part of the Homesearch Partnership.
8.2 We will monitor the number of bypasses, any deviation from this document, the reasons for bypassing and any appeals and their outcome.
9. Review
9.1 This document will be reviewed every three years, or earlier if required in light of changes in the law or good practice guidance.

Appendix 3 – Suspensions and Demotions Policy and Procedure

1. Introduction
1.1 This document describes the circumstances in which an applicant can be **suspended** from the Homesearch register (can't bid for a home) or have their banding **demoted** (lower banding, so much less likely to get a home). All of the landlords that let properties via Homesearch follow this Policy and Procedure. It means that all Homesearch partners have a common approach to dealing with suspensions and demotions that also aligns with the Welsh Government's Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness.
1.2 This document also describes how long Homesearch will suspend/demote and what a housing applicant needs to do to have the suspension/demotion removed – as well as the entire process that Homesearch follows to suspend/demote.
2. Policy Principles
2.1 We are committed to minimising the number of suspensions/demotions we make; ensuring fair and equal treatment for all applicants; supporting sustainable lettings/occupation contracts and avoiding evictions; ensuring applicants are aware as soon as possible how they need to address their behaviour; avoiding using 'prescribed' actions (the actions that need to be undertaken to remove a suspension/demotion) that are unreasonable for an applicant to meet; having an open and transparent appeals process; being sensitive to applicants' individual needs and acute housing need and tailoring our approach where reasonable do so. We will also unsuspend applicants/remove their demotion at the earliest opportunity, once issue(s) have been properly addressed.
2.2 Each application will be assessed on a case by case basis, with the relevant and available information taken into account.
2.3 A **joint** letting will not be agreed where one applicant or someone in their household is suspended.
3. Scope
3.1 Applicants subject to Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements - MAPPA (Level 3) are exempt from this Policy and Procedure due to the need to manage these applicants and the statutory duty placed on MCC as a partner to MAPPA and other Homesearch partners' duty to co-operate. This document applies to all other Homesearch applicants, including existing contract-holders who wish to transfer, as well as other applicants who are not currently our contract-holders.
3.2 For information on when applicants are **ineligible** to go onto the Homesearch register (e.g. no recourse to public funds) refer to Section 2.1 of the main Homesearch Policy and Appendix 7).
4. Reason for Suspension/Demotion
4.1 An applicant can be treated as ineligible for an allocation of housing (be suspended from bidding) if it's in line with the 'three stage test below. They would be suspended due to a household's unacceptable behaviour (e.g. serious debt, ASB, crime/violence, contract fraud e.g. obtaining an occupation contract by deception or allowing the condition of a rented property to deteriorate beyond a level deemed reasonable – not an exhaustive list).
4.2 **Demoted banding** can be applied for the same reasons, where the circumstances aren't serious enough to meet the three-stage test below. Alternatively, demotion can also take place where an applicant refuses a certain numbers of offers – see Section 5.6 below.

5. Applying a Suspension and Demotion
5.1 The applicant will be notified in writing and it will be explained why they have been suspended/demoted, how long it is for, what they need to do to address the behaviour e.g. engage with support services or sustain a contract without any issue for 6 or 12 months (not an exhaustive list), and how to inform the Homesearch Team that their behaviour has been sufficiently addressed to remove the suspension/demotion. They will also be advised of the appeals procedure. If considered necessary (e.g. literacy issues) this information will also be given verbally and/or translated. This will be done within 48 hours of a decision being made. At the point of suspension Homesearch will offer a support referral to each applicant and provide other bespoke advice e.g. if domestic abuse is suspected, applicants will receive signposting information. For independent advice, applicants will be advised to contact their local Citizen's Advice Bureau, a solicitor or Shelter Cymru at the same time.
5.2 Suspension/demotion will be implemented at the point the application is registered unless any further information has come to light during the course of a 'live' application. NB: it will be for the required Homesearch partner to show that this information was not available at the time of registration or would not have come to light under normal investigative procedures. Failure to show this may result in the applicant not being suspend/demoted.
5.3 Suspension – the 'three stage test': 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): • Was the applicant's (or household member's) behaviour serious enough to entitle a local authority to obtain a possession order on a secure contract in the same circumstances? Normally an outright order should be expected. • Was the behaviour serious enough to render the applicant or a household member unsuitable to be a contract-holder? • 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 contract-holder of one of the Homesearch partners when the unacceptable behaviour occurred to warrant suspension.
5.4 Each **suspension** case will be confirmed by the 'Suspension Panel'. Each **demotion** will be decided on a case by case basis by a Homesearch Officer – see Section 4 above. Also see Section 11 below for appeal process. Sanctions/or appeals/reviews of sanctions should be deferred for the appropriate amount of time, if the Suspension Panel/Homesearch Officer requires further information.
5.5 Demotions will be applied until an applicant has taken the required/prescribed actions stated by Homesearch. A suspension will be for 3, 6 or 12 months or possibly for another period of time, as decided by the Suspension Panel (who will take into consideration current and past behaviour to decide the timeframe, as well as the prescribed action(s).
5.6 Where an applicant with a Band 1 homeless duty is made one reasonable offer of suitable accommodation, which they then refuse, their banding can be demoted. All other applicants can make two refusals (in a twelve month period) before demotion is considered/applied. Applicants that come under 'reasonable preference' criteria (under section 167 of the Housing Act 1996), may be demoted to Band 3 These would be: homeless applicants; those occupying insanitary, overcrowded or unsatisfactory housing; people who need to move on medical or welfare grounds

