Somewhere to Live

A guide to Cannock Chase Council’s Choice Based Lettings Policy

www.cannockchasedc.gov.uk
Somewhere to Live

Our commitment to you

The Council want you to be happy in your home. We are committed to providing applicants with a choice regarding the type of property they live in and the area to which they choose to move to.

Cannock Chase Council is working as part of the UChoosehomes Sub Regional Choice Based Lettings Scheme

The Council is working with other social landlords to offer the opportunity to move outside of this area. The regions covered by the UChoosehomes Partnership are shown above.
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A. Introduction

The Council want you to be happy in your home. The purpose of this booklet is to explain how the Council decides who should be offered properties when they become available. This is called the Council’s Allocations Policy.

It tells you who can apply for Council accommodation, how the choice based lettings scheme works, the type of property you may express an interest in and where to go for further help.

The document explains how to register on the waiting list and to be allocated a property.

1. Why have an Allocations Policy?

Although the Council owns over 5000 properties, most of them are already occupied by other tenants. There is a large demand for the properties which become vacant, and the Council therefore needs to have a system for setting priorities when deciding who should have these properties.

2. How does the Allocations Policy work?

The policy is intended to help households who are in the greatest housing need, whilst providing you with a choice over what type of property you live in and where that property is.

The Council allocates accommodation through a choice based lettings scheme. Applicants are placed in one of the bands depending on their particular circumstances, known as housing need. This applies to existing Council tenants requesting a transfer, and other households wanting Council accommodation. When your application has been processed, you will be entered onto a list which will enable you to express an interest in vacant properties. This is called the “Housing Register”.

When a property becomes available, it is advertised and those on the waiting list will be able to express an interest in the vacancy. YOU CAN APPLY FOR ANY PROPERTY ADVERTISED, HOWEVER THOSE IN A HIGHER BAND WHO MEET THE ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA WILL BE CONSIDERED FIRST. You will be able to express an interest for as many advertised properties as you like. The property will be offered to the household from the highest band, who meets the eligibility criteria and who have been waiting in that band the longest.
3. **What type of tenancy will I get?**

If you are a new Council tenant, you will be given an “Introductory Tenancy”. This would be for one year. If there are no problems with the tenancy, e.g. the rent is paid and all other tenancy conditions are met, it will become a “Secure” tenancy at the end of the 12 month period. In certain cases, the Council may extend the introductory period beyond 12 months.

We also use non-secure tenancies in certain circumstances. Your individual circumstances will be assessed and we will offer the tenancy that is appropriate to your personal situation.

If you are an existing secure or assured tenant of any Council or Housing Association, you will be given a secure tenancy.

4. **Why have different tenancies?**

There are important differences between an introductory, a non-secure and a secure tenancy. The most important is that it is easier for the Council to evict introductory and non-secure tenants.

5. **What is sheltered housing?**

Sheltered housing is housing for people who are aged 60 years and above and offers independence and privacy in a safe and secure environment.

The Council owns and directly manages four sheltered schemes, and details of these are provided in the "What is Sheltered Housing?" booklet.

Sheltered housing vacancies will be allocated depending on the band award to each applicant, the length of time the application has been in that band, together with an assessment of needs.

6. **Tenancy Support**

There is a tenancy support scheme available to assist you in setting up and maintaining your tenancy. We also offer a tenancy support service to tenants in private tenancies. The aim of the service is to provide support and advice on all tenancy-related issues, such as budgeting, benefits information and access to other support services. Please contact the Housing Office to discuss if you could benefit from this service.
B. Who can apply for council accommodation?

1. General

You can apply for a property by placing your name on the Housing Register if:-

- You are aged 16 or over and live in the district.
- You are not deemed ineligible due to unacceptable behaviour.
- You are over 60 years of age and you have, at any time in the past, lived in the district for at least two years.
- You have a close relative (e.g. mother, father) living in the district and you/they need to provide or receive support and you/they are the only or principal carer.
- You have permanent employment within the Cannock Chase District
- You are subject to Immigration Control but eligible for housing allocation and homelessness assistance.
- The Council will also accept applications from other partner organisations within the Southern Staffordshire & North Warwickshire Choice Based Lettings Scheme.
- Special rules apply to owner occupiers (see Page 7 Section 6).

2. Transfers to another property

You will be treated in the same way as households who are not yet Council tenants. This means that you will be placed into one of the bands and you can ask to be considered for vacancies along with others from the housing register. The band which you are placed in will depend upon your personal circumstances.

Once you accept another property your application to move will be cancelled. If you wish to transfer to another Council or Housing Association property you must make a new application. This will be based on your new circumstances and you will be placed in the band appropriate to your housing need.
Before moving to another property the Council will inspect your existing home. If it is found that damage has been caused to the property either deliberately or by your neglect, the vacant property will be offered to someone else on the housing register and you will be required to carry out the necessary work, at your own cost. The Council will defer your transfer application until the remedial work has been carried out. Once this has been done, the Council will re-inspect the property, if the work is satisfactory, your transfer application will be changed from deferred and you may once again express your interest for vacancies.

Once you have vacated your current home if, after inspection, it is considered that a decorating allowance will need to be awarded for the incoming tenant, any decorating allowance to be granted for your new home will be withheld or reduced in value.

3. I am a council tenant - How many times can I transfer?

You can be considered for a transfer as many times as you wish, but you will need to submit a new application each time.

The band you are placed in will be determined according to the circumstances at your present home; no account will be taken of past circumstances. You should think carefully before accepting any offer of alternative housing as you may be placed in a different band, if you want to move again.

