

Homeseeker Policy



1. Introduction: Background and Scope

There is high demand for rented homes in Torfaen which is likely to increase. This policy sets out how Bron Afon will prioritise applicants for the homes we rent.

We intend to submit this policy to the Council and to ask them to adopt this policy as a joint policy. This will enable Bron Afon and the Council to work closely together to meet housing need in the Borough. Working in this way will assist Bron Afon in complying with the regulatory requirements of the Welsh Assembly Government and its legal duty to support the Council to meet its homelessness duties and will enable the Council itself to discharge its homelessness responsibilities. For both parties, it will enable us to support key groups of people in need of housing such as young people leaving care and people needing to leave hospital.

The main text of this policy does not cover allocation of sheltered housing. Pending a comprehensive review of the sheltered housing allocation policy, we will continue for the time being to allocate sheltered housing using the latest Council policy attached as Appendix B to this policy.

This policy covers transfers of existing tenants of Bron Afon as well as allocation of homes to new tenants.

2. Objectives of this policy and strategy

- To use our limited housing resources to best effect in meeting the greatest housing need in the Borough.
- To fulfil our regulatory and legal requirements.
- To support the Council in providing housing to homeless people and other groups to whom they owe a duty to secure accommodation.
- To provide an open and accountable system of prioritising applicants that is understandable by applicants but also gives due weighting to housing need.
- To allow applicants to exercise choice in their accommodation where possible and appropriate.
- To work in partnership with the Council and other registered social landlords in the Borough to meet housing need.
- To have flexibility in the policy to deal with genuine emergencies and local based arrangements where this will support the creation of cohesive communities and reduce anti social behaviour and crime.

3. A Partnership between Bron Afon and the Council

3.1 There will be a partnership between Bron Afon and the Council which will jointly administer the application of this policy. In the remainder of this policy this partnership is referred to simply as "The Partnership". This policy will apply to the allocation of all Bron Afon homes with the exception of sheltered housing which is allocated under the policy set out in Appendix B attached.

- 3.2 The policy will be administered by a Partnership Team which consists of staff from Bron Afon and the Council, hosted and managed by the Council.
- 3.3 The day to day decisions required on individual cases under the Policy will be determined by a Partnership Panel which will have a minimum of four staff. The Panel will always include staff from both Bron Afon and the Council. Staff members who form the Panel will have received the correct level of training to ensure the consistency of the decision making process. The Panel will be expected to work by consensus where possible.
- 3.4 The Partnership Team will report to a Steering Group of senior officers from both Bron Afon and the Council. The Steering Group will supervise and monitor the operation of this policy and the budget, operation and management of the Partnership Team and make recommendations for any changes required to both Bron Afon and the Council. They will keep under review the operation and decision making of the Panel.
- 3.5 This policy can only be changed by the Bron Afon Board in relation to the allocation of Bron Afon homes. The Council's policy on nominating homeless people and nomination of individuals to Bron Afon homes can only be changed by the Executive member for Housing of the Council or the Cabinet. The parties will review the policy jointly and seek to agree any changes and always consult each other before making any changes.

4. Registration for housing

- 4.1. The Partnership intends to work with housing associations renting homes in Torfaen to develop a common system for registering those seeking housing. This is called a "common housing register".
- 4.2 The Partnership will develop a straightforward application form for those wishing to register for housing. All applicants will be required to provide information enabling the Partnership to verify the contents of their application to ensure accuracy and eligibility. Verification can be undertaken in a number of ways: through attendance at the Council's Housing Options Centre, through a professional advocate/agency, by Bron Afon staff and where necessary by a home visit. Following verification, the application will be considered a 'live' application and registered from the initial date the application was first received by the Partnership. Advice or assistance is available free of charge to anyone experiencing difficulty with the application form or process from the Council, Bron Afon and housing associations participating in the common housing register.
- 4.3 Anyone over the age of 16 is eligible to join the Partnership Register unless they fall within one of the groups of ineligible applicants set out in paragraph 5.
- 4.4 If a young person under the age of eighteen is registering and is supported by the Council a copy of the support plan or pathway plan must be provided to the Partnership Team which should make reference to accommodation.
- 4.5 All eligible applications to join the register will be registered on the Partnership Register by the Partnership and each applicant allocated a unique identification number once verified. Registration will be confirmed in writing to the applicant at their registered address.

- 4.6 Two people who are married, in a civil partnership, or are a cohabiting couple, siblings, a parent and son or daughter or two people where one is a carer for the other can apply to join the register and obtain housing together as joint tenants. However, joint applications will not be accepted from:-
- Friends who simply wish to live together; &/or;
 - From applicants where one of the parties seeking to hold the tenancy is a person who is ineligible for housing under the legislation (see paragraph 5 below).
- 4.7 All entries on the register will be reviewed on a regular basis by the Partnership and applicants will be asked to advise whether they wish to remain on the Partnership Register. Those who do not respond within 28 days of their review will have their application cancelled. Applicants who may have difficulty maintaining their registration (for example, those with a learning disability or mental health issues) will be identified, and appropriate support arrangements put in place for those who need them. If a cancelled applicant re-applies to join the Partnership Register at a later date they will not be re-registered from their original application date unless there are mitigating circumstances. These would include:-
- Being away from their home to attend hospital, nursing home, residential home or other medical/support/care service; or;
 - Being away from their home to support/care for a family member or friend.
 - Other exceptional circumstances considered reasonable by the Panel.
- 4.8 Where someone requests re-instatement to the Partnership Register from their original date the Panel will need to see clear evidence of one of the above reasons before granting re-instatement. There is a right of appeal against the decision of the Panel. See paragraph 17.
- 4.9. Applicants will be advised that it is a criminal offence to knowingly or recklessly give false information to, or knowingly withhold information from the Council. It can carry a fine of up to £5000, and this will result in the current housing application being cancelled. Bron Afon will also be able to take possession proceedings against any tenant who has been offered accommodation on the basis of false information.