(including disability) and people who need to move to a particular locality within Monmouthshire where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or others). Any other applicants can be demoted to Band 4.
5.7 If an applicant with Emergency Band and Band 1 (high welfare need only) fails to bid after 3 months and a suitable property has become available during that time, Homesearch reserves the right to reduce an applicant's priority/banding. This will be decided case by case, as taking this action may be counter-productive e.g. the applicant in the emergency band needs to be permanently moved out of their social housing property into a new home.
5.8 See Suspension procedure checklist
6. Applying a Demotion/Suspension for Debt
6.1 Suspension and Demotion: Private and Social housing related debt to consider: rent arrears/fees and charges/court costs and bed and breakfast charge arrears (all former or current). Consideration should also be given to arrears caused by welfare benefit reforms. Debt also has to be non-statute barred (less than 6 years old) to warrant suspension/demotion. We would exclude debt included in a Debt Recovery Order.
6.2 For arrears/debt of £1,000 or above, or 8 weeks net private rent an applicant may be suspended and unable to bid unless they have: entered into a repayment plan with the former and current landlord; made a minimum of 13 consecutive weekly payments at an agreed level and repaid a minimum of 25% of the debt (although the Homesearch partners reserve the right to relax this criteria in exceptional circumstances) e.g. questions toc onsider may be is the person homeless? What are their current circumstances? Can they realistically be expected to meet this criteria? What was happening in the person's live when the debt was accrued? Were they a vulnerable young person? Had they been in the care system? Were they experiencing domestic abuse? (not an exhaustive list). The repayment plan and payments should have begun no later than 14 days of the letter/email Homesearch send explaining that the applicant is being suspended from the register.
6.3 Rent arrears/debt: We may **demote** an applicant for arrears/debt above £500, or above 4 weeks private rent, and below £1000. The same criteria as in Section 6.2 will apply i.e. generally if there's 13 consecutive weekly payments at an agreed level and repaid a minimum of 25%of the debt then demotion won't apply.
6.4 Regular agreed payments should be maintained up to the point of an offer of accommodation. If this is not the case, the applicant will be given 48 hours to make up the missed payments otherwise the offer of a property will likely be withdrawn and the demotion/suspension re-applied.
6.5 Only debts that are both recoverable and not statute barred (less than 6 years old) will be taken into consideration. Property related debts apply to both the applicant, spouse, joint applicant and partner of their prospective household.
6.6 Clearing the debt circumvents the payment plan criteria, including where Monmouthshire Council's Housing Options Team uses funds to settle the debt.
7. Further Criteria to Consider
7.1 A range of factors may be considered, which could affect a suspension/demotion being applied (not exhaustive): the circumstances of the applicant and their household; reasons for the behaviour; whether there are unmet support needs; what advice and assistance had been offered to the applicant and what action they could have taken to amend their behaviour and the nature of the behaviour. We'll also consider: The length of time that has elapsed since the unacceptable behaviour

occurred; whether there has been an improvement in the behaviour and whether there are any mitigating circumstances.
7.2 We reserve the right to give homelessness/vulnerable households more leeway – on a case by case basis e.g. Housing (Wales) Act 2014 and commencement of section 75(3) i.e. local authorities are required to secure accommodation for households with children and certain young people, who are in priority need and found 'intentionally homeless'.
7.3 It may also support a better outcome to help a transferring contract-holder to downsize (to support affordability) and decide to hold off on demotion/suspension on a case by case basis.
8. Removal of the Demotion/Suspension
8.1 Prescribed actions to remove the demotion/suspension: a bespoke suite of support will be used for different groups of applicants, depending on their housing need, current property tenure and local connection. The onus is on the applicant to inform Homesearch that the prescribed action(s) have been resolved (although in some instances Homesearch partners will also undertake some activities to check/confirm this, as further detailed in Appendix 3). Applicants that are considered vulnerable (using the same criteria as assisted bidding) will be contacted by Homesearch periodically to discuss their prescribed actions.
8.2 Once the suspension/demotion has been established if an applicant considers their behaviour no longer warrants the demotion/suspension, then they can request a review anytime. Homesearch will consider removing the suspension/demotion if prescribed action(s) are resolved before the set timeframe has elapsed. Again the onus will generally be on the applicant to request a review and prove that their behaviour has improved sufficiently and been sustained.
8.3 Current contract-holders seeking to transfer (see Section 1.3.1 (b) in the Homesearch Policy for a definition of transferring contract-holders) - the applicant's current Homesearch landlord will undertake 6 monthly rent account/debt checks to consider if the suspension can be lifted.
8.4 Demotion: After demotion ends an applicant will be returned to the appropriate band (based on current housing need). Applicants who were demoted to a lower band will retain their original registration date whilst demoted. However, when the demotion is lifted they will be returned to the correct band from the date that the demotion was lifted. All time previously accrued will be lost.
8.5 Suspension: Applicants will not be allowed to bid until their suspension has been removed. The effective date on the Housing Register will be the date that the suspension was lifted.
9. Cancelled Application
9.1 If the application of a suspend/demoted applicant is cancelled then their suspension/demotion will still remain in force for the remainder of the time after they reapply - unless there has been a significant change in circumstances. Homesearch would investigate and consider whether prescribed actions had been met at the point of re-application, or if a change of circumstances form was received.
9.2 Homesearch/Suspension Panel would investigate at the time of a reapplication to consider whether prescribed actions have been met.
10. Hibernated Cases
10.1 After 12 months, if the prescribed actions have not been met or the applicant doesn't contact Homesearch to update, suspended applications will be 'hibernated' i.e. they will become inactive and Homesearch will no longer do anything with the application. Homesearch will make further checks at this time and contact the