4. Can I apply with my partner?

Yes - you can make a joint application by completing a housing registration form.

5. Special Rules

Before a property can be offered, special rules apply to:-

- **Owner occupiers** *Part B Section 6*
- **Homeless households** *Part B Section 7 and Section D*
- **Members of Her Majesty’s Forces and their families** *Part B Section 8*
- **Households with no fixed abode/sleeping rough** *Part B Section 9*
- **Persons with relationship problems** *Part B Section 10*
- **Persons with current or former tenant arrears** *Part B Section 11*
- **Persons who are under 18 years of age** *Part B Section 12*
- **Households living outside the Cannock Chase District** *Part B Section 13*
- **Persons ineligible due to unacceptable behaviour** *Part B Section 14 and 15*

**IMPORTANT:**
If you fall into any of these groups, you must read the following notes carefully.
• Persons subject to Immigration Control and ineligible for Housing Allocation and Homelessness Assistance
  *Part B Section 17*
• Residents of redevelopment schemes *Part B Section 18*
• Local Lettings Policies *Part B Section 19*

If you fall into any of these groups, you must read the following notes carefully.

6. **Owner occupiers**

Owner occupiers can place their name on the Housing Register and can only be considered for accommodation if one of the following criteria is met:-

- The Council has an obligation to help you because you are unintentionally homeless and in a priority need category as defined by part VII of the Housing Act 1996 as amended 2002. You will be placed in Band 1.
- Your home is affected by a Demolition or Closing Order, you will be placed in Band 1.
- You live in the district and have been awarded a high or medium medical priority by the Council’s Medical Panel and the equity released from the sale of your home would be £80,000 or less.
- There is no equity limit or a need for a medical award for owner occupiers requiring sheltered accommodation.

If you have a high medical award you will be placed in Band 1.

If you have a medium medical award you will be placed in Band 2. You can express an interest for a one or two bedroom bungalow or flat.

If you are an owner occupier and have the financial resources to meet your own housing needs by securing alternative accommodation at market rents or buying a home, you will not be able to register for accommodation.

Owner Occupiers with relationship problems please see Page 9 Section 10.

7. **Homeless househols**

If the Council has accepted a duty towards you as a homeless household you will be placed in Band 1 and be awarded priority status to ensure you receive reasonable preference in the allocation of Council properties.

If you do not express interest for a property within two months of your acceptance the Council will make a direct offer of a suitable property.

If you refuse this suitable offer of accommodation:-

- This may result in you being placed in a lower band.
• The Council’s duty towards you as a homeless household will end, i.e. the Council will no longer have a statutory duty to accommodate you. This may result in you being placed in a lower band.
• Your application could be deferred for a maximum period of 12 months.

8. **Member of Her Majesty’s Forces**

If you or a member of your household is serving in HM Forces and you are living in service accommodation you may be eligible for assistance.

HMF households are considered in a similar way to homeless households and you will be eligible for a Cannock Chase Council property if:-

• Your household is a family with children, or you fall into one of the other priority groups as defined by the Housing Act 1996 and;
• You have a local connection with the Cannock Chase District and;
• You are leaving service accommodation through no fault of your own.
• Any applicant who needs to move to suitable adapted accommodation because of serious injury, medical condition or disability which they, or a member of their household, has sustained as a result of service in the Armed Forces will be considered for a high medical priority award.

If you are living in service accommodation and have a local connection with the district, you are entitled to place your name on the Housing Register. You should inform this Council when you know your discharge date, you will be placed into Band 2 (see Section F), and you may express an interest for suitable vacancies when they are advertised.

9. **Households with no fixed abode or who are sleeping rough**

A household with ‘no fixed abode’ is defined as somebody who sleeps at a number of different places, usually with family and friends.

A ‘rough sleeper’ is defined as somebody who does not sleep in a recognised residential dwelling and has not done so for prolonged periods of time.

If you are classed as no fixed abode or rough sleeper you will be placed in Band 2 (see Section F).
10. Persons with relationship problems

If you and your partner are joint tenants of a Council property and have decided to separate and require Council accommodation, you should both place your names on the Housing Register.

Any application made for family accommodation following a relationship breakdown, will be deferred for a period of six months to allow for issues regarding the care and residency of any children to be resolved.

Where one bedroom accommodation is required for the partner leaving the family home in order that the children of the relationship can remain, there will be no deferral period.

Qualification for housing is that you are a Council tenant, private tenant or lodger.

When confirmation has been received of the arrangements for any children, applications for two, three and four bedroom accommodation will be considered in line with all other applicants. However, to reflect the fact that the children may not be resident with the applicant on a permanent basis, you will be placed in Band 3 (see Section F).

In cases where an owner occupier has left the family home and requests a one bedroom flat and continues to maintain the family home, the application is to be dealt with as a lodger/tenant depending on their current circumstances, and you will be placed in Band 3.

Owner occupiers requesting other types of accommodation will be dealt with in accordance with the owner occupiers policy (see Page 7 Section 6).

11. Households with mortgage arrears, current or former tenant arrears

If you have rent arrears at your current home or a former home with either Cannock Chase Council or any other landlord, your application will be placed in the appropriate band. However, you will receive a reduced priority within that band for a specified period (see Page 18 Section 3).

If you have mortgage arrears either at your current property or a former property, your application will be placed in the appropriate band. However, you will receive a reduced priority within that band for a specified period (see Page 18 Section 3).
In exceptional circumstances it may be possible to remove this deferment, if you have paid a substantial part of your arrears and made adequate arrangements to clear the rest of the money owing.

Please let us know if you have an agreement to pay and have paid off a substantial part of your arrears, your application will then be reviewed and your application may be placed in the appropriate band. In such cases however, you will not be granted a secure tenancy until all arrears are paid.

12. Applicants who are under 18 years of age

You can place your name on the Housing Register when you are aged 16 or over. However, you will not normally be offered a property until you are aged 18 as you cannot legally hold a tenancy until this age.

In exceptional circumstances, you may be made an offer of a property before you are 18, but in most cases this will be in the form of specialist accommodation which provides support services.

13. Households who live outside of the Cannock Chase district

If you live outside of the district and:-

- You are over 60 years of age and you have, at any time in the past, lived in the district for at least two years. You will be placed in Band 4.
- You have a close relative (e.g. mother, father) living in the district and you/they need to provide or receive support and you/they are the only or principal carer, you will be placed in Band 4.
- You have permanent employment within the Cannock Chase District. You must provide written evidence from your employer that you work for a minimum 20 hours per week and that you are not employed on a fixed term contract for less than 12 months. If the travel time from your home to work is under two hours. You will be placed in Band 4.
- As a general rule, a travelling time greater than two hours a day is considered unacceptable, if your journey from home to work exceeds two hours you will be placed in Band 2.
- You live in an area within the UChoosehomes partnership. You will be placed in Band 4.

Out of area applicants will remain within Band 4, irrespective of other needs criteria which they meet.

Special rules apply to homeless applicants (see Page 17 Section D).
14. **Ineligibility for housing allocation**

The Council has a legal duty to check whether an applicant is eligible to be allocated accommodation, or whether he or she is excluded under section 160(A), (1) (3) or (5) of the 1996 Housing Act. The Council can also decide to treat an applicant as ineligible for an allocation of accommodation due to serious unacceptable behaviour under section 160A(7) of the 1996 Housing Act.

15. **Serious unacceptable behaviour**

The Homelessness Act 2002 allows the Council to determine whether an applicant is ineligible for an allocation of a tenancy due to serious unacceptable behaviour.

The purpose is to assist local authorities to deal with the problem of anti-social behaviour on Council estates.

All housing applications are assessed to determine if the household is eligible for the allocation of accommodation and any of the following may result in your application being investigated further:-

- People who have previously been evicted by this Council or another local authority or social housing provider, for reasons of anti-social behaviour or for causing damage to the landlords property.
- People who have had an injunction under Part V of the Housing Act 1996 obtained against them by the Council.
- People who have been convicted of an offense relating to the supply of drugs and have received either a custodial sentence of at least 2½ years, or have received a shorter sentence that is not yet spent under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. (Reference is made to the Staffordshire Joint Protocol for Information Exchange).
- Any person where Cannock Chase Council, or any other local authority or Registered Social Landlord has a current injunction, or has obtained an injunction within the past 3 years against them, due to their behaviour towards housing employees.
- Any person convicted of a violent or threatening offense towards a member of the Council, an employee of Cannock Chase Council, or any other local authority or another Registered Social landlord within the past five years.
• If you, or a member of your household, are considered to have committed acts of unacceptable behaviour you may be requested to provide additional information or attend an interview. If the Council then decide you are ineligible you will receive a written decision giving reasons why you have been determined as ineligible for allocation.

In these cases your application will not be placed into a band and the application excluded. Should you disagree with the decision you are entitled to a review of the decision by the Council’s Appeals and Complaints Panel (see Page 34).

16. Other unacceptable behaviour

Where the behaviour of an applicant, or a member of his/her family, affects their suitability to be a tenant but is not so severe as to exclude them from the housing register (e.g. rent arrears or low level nuisance) the applicant will receive reduced preference and be placed in Band 4 (see Page 18).

17. Immigration Control - Eligibility for housing allocation and homelessness assistance

Applicants who are subject to immigration control and fulfil the following criteria may be eligible for the allocation of accommodation:-

• Refugee status.
• Exceptional leave to remain - provided there is no condition that you shall not be a charge on public funds.
• Indefinite leave to remain provided you are habitually resident in the Common Travel Area (CTA) and leave to remain was not granted in the previous 5 years on the basis of sponsorship in relation to maintenance and accommodation.
• Nationals of a country that have ratified the European Convention of Social and Medical Assistance (ECSMA) or the European Social Charter (ESC) provided you are lawfully present in the UK.
• From one of the “A8” Countries and meet conditions as determined by the Secretary of State.

If you are unsure about your eligibility as a result of immigration control you should register your application together with your status. You will be advised whether you will be placed into a band.
18. Redevelopment Schemes

Residents requiring rehousing as a result of major redevelopment schemes will be subject to special priority agreed by the Council. If you are affected by such a scheme, please ask for details from the Allocations Officer.

19. Local Lettings Policy

The Council may from time to time implement local lettings policies for specific areas or schemes. These policies will have regard to considerations such as social mix, density, age and community stability.

Any such policy will be time limited, but during that time properties may be let to applicants outside of the normal rules for priority and banding contained within this document. Any property let under a local lettings policy will be reported under the normal feedback process.
C. Applying for accommodation?

1. How do I get my name on the Housing Register?

You should complete a registration form and return it to the Housing Office or One Stop Shops detailed at the back of this booklet. If you live outside the Cannock Chase area, or are unsure where to send your form, it should be returned to the Housing Office.

It is important that the form is completed correctly otherwise it will be returned to you. You will not be placed on the Housing Register and considered for Council housing until the form is fully completed. If you require help in completing the form, staff at any of the Council’s offices will be pleased to help you.