applicant by text/phone to discuss progress and check whether further help can be provided (and also ask if the applicant wants to remain on the register). Also see Section 8.1 above.
10.2 Current contract-holders seeking to transfer (see Section 1.3.1 (b) in the Homesearch Policy for a definition of transferring contract-holders) - the applicant's current Homesearch landlord will need to confirm the level of debt still outstanding at the point of hibernation.
10.3 MCC's Housing Options Team will provide 6 monthly updates to Homesearch about hibernated homeless applicants.
10.4 See Hibernated / Suspension guide review
11. Appealing a Suspension/Demotion
11.1 Applicants can exercise their right to an appeal/review verbally or in writing. The applicant must request this within 28 days of the decision letter/email being sent. Homesearch will offer/facilitate support for vulnerable adults as appropriate.
11.2 The appeal/circumstances when the suspension/demotion will be removed are to be decided on a case by case basis. In the first instance any additional information should be sent to Homesearch to enable them to informally reassess the decision. Known circumstances at the time of the review will be taken into consideration. Applicants will be given at least 5 working days to provide further information. If the demotion/suspension stands and the applicant is still dissatisfied, the appeal will be heard by the Suspension Panel (cases will also be brought back to the panel when new information is supplied). If the decision is upheld at panel and there's no new information available/pending and an applicant is still dissatisfied, it will be passed to MCC to make a final decision within 28 days (MCC will investigate and obtain further information if needed).
11.3 As a General Guide: There should have been no cause for complaint against the applicant (or members of their prospective household) for a continuous period (also factoring in the severity of the behaviour) from the point where action has been agreed with the applicant to address their behaviour or other identified problems.
12. Sharing Information
12.1 We will work collaboratively with other partners e.g. the police and probation services and other agencies to share information as appropriate. Also see the Sharing Information Section in the Homesearch Policy and Procedure.
13. Responsibilities
13.1 The overall responsibility for this policy lies with Monmouthshire County Council's Strategic Housing Manager and the Homesearch Partnership. Decisions will be ratified by the Manager of the Monmouthshire Homesearch Team.
13.2 Monmouthshire Homesearch Team co-ordinates the Suspension panel. All Homesearch partners are responsible for submitting information relating to their tenants unacceptable behaviour and also to provide evidence of extenuating circumstances. If a Homesearch Officer suspends for arrears/debt and sends to Panel to agree, where the debt relates to a former contract at a Homesearch landlord, it would be down to that landlord to check and submit any information about mitigating circumstances that might influence a decision.
13.3 Each partner will nominate a person to attend the Suspension Panel.
13.4 The role of the Panel is to scrutinise/change decisions. They meet on a quarterly basis (or more frequently if agreed).

13.5 Suspension decisions will be made on the information available to the Panel. Insufficient information will result in the case being deferred and reconsidered via email when information is available. For a decision to be upheld, it has to be agreed by the majority of the Suspension Panel.
13.6 MCC/Homesearch will provide sufficient training for staff of the MHR landlords who implement this policy and procedures.
14. Monitoring and Reporting
14.1 Monitoring will be performed by the Homesearch Partnership.
14.2 MCC and Homesearch will monitor: the number of suspensions/demotions and a breakdown of the reasons; the average length of time applicants are suspend/demoted by reason; the number of suspend/demoted applicants as a percentage of the total number of applicants on the MHR; the number of appeals of suspension/demotions; the number of appeals upheld and decisions over-turned by reason; the length of time between receipt of the appeal letter and notification of the appeal outcome.
14.3 Emails from the panel members will be used as evidence of a decision being made and maintained on files to provide an appropriate audit trail.
15. Review
15.1 The Council will review this policy 3 years, or earlier if required in light of changes in the law or good practice guidance.

Appendix 4 – Lettings Quotas

1. Lettings quotas

1.1. Lettings quotas are not applied at the moment, these are reviewed at quarterly operational Homesearch Partnership meetings and can be reintroduced if agreed by the Partnership and the Strategic Housing Manager.

1.2. Lettings quotas are described in Section 3.16 of the main Homesearch Policy. Categories of Homesearch applicants that quotas may be applied to as a proportion of lettings are:

a) Applicants seeking new social housing in Monmouthshire who are in housing need (excluding homeless households)

b) Homeless applicants owed a full duty by MCC under Section 75 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 (Band 1), including those owed a duty under Section 66 or 73 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 (Band 2)

c) Contract-holders transferring between community landlord occupation contracts in Monmouthshire

Appendix 5 – Customer Commitments

- ✓ Consider every application received.
- ✓ Homesearch is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and making sure all applicants are treated fairly and without unlawful discrimination.
- ✓ Make sure the Partnership meets its legal obligations for the allocation of social housing.
- ✓ Provide free advice and information about the right to apply for accommodation.
- ✓ Provide free assistance to applicants who may have difficulty when making an application, for example help completing the application for accommodation form.
- ✓ Make sure any information we provide is easy to understand and is readily accessible.
- ✓ Provide information to all applicants on what types of accommodation are available throughout the County.
- ✓ Supply information to the applicant to enable them to ascertain how long they are likely to have to wait before being offered accommodation.
- ✓ Advise those applicants with low housing need that they are extremely unlikely to be offered social housing through this scheme.
- ✓ Make the Homesearch Policy available at www.monmouthshirehomesearch.co.uk and provide a copy to any household that requests one.
- ✓ We will be sensitive to individual needs and tailor our services and approach accordingly.
- ✓ To re-let all vacant homes that are ready to let as quickly as possible.
- ✓ Ensure that all information provided by applicants will be treated in strictest confidence, adhering to the Data Protection Act 2018 and associated legislation and guidance.
- ✓ Provide services in Welsh, or direct applicants to where they can access the service in Welsh.
- ✓ Assess the language need of applicants and respond appropriately.
- ✓ Homesearch will respond to all emails and letters sent by applicants within 10 working days; assess and register all housing applications within 10 days of receiving all necessary information.
- ✓ Senior Officers at either the Council or the Homesearch partner organisations will undertake statutory reviews of decisions made in accordance with regulations and aim to complete the review within 56 working days.
- ✓ Homesearch will undertake an initial assessment of medical and welfare cases within 20 working days of receiving all necessary information, including any supporting information from third parties.

Appendix 6 – Sharing Information

1. Data Protection

1.1 All identifiable personal information held on a living person is subject to the General Data Protection Regulations and Data Protection Act 2018 (and the associated legislation and guidance).

1.2 Further information on the legal basis that Homesearch uses to manage and share personal information and the legal rights of data subjects can be found in the declaration that an applicant signs when they compete a Homesearch application form; in the privacy statement available at www.monmouthshirehomesearch.co.uk and also in the privacy notice and Welsh Accord for Sharing Personal Information, which are available at www.monmouthshire.gov.uk or by emailing dataprotection@monmouthshire.gov.uk All Homesearch partners adhere to these documents.

1.3 Information may be shared about individuals and their history irrespective of whether their consent has been obtained in certain circumstances which will include:

a) For the purposes of the prevention or detection of crime.
b) In accordance with the provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (Section 115).
c) Where there is a serious threat to the applicant or a third-party including staff or contractors.
d) Where information is relevant to the management or support duties of the proposed landlord or support organisation to ensure the health and safety of the applicant, a member of his or her household, or a member of staff.
e) To safe-guard children and adults at risk and address child or vulnerable adult protection issues.

1.4 When a data subject seeks to exercise their legal rights under the General Data Protection Regulations and Data Protection Act 2018 all Homesearch partners will cooperate as required.

Appendix 7 – Eligibility and Social Housing

1.1 A Local Authority can't allocate housing to a person from abroad who is not eligible. This is covered in The Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (Wales) Regulations 2014 and its subsequent amendments (note legislation on immigration and related case law is subject to frequent change). Also refer to pages 22 to 30 of the Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness and Annex 4 and 6. **NB: these documents are awaiting updating by the Welsh Government.**

Appendix 8 – Translation Services

1.1 There is likely to be limited need for translation and interpretation services in Monmouthshire for the foreseeable future.

1.2 Services should be secured on an ad-hoc basis, by either Homesearch or the Homesearch Partners as appropriate – depending who is assisting the applicant.

Appendix 9 – Housing Band Guidance

1. Emergency Band – Urgent Housing Need

1.1 This band is for people who have an urgent housing need, who need immediate rehousing and who are unable to resolve their own housing need. We arrange priority within the Emergency Band in the first instance in date order of entry into the Emergency Band and not by the original application date.

1.2 Applicants placed into the Emergency Band will have their circumstances and bidding history reviewed after 3 months to ensure that they are actively bidding for suitable available properties and their situation remains unchanged. Applicants may be downgraded as an outcome of the review.

1.3 **Special Management Lettings**

There may be exceptional circumstances where the only way an exceptionally urgent housing need can be resolved is through the use of management discretion. There is ability in very urgent cases for the Homesearch Partnership to exercise discretion. In the interests of fairness to all applicants these circumstances are kept to an absolute minimum. Such cases will usually involve the following circumstances (not an exhaustive list):

a) Residents of Monmouthshire who are community landlord contract-holders whose homes are damaged by flood, fire or other disaster may be provided with another contract immediately if it is not possible to repair their existing accommodation.
b) Households who on Police advice must be moved as a matter of urgency, e.g. continued harassment, racial harassment, hate crimes, and domestic abuse.
c) An applicant has an exceptional need that is not covered by the allocation scheme. For example, where Child or Public Protection issues require urgent rehousing.
d) To support humanitarian protection/vulnerable persons and resettlement schemes.

1.4 **People Occupying Unsanitary or Unfit Housing**

a) A private sector property either owned or rented where a statutory notice has been issued by the Environmental Health Department that an unfit property is to be demolished under the Housing Act 2004.
b) A private sector contract-holder where the Council's Public Health Team have served a Prohibition of Use Notice on the property or part of the property and the contract-holder cannot continue to occupy.
c) A property owned by either a community or Private landlord where the household is severely overcrowded and Part 10 of Housing Act 1985 relating to overcrowding is not complied with.

1.5 **Exceptional Medical Need**

Where an applicant or a member of their household is unable to continue to occupy their current accommodation due to extreme medical need. Or the applicant is unable to leave hospital due to their current permanent housing being unsuitable to return to will be determined as exceptional medical need. This will be reviewed after 3 months if the applicant has not been offered accommodation.

1.6 **Exceptional Welfare Need**
Where an applicant or a member of their household is unable to continue to occupy their current accommodation due to extreme welfare need. This will be reviewed after 3 months if the applicant has not been offered accommodation.

1.7 **Monmouthshire Community Landlord contract-holders Requiring Permanent Decanting**
Community Landlord contract-holders of the partnership, residing in Monmouthshire, who are required to move due to the Housing Association carrying out major works resulting in their property being demolished or disposed of.

2. BAND 1 – High Housing Need

2.1 This band will be for applicants whose housing need is very urgent and who are unable to resolve their own housing circumstances. We arrange priority in the first instance in date order of entry into Band 1 and not by the original application date. All applicants in this band have equal priority.

2.2 **Lacking 2 or more Bedrooms**
These are applicants who are lacking 2 or more bedrooms in accordance with the size of property eligibility criteria. Applicants who are eligible for 2 different property sizes (i.e. 2 and 3 bedrooms) will be assessed on their minimum entitlement. However, where the children are of different sexes and aged over 10 years, or there are two children with one aged over 10, an additional bedroom over the minimum entitlement will be allowed when making the lacking assessment.

2.3 **Care Leavers and Child in Need**

a) A care leaver is defined as a young person between the age of 16 and 21 who was in the care of MCC at the time of their 16th birthday. It is further extended to include care leavers aged 21 to 25 who have re-engaged with education or when duty ends when leaving education. It is the responsibility of Social Services to advise Monmouthshire Homesearch when a care leaver is eligible for the care leaver's status. However, the care leaver status will only apply until the applicant has achieved a occupation contract and any subsequent applications after this will be determined under the remainder of this policy.
b) We will liaise with Social Services to ensure that Care Leavers do not receive an offer of accommodation until they are ready for independent living.
c) A young person who has been assessed by MCC Social Services as being a Child in Need under Sections 17 or 20 Children Act 1989 following a presentation as a homeless young person and has been assessed as being ready for independent living will be placed into Band 1 from their application date.
d) A care leaver will only be entitled to Band 1 priority when they are registering for housing and will not therefore have held a previous community landlord occupation contract. Therefore, a Care Leaver who is looking for a transfer will be assessed on their current housing need and will not be deemed as a care leaver. However, the care leaver does not need to be applying straight from their placement. This is in recognition that care leavers may

make choices on their accommodation that are not sustainable.

e) Any occupation contract offered to a care leaver will generally be a sole contract in the name of the care leaver.