You can apply online by visiting our website www.cannockchasedc.gov.uk and following the link to the application form on the UChoosehomes website.

Alternatively download an application form and return it to the Housing Office.

2. Do I need to send anything else in with my application?

Yes, you need to provide:-

• Confirmation of your current address, and your National Insurance number. If you do not, you will not be able to apply for vacant properties.
• If you live outside the Cannock Chase area and are applying for housing because you work in the area, you will need to provide a letter from your employer confirming that you have permanent employment in the area and that you work over 20 hours per week.
• If you are pregnant you need to provide a proof of pregnancy certificate, stating the date your baby is due.
• If you have included children on your application you need to provide confirmation of the ages and address; e.g. a photocopy of tax credit details or child benefit award letter.

You may also need to provide copies of other documents and if this is the case you will be advised at the time your application is registered.
Your application will not be deemed complete and you will be unable to express an interest in vacancies until you have provided any requested proof.

**IMPORTANT:** The original of any document (such as proof of pregnancy certificate) should not be posted, a photocopy should be provided. Housing staff will be pleased to take a copy for you if necessary.

3. **When my form has been processed, do I need to contact you again?**

Yes - all applicants, including Council tenants have to re-register each year on the anniversary of their application.

You will receive a form which you should sign and return to the Housing Office or One Stop Shop. If you do not do so your application will be cancelled and you will not be able to express an interest for vacancies.

4. **What type of property can I apply for?**

This depends on your circumstances, you can however apply for any vacancy. Under exceptional circumstances the Council reserves the right to allocate properties without advertising them, these management allocations will be reported as part of the feedback and monitoring process. (see Section H for full details).

5. **Can I live on a particular estate?**

Yes, if you wish to live on a particular estate then you should only express an interest for a vacancy that is advertised in the area you wish to live in. You are advised however, that some estates are in greater demand and you may have to wait longer.

Generally, you will be re-housed more quickly if you express an interest in properties across a wide area of the district rather than restrict your choice to one particular estate.

We would advise you to consider all housing options to maximise your housing opportunities.
6. **What should I do if my circumstances change?**

You should contact the Housing Office as soon as possible to inform us of your change in circumstances. In most cases you will be asked to complete a ‘Change of Circumstances Form’ but if you have moved address or if you wish to be re-housed with a new partner, you will have to complete a new Application for Housing Form.

We will assess your change in circumstances and, if necessary re-assess the band awarded to you. You will be notified of the new band you have been placed in.

7. **What if I am unable to live at my present accommodation because of an illness or disability?**

If you have an illness or disability which means that your present home is not suitable for your needs, additional priority may be given to your application. Your illness or disability and how your current housing situation impacts on this may affect which band you are placed in. If you wish to apply for a medical assessment you should complete a ‘Medical Need Assessment Form’. When this has been returned, arrangements will be made for the Council’s medical panel to assess your application.

8. **Home visits**

All applicants are subject to a home visit. A property will not be offered unless a visit has taken place.

Applicants who have no fixed abode and therefore do not have any settled accommodation may apply for rehousing. All addresses on the application will be visited for verification.
1. What if I am homeless or think I will be homeless in the future?

You should contact the Housing Office as soon as possible to make an appointment to discuss your situation. Your application will be dealt with urgently by the Housing Options Team who can assist you in your efforts to prevent homelessness and offer information on housing law. In addition, the Housing Options Team will be able to discuss other housing options available to you.

If you are actually homeless and have nowhere to stay, it is possible that the Council’s Housing Options Team could help with temporary accommodation. Assistance is not available in all cases and the Homelessness Officer will be able to advise you if this is a service we are able to provide to you.

Once your application has been thoroughly investigated, the Council will make a formal homeless decision in writing. This advises you if the Council has a duty to re-house you or not and for how long. You will be informed of the right to request a review of this decision if you disagree. There are several stages to the application and it is necessary to provide various proofs based on your individual circumstances. The Housing Options Team will advise you of the information required to complete your assessment.

If the Council has accepted that it has a statutory homeless duty towards you as a homeless household, you will be placed in Band 1 to ensure you receive reasonable preference when Council properties are allocated.

If you are homeless but the Council has no statutory duty to rehouse you, you will be placed in Band 2.

Where this is not the case, we will provide information, advice and support to assist you in your efforts to secure alternative accommodation.

If you are homeless and do not express an interest for a property within two months of your acceptance, the Council will review your application and may make a direct offer of reasonable accommodation. Should you refuse this offer, your application will be reviewed, which may mean that you lose any priority status awarded and you may be subject to reduced preference (see Page 18 Section 3).
1. When I have returned my form, what then?

We will check the information contained in your application. If you have not completed the form correctly, it will be returned to you. It will not be assessed until all questions have been fully answered.

If you are eligible to be placed on the Housing Register, you will be notified of which band you have been placed in.

2. Reasonable preference groups

The allocations scheme is designed to ensure that those in greatest housing need are given preference for the allocation of accommodation. Section 167 (2) of the Housing Act 1996 and the Homelessness Act 2002 determines the following should be given reasonable preference:-

• Applicants who are homeless including those who are intentionally homeless and those not in a priority need.
• Applicants occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions.
• Applicants who need to move on medical or welfare grounds, including grounds relating to disability.
• Applicants who need to move to a particular locality in the district and failure to meet that need would cause hardship to themselves or to others.

3. Reduced preference

Although the allocations scheme seeks to ensure that those in greatest housing need are re-housed more quickly, in certain circumstances applicants may have their priority reduced. This may be due to their lack of a local connection to the district, financial circumstances, or due to their behaviour.

If you have no local connection you will not be able to register for accommodation unless you are applying from a member or organisation within the UChoosehomes partnership.

Applicants living in an area covered by the UChoosehomes Partnership will be given preference within Band 4.
In assessing your priority at the time of the application we will take into account any behaviour that affects your suitability as a tenant. In certain circumstances, an applicant may not be considered for accommodation until the behaviour has improved. If the behaviour is deemed to show the applicant’s unsuitability to become a tenant or a current tenancy is not being conducted in a satisfactory manner, this will have the effect of suspending the application for a defined period of time. In this case your application will be monitored and will remain in the band and you may register interest in vacancies. However, you will not receive an offer until the reason for your suspension has been remedied.

Such behaviour may include rent arrears, breach of tenancy obligations or anti-social behaviour. Following an assessment of your circumstances a decision will be made on whether to suspend the application or not. You will be notified of such a decision in writing, detailing how you can act to remedy the situation as well as a timescale for a review.

Where the behaviour is so serious that an outright possession order could have been issued, the application will be placed in Band 4 even if your circumstances would normally mean you would be placed in a higher band.

You will be informed in writing about how this decision was reached, you will have the right to appeal the decision (see Page 34 Section L).

You must not deliberately make your circumstances worse. If you do, your application will be investigated and reassessed. This could result in your application receiving a reduced priority. For example, if you are living in privately rented accommodation with no overcrowding issues and choose to give up the tenancy to move in with relatives, where there were overcrowding issues, your band will be assessed as though you were still occupying the privately rented accommodation. You will be notified of the decision and have a right to appeal (see Page 34 Section L).

4. Medical Need Assessment

The Council’s Medical Assessment Panel is made up of Senior Medical practitioners and Housing Officers and Support Group representatives. They will assess the medical circumstances of the application and determine the effect re-housing would have on the applicants. The Medical Assessment Panel will award:-

- High Priority
- Medium Priority
- Low Priority
- No Priority
5. **Social Need Assessment**

The Council’s Social Need Assessment Panel is made up of Housing Officers. They will assess the non-medical, welfare and hardship circumstances of the application and will determine the effect that re-housing will have on the applicants. In relation to either welfare or hardship need, the Social Need Assessment panel will award:

- High Priority
- Medium Priority
- Low Priority
- No Priority

6. **Overcrowding**

Overcrowding is based on the standard that a separate bedroom is needed for each of the following:

- Applicant and spouse/partner
- Each child living permanently with the applicant
- An expected child where no bedroom is available also
- A person whom the Council’s Medical Assessment Panel considers should sleep in a room alone.
- Where an applicant has to share a kitchen, living room, WC and bathroom with other occupants who will not be moving as part of the application.

For the purposes of the assessment “living permanently” would mean that children must spend at least 50% of the time with the main applicant. An expected child will count 6 months prior to the expected birth. Immediate family means those moving as part of this application.

We reserve for ourselves the discretion to modify the above criteria and not to apply them rigidly, particularly those that would result in unfairness to the particular applicant or other applicants generally. In particular under certain circumstances the size of the bedrooms in a property and the relationship between those sharing a bedroom will be taken into account when carrying out an assessment.

7. **How are individual properties allocated?**

The law only allows the Council to allocate its properties to households from the Housing Register. When a property becomes available, it is allocated to the household in the highest band who meets the eligibility criteria and have been waiting in that band the longest.
8. **Excluded properties**

There will be occasions when certain properties will not be advertised and the reasons for these exclusions will be monitored and reported through the normal feedback process. Some examples are:-

- Properties required for existing tenants whose properties are subject to major works requiring them to vacate.
- A vacancy is required to enable us to discharge our duty to a statutory homeless household.

**F. Priority Bands**

Banding is awarded based on individual circumstances. This means that those households in the greatest housing need have the highest priority.

The Council operates a system based on four bands, plus a priority band (Band 1+) for those in exceptional housing need. Those applicants who demonstrate multiple need will be moved to a higher category if they fulfil two of the need criteria within their current band, this is known as cumulative need.

To be placed on the Housing Register, you will need to be already living in the Cannock Chase District or be able to demonstrate a connection with the district. Examples of a connection include, close family living in the district, a job in the district, the need to care for, or receive care from someone who lives in the district.

If someone deliberately worsens their housing situation in order to improve their housing priority, they will be reassessed and may receive a reduced priority (see Page 18 Section 3).

Applicants with no local connection but who live in an area covered by the UChoosehomes partnership (see Page 1) will be placed in Band 4 and will be given priority within that band.

If an applicant (or one or more members of their household, as applicable) has more than one housing need (cumulative need) within the band in which they have been placed, their case will be assessed to see whether the applicant should be given additional priority and placed in a higher band.

This includes cases where more than one member of the applicant’s household has housing needs, particularly medical or welfare needs, of such an extent or severity that the household’s overall needs justify the applicant being given additional priority and placed in a higher band.
Priority status (Band 1+) will be awarded to Band 1 applicants in the following situations:

(a) Where an applicant has been accepted as being unintentionally homeless and in priority need

and

(b) Fulfils one of the other Band 1 criteria which has not been taken into account as part of the homeless decision.

Band 1+ will be valid for 2 months, at which time the applicants case will be reviewed.

Applicants awarded Band 1+ will take preference over other Band 1 applicants applying for the same property.