2.4 **Contract-holders Vacating Adapted or Disabled Accommodation**

A contract-holder/applicant who is releasing a Community Landlord disabled adapted property in Monmouthshire, with no other housing need will be placed in Band 1 if the adaptations are no longer required by the contract-holder/applicant. This would not apply to those contract-holders who have had minor adaptations to their property e.g. level access showers, stair-lifts, ramps, grab rails, etc.

2.5 **Transfers who are Under-Occupying by one or More Bedrooms**

a) To make best use of the housing stock within Monmouthshire we will offer accommodation to contract-holders who are currently under-occupying general needs accommodation by one or more bedrooms. To be considered as a contract-holder under-occupying you must be a current contract-holder of one of the housing partners i.e. Awen Homes; Hedyn; Codi or United Welsh Housing Association.

b) The property size and household size eligibility criteria will be used to determine the level of under-occupation. However, applicants who are eligible for two property sizes will be assessed on their minimum entitlement, therefore maximising the under-occupation. When an applicant wishes to downsize to smaller accommodation, due to Welfare Benefit Reform, any offer of accommodation will only be made if the accommodation is smaller.

2.6 **Successors who are Under-Occupying**

When a Monmouthshire Community Landlord Contract-holder dies and another member of that household has a right to succeed to that contract but the property is deemed too large for that person's needs, the applicant will then be placed in Band 1 in order to facilitate move on. This again makes best use of stock and releases family sized accommodation.

2.7 **Move on from Supported or Shared Housing**

a) In order to be placed into Band 1, applicants must occupy one of the supported housing projects in Monmouthshire that receive funding from MCC's Supporting People Team or MCC's Social Services (this would include where residents are funded by MCC to live in accommodation outside of Monmouthshire). This includes applicants who need to leave supported housing within the next 12 months or in a planned time and who are ready for independent living with or without support.
b) We expect the applicant to accept the support services made available to them in order to ensure the necessary standard of independence is achieved and the contract is sustainable.

2.8 **High Medical Need**

Applicants assessed as having a high medical priority because their medical condition and/or disability is having a significant detrimental effect on their ability to live independently at home will be placed in Band 1.

2.9 **High Welfare Need**

Applicants assessed as having a high welfare need and need to move urgently and where failure to move will cause serious hardship to themselves or others will be placed into Band 1.

2.10 **Major Disrepair**

The applicant is a private contract-holder and the Council's Environmental Health Department has identified a Category 1 hazard under the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System. The applicant will be required to provide written confirmation from the Environmental Health Officer of the disrepair and the action to be taken to rectify the hazard(s). Once the relevant actions have been carried out to address the disrepair issue(s) the application will be reassessed.

2.11 **Foster Carers, Adoptive Parents, Adult Placement and Supported Lodging Providers**

An applicant living in Monmouthshire who has been accepted by a Gwent local authority to be a provider of foster care, an adult placement or supported lodgings or to be an adoptive parent and who require a larger property in order to provide this service/placement. Applicants will only be eligible for one extra bedroom.

2.12 **Social Services Referral**

The above band reason will be used for clients of Social Services who require specialist or supported housing urgently in order for them to resettle into the community or make the transition to independent living. This priority will not be awarded to Social Service clients who currently live independently.

2.13 **Displaced Agricultural Workers**

The Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976 (the 1976 Act) requires MCC to use its best endeavours to provide accommodation for displaced agricultural workers. In order to be placed into Band 1:

a) The dwelling-house from which the worker is displaced is needed to accommodate another agricultural worker
b) The farmer cannot provide suitable alternative accommodation for the

displaced worker and

c) They need to re-house the displaced worker in the interests of efficient agriculture
d) It is important, therefore, for Local Authorities to include in their allocation schemes a policy statement in respect of cases arising under the 1976 Act.

2.14 **Homeless Households Owed a Section 75 Duty by MCC**

Applicants accepted as being owed a duty under Section 75 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 by MCC. To be owed the duty the applicant would need to be considered by MCC to be in priority need and unintentionally homeless. They would also not have suitable accommodation available for occupation, which is likely to last for at least 6 months.

2.15 **2 Children Under 5 Years Old in a Flat and no Lift**

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 the youngest child turns 5 years of age and applicants will then be placed into Band 2.

2.16 **Applicants Leaving the Armed Forces**

a) Applicants will meet this category when leaving the British Armed Forces and are in receipt of their Cessation of Duty Notice or their Testimonial of Military Service Notice and they have a local connection to Monmouthshire. Spouses or civil partners who separate from serving personnel will be considered as meeting this category should they demonstrate they previously normally resided with their spouse/ civil partner as part of their household and they have a local connection to Monmouthshire. This would also apply to bereaved spouses or civil partners of serving British Armed Forces personnel.
b) If the applicant has left the armed forces or armed forces accommodation 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. It is applicable for up to five years post discharge, separation or loss.
c) Applicants who are active participants in operations of the Territorial Army (TA) will not be given extra preference on the Homesearch Register.
d) When assessing sufficient financial resources (also see Section 5.5 below) Homesearch would disregard financial resources connected with being in thearmed forces.

3. BAND 2 – Medium Housing Need

3.1 This band is for applicants who have a housing need and are unable to resolve this need themselves. We arrange priority within Band 2 in the first instance in date order of entry into Band 2 and not by the original application date.