All applicants who have an urgent housing need (including households who are statutorily homeless) and live or work in the Cannock Chase area.

**Condition of property**

Evidence of a Closing Order issued by the Council.

**Homeless duty**

Evidence of a determination letter from the Housing Options Team which states that they have a statutory duty to assist the applicant in obtaining housing.

**Lack of facilities**

If the accommodation currently occupied does not have access to a hot water supply, bathroom, inside toilet or kitchen, e.g. bed and breakfast, hostels, caravans, or would be considered unfit for habitation.

**Parents forced to live apart**

Evidence or reason must be supplied as to why the parents of dependent children are forced to live apart. These instances will be awarded high welfare need. If it could reasonably be expected for both parents to live in either of the homes that they occupy, they will not be included in Band 1.

**Child separated from parents**

Evidence must be provided as to the reason the child cannot occupy the current home of the parent, and that they will live as a family unit if suitable accommodation is allocated.
High medical priority
A high priority awarded by the Council’s Medical Assessment Panel. Examples include that a wheelchair user occupies a home where facilities are upstairs and therefore inaccessible, where an applicant is due to be discharged from hospital and their current accommodation is totally unsuitable. Any applicant who needs to move to suitable adapted accommodation because of serious injury, medical condition or disability which they, or a member of their household, has sustained as a result of service in the Armed Forces.

Domestic violence referrals
Applicants who have endured domestic violence can be referred by professional agencies, i.e. police or a refuge. Domestic violence would refer to any person being physically or mentally abused by a partner or relative.

Harassment including racial
This covers applicants who are referred by statutory agencies, e.g. Police, as they are enduring harassment, and who are therefore unable to remain in their current home. Note, harassment implies a degree of deliberate intent with some underlying motive and can be distinguished from neighbour disputes or nuisance. Harassment includes action on grounds of age, sex, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, political views, marital or social status and racial harassment on the grounds of colour, race, nationality or ethnic or national origins.

Overcrowding
Applicants who are overcrowded statutorily or because their present home is short of a least 3 bedrooms (see Page 20 Section 6).

Move on accommodation
Applicants who are living in specialist accommodation and it is no longer suitable for their needs and by vacating that property it is being made available for occupation for a household for whom it is suitable.

Social need
Applicants who are awarded a High Priority by the Social Need Assessment Panel. This would most likely be applicants who have been referred by professional agencies and whose current housing is unsuitable and affecting them to the point where it is having a detrimental effect on their quality of life.

Hardship
Applicants who are awarded a High Priority by the Social Need Assessment Panel. This would included applicants who need to move to a particular area to take up employment, and if they did not, significant financial hardship would be caused.

Cumulative need
Applicants who fulfil two or more of the Band 1 criteria, one of which must be a statutory homeless duty to rehouse, will move to Band 1+ status.
BAND TWO

Applicants who have an intermediate housing need and live or work in the Cannock Chase area

**Homeless - no statutory duty to re-house**

Applicants who provide proof of their homelessness (including those leaving institutions or tied accommodation) where there is no statutory duty for the Council to assist in re-housing.

**Under-occupation**

Applicants who currently rent a property from the Council and currently under-occupy the property by two or more bedrooms. The criteria for under-occupation will be the same as that for overcrowding (see Page 23).

**Overcrowding**

Applicants who are overcrowded because their present home is short of at least 2 bedrooms or there is evidence of shared facilities. (see Page 20 Section 6)

**Medical need**

Applicants who have been awarded a medium priority by the Council’s Medical Assessment Panel, to reflect how their mental/physical health is affected by their current housing.

**Social need**

Where the applicant has been awarded a medium priority from the Council’s Social Need Assessment Panel. An example of a medium social need would be to receive support from the only available carer.

**Hardship**

Where the applicant has been awarded a medium priority from the Assessment Panel. An example would be they would not be able to take up an educational opportunity if they do not move, or you have children under 16 years old and you live in an upstairs flat with no garden.

**Access to work**

Applicants who work within the Cannock Chase district and currently live outside of the area, and the travelling time from your home to work exceeds two hours.

**Other vulnerable groups**

These will include those identified under homeless legislation as having a priority need such as those leaving prison or local authority care. This will also apply to applicants leaving the armed forces (see Page 8 Section 8).

**Cumulative need**

Where an applicant fulfils two or more of the Band 2 criteria, they will move to Band 1.
BAND THREE

Applicants who have some housing need and live in the Cannock Chase area

Overcrowding

Applicants who are overcrowded because their present home is short of at least 1 bedroom (see Page 20 Section 6).

Medical need

Where an applicant’s mental/physical health is being affected by their current housing, and the Council’s Medical Assessment Panel has awarded a low medical priority.

Social need

Where the applicant has been awarded a low priority from the Social Need Assessment Panel. An example of a low social need would be to receive support from someone other than a principal carer.

Hardship

Where the applicant has been awarded a low priority from the Assessment Panel. Applicants who need to move to a particular area to provide support and not to do so would cause personal hardship. An example of low hardship would be that you have children under 16 years old and you live in a ground floor flat with no garden, or you live in an upstairs flat with a garden.

Cumulative need

Where an applicant fulfils two or more of the band three criteria, they will move to Band 2.

BAND FOUR

Applicants who wish to move but have no housing need. Applicants from outside of the Cannock Chase district and those who have had a reduced preference

Applicants who live outside the Cannock Chase district may demonstrate some need for re-housing and have a connection to the Cannock Chase district e.g. through family, work or the need to give or receive care.