3.2 **Lacking One Bedroom**

a) Applicants who are lacking one bedroom in accordance with the "Size of Property" eligibility criteria. Applicants who are eligible for 2 different property sizes (i.e. 2 and 3 bedrooms) will be assessed on their minimum entitlement. However, where the children are of different sexes and aged

10 years or over, an additional bedroom over the minimum entitlement will be allowed when making the lacking assessment.

b) Single applicants occupying bedsit accommodation are not considered to be lacking a bedroom and therefore will be assessed as adequately housed.
c) Couples who are occupying one bedroom accommodation which cannot accommodate (as determined by environmental health) will be eligible for lacking one bedroom. The room will only be required to be capable of containing a double bed, a bed side table of reasonable dimension and adequate floor space to walk around the bed and reasonable sized storage for clothing.

3.3 **Medium Medical Need**

Applicants assessed as having a medium medical condition or disability whereby a move to alternative suitable accommodation would significantly improve their health.

3.4 **Medium Welfare Need**

Applicants assessed as having a medium welfare need and moving to alternative accommodation would significantly improve their well-being.

3.5 **Split Families**

This category is for families that are reasonably expected to live together but are unable to live together because of their housing situation. To qualify for this category a family must be living separately from each other having previously lived together as a family unit. Applicants will need to demonstrate why they have to live apart e.g. living together would create severe over-crowding.

3.6 **1 Child Under 12 Years Old in a Flat and no Lift**

Applicants who have one or more dependent children who are younger than 12 and live in a flat above ground floor will gain Band 2. Homesearch will review this once one child turns 12 years of age and applicants will be placed into the appropriate band.

3.7 **Caravan Dwellers**

Applicants living in a caravan (as their main home) will be placed into Band 2.

3.8 **Private Rented & Claiming Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP)**

To differentiate between private rented contract-holders that can and can't afford their private rented accommodation, applicants receiving DHP will be placed in Band 2.

3.9 **Families Sharing facilities**

This includes applicants with dependent children who are sharing with friends or relatives and who are not included in their application. This award should not be made where the applicant is the householder and has invited other people to live in the accommodation. This is because the applicant has chosen to share facilities. Home-owners who are sharing facilities following a relationship breakdown will be banded based on their circumstances.

3.10 **Owed Section 66 or 73 Homeless Duties**

Applicants owed a Section 66 duty, would be threatened with homelessness within 56 days and their priority need and/or intentional homelessness remains

under investigation by MCC. Applicants owed a Section 73 duty, under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, would be considered homeless and eligible for assistance.

4. BAND 3 – Low Housing Need

4.1 This Band will be for applicants with a low housing need. Priority within this Band will be arranged in order of date of application. The following groups of applicants will be placed into Band 3:

4.2 **Low Medical Need**
Applicants assessed as having a low medical condition or disability where a move to suitable alternative accommodation would improve their health.

4.3 **Low Welfare Need**
Applicants assessed by as having a low welfare need and moving to alternative accommodation would improve their well-being.

4.4 **Sharing Facilities**
Applicants who are sharing with friends or relatives and who are not included in their application. This award should not be made where the applicant is the householder and has invited other people to live in the accommodation. This is because the applicant has chosen to share facilities. Home-owners who are sharing facilities following a relationship breakdown will be banded based on their circumstances.

4.5 **Reduced Banding Due to Refusals 1**
See Section 5.6 in Appendix 3 for further information on reduced banding due to refusals.

4.6 **Adequately Housed Private contract-holders with a local connection**
Adequately housed private contract-holders with a local connection to Monmouthshire. Would include all privately renting applicants not claiming DHP.

4.7 **Minor Disrepair**
Where the applicant is a private tenant and is living in accommodation which the Council's Environmental Health Department have confirmed that it is a Category 2 Hazard under the Health & Safety Rating System.

5. BAND 4 – No Housing Need

5.1 This Band is for applicants with no recognised housing need and these applicants are extremely unlikely to receive an offer of accommodation under this scheme. Priority within this band will be arranged in order of date of application.

5.2 **Home Owners**

a) All home owners will be placed into Band 4. The only exception to this is if applicants are eligible for medical priority. To be awarded medical priority an applicant would need to demonstrate that they cannot afford to either buy an adapted property or make the required adaptation(s) to their current home. Any adaptation(s) would need to be assessed/recommended by an

Occupational Therapist.

b) Home owners seeking to move who disclose a welfare need, including financial problems, will be referred to MCC's Housing Options Team.
c) Applicants who have a financial interest in a property they don't occupy will be required to demonstrate why they do not reside in their property. If there are justifiable reasons as to why they do not occupy the property they own, they will be assessed on where they currently reside.

5.3 **Serving Armed Forces Personnel**

a) Applicants who are serving in the British Armed Forces can apply to join the Housing Register and will initially be placed into Band 4.
b) Those applicants who have a local connection to Monmouthshire will be moved into Band 1 on receipt of their Cessation of Duty Notice or Testimonial of Military Service Notice. Applicants who are Reservists (Territorial Army, Royal Navy / Royal Marine Reserve, Royal Airforce Reserve) will not receive the Leaving the Armed Forces Priority as standard, but each case will be considered individually.

5.4 **Serving Prisoners**

Applications from serving prisoners will be placed into Band 4 until they are released from prison. They will then be required to complete a change of circumstances form on release and their application will re-assessed based on the accommodation that they occupy. Any prisoner who is going to be homeless on release from prison should be referred to the relevant Council's homelessness team i.e. the Local Authority where they have a local connection.

5.5 **Sufficient Financial Resources**

a) Income/money received as a result of leaving the armed forces or from welfare benefits will be excluded when Homesearch considers financial resources. If a single applicant or joint applicants earn more than £50,000 per year, they will be placed into Band 4. If cash investments/savings exceed £16,000 or if capital assets exceed £50,000 they will also be placed into Band 4.
b) In exceptional circumstances (such as where there is a high medical need), Homesearch may consider applying flexibility to the above criteria. This will need to be agreed by the Homesearch Partners and Strategic Housing Manager, or another Monmouthshire County Council officer nominated to act on their behalf.
c) This criteria also applies to households owed a Homeless Duty by MCC.