Applicants applying to move into the district as members of the UChoosehomes Partnership. Priority within this band will be given to members of the UChoosehomes Partnership using the banding criteria of the joint Allocations Policy. A copy of this is available at www.UChoosehomes.co.uk. Households who have had a reduced preference applied to their application will be considered after members of the UChoose Scheme and other out of area applicants.

Applicants who have had a reduced preference applied to their application (see Page 18 Section 3).
The Council has a variety of housing stock throughout its district made up of the following:-

- One, two, three and four bedroom flats
- Two and three bedroom maisonettes
- One, two and three bedroom bungalows
- Two, three and four bedroom houses
- Sheltered bedsits and one bedroom flats
- Mature person’s flats (1 bedroom only for applicants aged over 40 years)

G. What type of accommodation does the Council have?

H. What type of property can I have?

1. General

This depends on your age and the size of your household. The types of property for which you are eligible are outlined below. N.B. if you are pregnant, your child will be counted as a member of your household 3 months prior to the expected date of delivery.

Important: You should examine this table carefully before you complete your application for housing form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROPERTY TYPE</th>
<th>ELIGIBLE HOUSEHOLDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One bedroom flat</td>
<td>• Single persons or couples without children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One bedroom flat in a mature block</td>
<td>• Single persons aged over 40 years or couples where one party is aged 40 years or over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two bedroom flat</td>
<td>• Households with one child or two children of the same sex, or couples with a housing or medical need for separate bedrooms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| One bedroom bungalows          | • Single persons aged 60 or over
• Couples where at least one person is aged 60 or over
• Single persons or couples with a medical need for ground floor accommodation
• Owner occupiers with a medical priority for ground floor accommodation and equity of less than £80,000 |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROPERTY TYPE</th>
<th>ELIGIBLE HOUSEHOLDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Two Bedroom bungalow                           | • Single people aged 60 and over  
• Couples or families with children where one person is aged 60 or over  
• Single people or couples or households with children that have a medical need for ground floor accommodation  
• Owner occupiers with a medical priority for ground floor accommodation and equity of less than £80,000 |
| Three bedroom bungalow                         | • Single persons or couples who are aged 60 and over with two or more children  
• Couples who have a medical need for ground floor accommodation, and have two or more children or another family member who normally is expected to reside with them  
• Couples with one child where they have a medical need for separate bedrooms |
| Two bedroom house                              | • Households with one or more children                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Three bedroom flat/house/maisonette            | • Households with two or more children                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Four bedroom flat/house                        | • Households with three or more children                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Sheltered Accommodation                        | • Single people and couples aged 60 or over  
• Owner occupiers, aged 60 or over with a medical priority for sheltered accommodation who have an equity of less than £80,000                                                                                     |
| Properties with adaptations for disabled households | • Households who require the adaptations provided in the property                                                                                                                                                        |
I. Where is the Council’s accommodation located?

The area covered by Cannock Chase Council includes Hednesford, Rugeley, Norton Canes and Heath Hayes as well as Cannock. Full details of all estates are available from your housing office. The Council also works in partnership with several other housing organisations throughout North Warwickshire and Southern Staffordshire. Please visit www.UChoosehomes.co.uk for further details of the scheme and available properties.
1. **How will I get to know about available properties?**

All vacant properties will be advertised on the Council’s website www.cannockchasedc.gov.uk. There is a sub regional choice based lettings scheme for North Warwickshire and Southern Staffordshire, for further details logon to the website www.UChoosehomes.co.uk As well as advertising on the internet the properties will be displayed in the Council’s offices, One Stop Shops and local newspapers. If you are disabled and have difficulty accessing the service, please contact the Allocations Section who will give you further advice and assistance.

2. **How can I express an interest in a vacant property?**

If you see a property advertised and you meet the eligibility criteria (see Section H) you can register your interest via the website www.cannockchasedc.gov.uk and follow the link, by telephoning, coming into the office or One Stop Shop, email or SMS text message.

3. **Can I express an interest for any property?**

Yes you can apply for any vacant property advertised, the successful applicant will be the one in the highest band who meets the eligibility criteria and has been waiting in that band the longest.

4. **Can someone express an interest for me?**

You can nominate someone to act as an advocate on your behalf, this can be a friend, relative or someone from the support services. They can then act for you. If you have no one to act as an advocate, the Council’s Allocations Officer will be pleased to do this on your behalf.

5. **Can I request more than one property?**

You can express an interest for as many properties as you like. You will only be considered for a vacancy if you meet all of the criteria. You will not be considered for vacant properties once your application has been successful and you are considering an offer.

6. **Will my chances increase if I express an interest more than once for the same property?**

No. Only one is required for each property.

7. **If I express an interest early or late will it increase my chances?**

No, all applications will be considered on the appropriate banding, the eligibility criteria and the length of time the application has been valid.
8. How will I know if I have been successful?

Each property advertised will have a closing date for the receipt of expressions of interest. You will be notified within 5 working days if you have been successful. If you have not heard from us within that time, you should assume you have been unsuccessful and continue to express your interest in other vacancies.

9. How do I receive an offer of a property?

You will be sent a letter that will make you a formal offer of the accommodation. This letter will ask you to contact the Housing Office to discuss the property that has been offered. You will be given the opportunity to view the property when the keys are available before you make a final decision about whether or not you want to accept the property.