5.6 **Reduced Banding Due to Refusals 2**

See Section 5.6 in Appendix 3 for further information on reduced banding due to refusals.

5.7 **No Local Connection**

All applicants who have no local connection to Monmouthshire will be placed into Band 4 unless they can demonstrate an over-riding medical need to locate to Monmouthshire as treatment can only be provided in Monmouthshire.

5.8 **Adequately Housed Community Landlord Contract-holders**

Will be placed into Band 4 unless they can demonstrate another over-riding

housing need that places them above Band 4.

Appendix 10 – Local Letting Plans

1. Local Lettings Plans (LLPs)

1.1. LLPs are predominantly used when new affordable housing is built in Monmouthshire to ensure a cohesive and sustainable community.

1.2. When new affordable housing is built in rural areas/villages in Monmouthshire, the Rural Allocation Policy will be used to influence the allocation of social housing, intermediate rent housing and low cost home ownership housing. See Appendix 1 and Appendix 11 for further details.

1.3. When developing new affordable housing in non-rural areas and over 4 units the Homesearch partners will use quotas to determine the distribution of allocations by application type, to help support sustainable communities. Once all Emergency Band applicants are exhausted from the shortlist, 50% of properties will be allocated to Band 1, and 25% to Bands 2 and 3 respectively. NB: If more than 25% is allocated to Emergency Band applicants, this will result in a corresponding reduction to the 25% Band 2 quota.

2. Local Lettings Plan (LLP) criteria

2.1. As per Section 3.15 of the Homesearch Policy, Homesearch partners may consider applying LLPs.

2.2. An LLP allows allocation criteria in the main Homesearch Policy and Procedures to be adjusted. It enables additional criteria to be added onto the allocation of social housing in a localised community e.g. social housing can only be let to someone above a certain age/ no history of ASB etc. So an LLP can influence which group of people will be allocated tenancies in certain areas. An LLP can be used to respond to local issues and support sustainable communities/community cohesion.

2.3. Applicant guidelines for LLP's are also available at www.monmouthshirehomesearch.co.uk

3. LLP principles

3.1. Homesearch partners will keep the use of LLPs to a minimum.

3.2. Each LLP developed will include:

- Key aims and objectives.
- Key proposals.
- Timescale for implementing the plan and the review period following implementation.
- Duration of plan and whether it includes initial allocations or all relets.
- Details of the area/properties included in the plan.
- Details of how allocation/shortlisting of properties will be managed.
- Any consultation on the proposal (if relevant) and the outcomes.
- How success of the LLP will be measured.
- Risks of implementing the plan and measures to reduce any risk.

3.3. Details of all LLPs in place will be published at www.monmouthshirehomesearch.co.uk and further information is also available from Homesearch upon request.

3.4. Each Homesearch partner can propose an LLP. MCC will then decide whether or not to implement the LLP (decision making is delegated to a designated MCC Officer).

Appendix 11 – Intermediate Housing Framework

1. What is Intermediate Housing?

1.1 Intermediate Housing is where prices or rents are above those of social rented housing but below market house prices or rents.

2. What does this include?

2.1 In Monmouthshire this includes:

- Low Cost Home Ownership – Homebuy/Shared Equity
- Shared Ownership
- Intermediate Rent
- Rent to Buy

The above products are subject to review and can be withdrawn at any point; any new intermediate housing options can be identified and operated under this framework.

3. Low Cost Home Ownership – Homebuy/Shared Equity

3.1 Homes can be purchased where a Community Landlord will hold an equity share in the property (typically 30% - 50% of the market value). There is no interest, rent or any other charges associated with the equity share. When the homeowner decides to sell the property on, the equity share is repaid based on the current market value of the home.

3.2 Refer to individual Community Landlord for required income to access Homebuy, prospective purchasers will be required to evidence that the property is affordable and that they are unable to access home ownership without help. Community Landlords work within the guidance set by WG (https://www.gov.wales/homebuy-wales).

4. Shared Ownership

4.1 This is also referred to as part buy/part rent. The scheme will typically offer applicants an opportunity to purchase 50% to 70% of the value of the property; the remaining share will be liable for a rental charge.

4.2 Refer to individual Community Landlord for required income level to access shared ownership, prospective purchasers will be required to evidence that the property is affordable and that they are unable to access home ownership without help. Community Landlords work within the guidance set by WG (https://www.gov.wales/shared-ownership-wales).

5. Intermediate Rent

5.1 Intermediate Rent offers the opportunity to rent a good quality home at less than you would expect to pay in the open market for a similar home in a similar area. To be eligible you must have a gross household income of £22,000 - £50,000 per annum. In exceptional circumstances Homesearch may consider applying flexibility to the income criteria if it can be demonstrated that the property is affordable to the applicant and that they are unable to access market housing without help.

6. Rent to Own

6.1 Rent to Own supports the purchase of a home for those who do not have sufficient funds for a mortgage deposit. The scheme enables contract- holders of rental properties within the scheme to build up a lump sum towards a deposit whilst they rent their home. The lump sum toward the deposit can then be used to help secure a mortgage to enable the purchase of the home. To be eligible prospective purchasers must have a gross household income of £25,000 - £50,000 per annum.

7. Management and Administration

7.1 Opportunities to purchase or rent properties will be advertised on the Homesearch website. To be considered for an intermediate property applicants must express an interest via Homesearch.

7.2 In the event of more than one applicant, being interested in a property the priority will be given in the following order:

- Local connection to Monmouthshire
- Date of registration
- Financial ability to proceed

8. Local Connection to Monmouthshire

8.1 In order to meet local housing need, we will give priority to applicants who have a local connection to Monmouthshire.

8.2 Local connection is defined in Section 3.2.2 of this policy.

8.3 In instances where none of the short-listed applicants are able to meet the defined local connection criteria, priority will be given to those who have lived in Monmouthshire for the longest amount of time.

9. Which Intermediate properties are included?

9.1 Properties included are those which have been secured by Monmouthshire County Council through Section 106 obligations and properties funded through the allocation of Social Housing Grant, Housing Finance Grant, Rent to Own/Shared Ownership monies and any other relevant future Welsh Government funding scheme. Therefore, intermediate properties acquired by Community Landlords using their own funds are not covered by this policy.

9.2 Properties which have re-sale covenants included in the contract are also included.

10. Sales and Re-Sales

10.1 Upon purchasing a property, pre-emption provisions will be included in the transfer between the developer and the purchasing Community Landlord. The provisions will include clauses stating the buyer cannot dispose of the property without first allowing the Community Landlord or Council an agreed period to nominate a buyer. If for any reason pre-emption provisions are not included in the transfer of sale, a separate agreement between the Community Landlord and

purchaser will be drawn up and registered separately against the property title.

10.2 A condition of the sale will prohibit any owner to sublet the whole property; this therefore prevents any properties being used as investments. Property owners are able to sublet a room while they remain in occupation and use the property as their principal home.

10.3 Either the Community Landlord or Monmouthshire County Council (depending upon who holds the equity share) will be responsible for managing and recycling the agreed equity share for each property.

10.4 Upon resale the home owner is responsible for all associated costs with selling a house. Typical costs associated with selling a property could include:

- Administration/Estate Agency Fees
- Conveyancing costs
- Cost of Energy Performance Certificate
- Any charges associated with repaying your mortgage such as early repayment charge (if applicable)

11. Eligibility

11.1 Intermediate housing options are primarily aimed at those struggling to access homeownership or private rental properties at open market levels.

11.2 In conjunction with Monmouthshire County Council signing up to the Armed Forces Community Covenant, service personnel will be considered providing they meet other eligibility criteria of the scheme. Any financial resources connected with being in the armed forces will be disregarded when assessing eligibility and sustainability.

11.3 Unless otherwise stated all properties will be advertised with the intention of achieving the maximum/ideal occupancy levels. If the ideal occupation cannot be secured, then less than the ideal occupancy will be accepted in descending order in accordance with local connection, date of registration and financial ability to proceed.

11.4 Property Size

HouseholdSize	1 Bed	2 Bed 4 Person House	3 Bed 5 Person House	4 Bed 6 Bed House
Single Person	X	X		
Couple	X	X		
Single/Couple who are pregnant		X		
Single/Couple 1+ child		X	X	
Single/Couple 2+ children			X	
Single/Couple + 3 children			X	X

Single/Couple + 4 or more children				X
2 Single Adults		X		

11.5 Once shortlisted for a property, applicants must demonstrate their eligibility by producing evidence of their residence or family connection to Monmouthshire, valid identification, and confirmation of their financial circumstances.

11.6 To purchase a property applicants must have an acceptable credit history and be in a position to access a mortgage with an approved mortgage lender – approved by the Council of Mortgage Lenders (CML). The purchaser must provide the Community Landlord with a valid mortgage offer certificate on application of eligible properties.

11.7 An applicant must not be in rent arrears, have any re-chargeable arrears to the Local Authority or Community Landlord partners or be subject to a court order for breach of occupation contract conditions to proceed with an offer of accommodation.

12. Intermediate homes in rural areas

12.1 Where an opportunity arises to allocate intermediate homes in rural areas, we will defer and prioritise in accordance to the Rural Allocations Policy - see Appendix1.

13. Registration

13.1 Applicants must register through Homesearch, once registered applicants will be able to log in using their email address and password.

13.2 Any registration details found to contain false or misleading information could result in the cancellation of the registered application.

13.3 It is the responsibility of applicants to ensure their application is kept up to date with regard to any change in personal circumstances.

13.4 Registration for Intermediate properties does not bind the Council or the Community Landlord to offer any particular property or any property at all. The allocation of Intermediate housing is not bound by the same legislation as the administration of social housing.

14. Fees

14.1 Registration to the scheme is free of charge.

14.2 Applicants must refer to the individual Community Landlord for details of holding fees, rent in advance and other administration charges when a property is selected.

Appendix 12 – Rapid Re-housing Protocol

1.1 Welsh Government's vision is for homelessness to be 'rare, brief and unrepeated', instructing Local Authorities to achieve this through a 'Rapid Rehousing' approach to homelessness. The core aim of Rapid Rehousing is to prevent homelessness; where prevention is not possible or appropriate, stable housing and support should be provided through a range of models, thereby reducing the dependency on emergency housing.

1.2 Monmouthshire's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan identifies four priority areas to prevent homelessness at the earliest opportunity, to minimise any time households may have to spend in temporary accommodation and to provide the right level of support at the right time to sustain future tenancies:

- Priority 1 - Prevent homelessness at the earliest opportunity.
- Priority 2 - Increase the supply of affordable and settled accommodation.
- Priority 3 - Provide timely and effective support to sustain accommodation.
- Priority 4 - Maximising resources and benefits through well connected partnerships.

1.3 MCC will work closely with the Homesearch Partnership to facilitate adequate availability of social housing stock to help meet local homeless need through the flexible quota arrangement within the existing Monmouthshire Homesearch Housing Allocation Policy. Through the Housing Support Grant MCC commissions a range of housing related support, including resettlement support. All those accommodated through the Homelessness route will be offered this support. 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.

1.4 Should this support not be available this may prevent the Council from moving some applicants on to permanent accommodation.

1.5 On a homeless determination and a Band 1 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 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.

1.6 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.

1.7 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.

1.8 As the Temporary Accommodation and Resettlement Support Service are delivered through the same providers, there will be a seamless move with support during the re settlement 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 genericfloating support service after this period.