10. What if I turn down the offer?

If, after viewing the property, you decide that it is not suitable you can refuse the property, remain on the housing register and continue to express your interest in other vacancies. We will ask for your reasons for refusal. However, under certain circumstances (for example statutory homeless cases) the refusal could mean that you lose your Band 1 status along with any priority status if appropriate. Applicants will be limited to three refusals of shortlisted offers per year unless the property that they are expressing an interest in has proved difficult to let. The Allocations Officer will make the decision as to whether a property has proved difficult to let.

11. What if I want to transfer to another council property?

You will be treated in the same way as households who are not yet Council tenants. This means that you will be placed into one of the bands and you can ask to be considered for vacancies along with others from the waiting list.

An inspection of your property will be carried out prior to you being offered alternative accommodation. Before moving to another property the Council will inspect your existing home. If it is found that damage has been caused to the property either deliberately or by your neglect, the vacant property will be offered to someone else on the housing register and you will be required to carry out the necessary work, at your own cost. The Council will defer your transfer application until the remedial work has been carried out. Once this has been done, the Council will re-inspect the property, if the work is satisfactory your transfer application will be changed from deferred and you may once again express your interest for vacancies.
Once you have vacated your current home if, after inspection, it is considered that a decorating allowance will need to be awarded for the incoming tenant, any decorating allowance to be granted for your new property will be withheld or reduced in value.

12. What if I want to transfer after I move in?

Once you have accepted an offer of accommodation, your application will be cancelled. If you wish to move to another Council or Housing Association property you must complete a new Application for Housing Form. Your new circumstances will be assessed and you will be placed in the relevant band, in accordance with your housing need.

Please see the section on Mutual Exchanges on Page 33 for more details of the HomeSwapper Scheme or visit their website at www.homeswapper.co.uk.
1. **Housing Options Team (Private Renting)**

We recognise that there are many occasions where you might benefit from some housing advice and information and for this purpose trained staff are available to discuss your individual housing needs and wide range of housing options. The services provided include:-

- Housing advice and information
- Rent advance and loss and damage guarantee scheme
- Details of landlords and vacancies within the district
- Homelessness prevention
- Liaise with other agencies
- Mediation services
- Information on Home Buy and shared ownership schemes

There is a wide range of advice and information available. This list is not exhaustive but outlines some of the services you can access free of charge. You can contact the Housing Options Team direct on (01543) 462621.

2. **Homelessness prevention**

If you feel that you may lose your accommodation and become homeless, you should contact our Housing Office or the Housing Options Team for help and advice as we may be able to prevent your homelessness. We can talk to your landlord, liaise with the benefits agencies about your claim, provide information about grants and loans available to you, and help explain Housing Law to ensure that you are fully aware of your rights and responsibilities.

If you feel that your home is potentially at risk, please contact us to discuss your situation and identify ways in which we can help you. We can also refer you direct to the Housing Options Team for more information.

3. **Housing Associations**

A number of Housing Associations own property within the Cannock Chase area. These are independent non-profit making organisations who provide properties at affordable rents for households in need.

The Council is able to nominate people who have been accepted on its Housing Register for vacant properties. If you wish to be considered for a Housing Association property, you should complete the relevant section of your Application for Housing Form.
Some Associations also have properties for sale under shared ownership arrangements. This means that you can buy part of the property and pay rent for the remainder to the Housing Association. If you are interested in this scheme, please contact the Housing Options Team for further information.

You may also wish to apply directly to a Housing Association and the list of the Associations which have properties in the Cannock Chase area is available from your local office.

4. Mutual exchanges

If you are a Council tenant, you may find another tenant who would like to exchange (or swap) homes with you. To help you find a suitable exchange you can advertise your home, free of charge at the Housing Office or in the Council’s Hometalk magazine. The Council have also joined the ‘HOMESWAPPER’ scheme, as a tenant you can register free of charge and seek suitable tenants to exchange with. To register with this scheme please visit the Council’s website and follow the ‘HOMESWAPPER’ link or log on at www.homeswapper.co.uk.

Before the exchange can take place both parties must apply to the Council (using a special application form available from the Housing Office), for written permission to move. You must not exchange until you have received permission in writing.

When seeking permission from the Council for an exchange, we will consider the following before any decision is made:-

- Neither of you have rent arrears
- Neither property will be overcrowded or under occupied
- There is no Notice Seeking Possession pending or served on either property
- The property has not been specially designed or adapted for a disabled person and no person requiring the adaptation would be living there if the exchange takes place
- The property is part of a sheltered housing scheme and should the exchange take place, no qualifying person would be living there
- Any other information which may affect the decision made whilst taking into account current legislation and offering a consistent service.

5. UChoosehomes

The Council has formed a partnership with other social housing providers across Southern Staffordshire and Northern Warwickshire, to see if you are eligible and to express interest in vacancies please visit www.UChoosehomes.co.uk.
You have the right to request a review of any decision initially made by the Council. The original decision will be reviewed by the Head of Housing, should you still disagree, then you have the right to have the case reviewed by the Council’s Appeals Panel. In certain circumstances you can refer the matter to the Local Government Ombudsman.

The Council is committed to serving the Cannock Chase community in the most efficient and courteous way. We are constantly trying to improve our services and the way we deliver them.

We welcome any feedback on your experiences of accessing Council services and have a leaflet which explains our complaints procedure and encourages you to tell us your experiences so that we can continue to work towards serving the community to the highest standards.
This booklet can be provided in Braille, on audio cassette tape/disk, large print and in the following languages on request to Cannock Chase Council on 01543 462621.

Bengali, Gujarati, Chinese, Urdu, Punjabi and Polish

Email: customerservices@cannockchasedc.gov.uk
Website: www.cannockchasedc.gov.uk

November 2009