5. Applicants who are ineligible to join the Partnership register

- 5.1 The law provides that certain people who are subject to immigration control may not be provided with housing by Bron Afon and may not join the Partnership Register. These include the following groups:-
- People with restrictions or conditions on their leave to enter or remain in the UK.
 - People who have entered the UK illegally or who have overstayed their leave.
 - People who are not habitually resident in the UK, Channel Islands, Isle of Man or Republic of Ireland.
- 5.2 Other people from abroad may join the Partnership Register and will be considered for housing in line with this policy. This includes people who:
- Have exceptional or indefinite leave to remain in the UK, or;
 - Have been granted refugee status, or;

- Are habitually resident in the UK, Channel Islands, Isle of Man or Republic of Ireland.

5.3 Even if an applicant has exceptional leave to remain in the UK, this may be subject to a condition that they have no recourse to public funds for themselves and their dependents. This will also make them ineligible for housing with Bron Afon.

5.4 Even if an applicant has indefinite leave to remain in the UK, this may be subject to a condition that they remain habitually resident in the UK, Channel Islands, Isle of Man or Republic of Ireland. If they are not habitually resident this will make them ineligible for housing with Bron Afon.

5.5 The term "habitually resident" is used to indicate the country where the applicant resides permanently. This means the country where the applicant normally lives and has connections such as bank /savings accounts, furniture, personal belongings, past and/or current employment, accommodation, family, etc. If the applicant has come to the UK in the last two years, they will be asked to complete an additional questionnaire, which will enable the Partnership to assess if they are habitually resident and can be considered for housing with Bron Afon.

6. Advertising homes for letting

6.1 All homes for letting by Bron Afon will be advertised by the Partnership Team other than homes required to house the following groups of people:-

- i. Homes required for housing a tenant **temporarily** in an emergency to enable essential repair works to be carried out to their home where the tenant cannot remain in occupation whilst the works are undertaken.
- ii. Homes required for housing a tenant **temporarily** to enable improvement works to be carried out to their existing home where the tenant cannot remain in occupation whilst the works are undertaken.
- iii. Homes required for re-housing someone being harassed at their current home, which is evidenced or substantiated by a professional body/individual including the Police or other agency, and the move will protect the person(s) from danger. Advice may be sought from relevant agencies about a suitable location where applicants in these circumstances will be re-housed. In addition it may not be possible for an applicant to retain choice where that choice may impact on their safety and welfare.
- iv. Homes required for re-housing someone who needs accommodation of a particular kind or in a particular location to protect them or other persons from danger.
- v. Homes required to accommodate the occupant(s) of a Bron Afon home where Bron Afon is seeking possession and must secure suitable alternative accommodation e.g. a successor to a tenancy whose home is too big or where a home is intended to be demolished and the tenant must be re-housed.
- vi. Homes required to re-house staff who have in the past been required to live in particular accommodation to perform their jobs and who are leaving Bron Afon's employment and require alternative accommodation.
- vii. Homes required to re-house a person accepted by the Council as statutory homeless and owed a full homelessness duty through S193 1996 Housing Act who has refused to bid for a suitable property or has refused a suitable offer through the bidding process.

- viii. Homes required for temporary re-housing in the event of a major incident e.g. flooding or major fire.
- ix. Homes required to re-house a Bron Afon tenant whose existing home needs substantial adaptations but who has agreed to move to a home that is suitable for their needs.
- x. Homes required by the Council for use as non secure temporary tenancies in discharge of their temporary accommodation duties.
- xi. Homes required to house a patient in a hospital who is medically fit to leave hospital but unable to move back to their original home. The Partnership will consider each case on an individual basis and will provide either temporary or permanent housing dependant upon whether the applicant is able to secure suitable housing using their own means e.g. by selling their existing home and purchasing a more suitable property to meet their needs.
- xii. Homes required urgently for someone with a terminal illness who has particular housing needs, and those needs would be met by the property to be allocated - The Partnership will consider each case on an individual basis and will provide either temporary or permanent housing dependant upon whether the applicant is able to secure suitable housing using their own means.

- 6.2 Details of homes will be included in the adverts in order to ensure that applicants can bid for properties that are of an appropriate size and are of a type and in a location of their choice.
- 6.3 Homes will either be identified as available for bids by all applicants on the Partnership Register or that preference will be given to Gold Band 2 applicants over those in Gold Band 1.
- 6.4 Properties will be advertised on a Partnership website, on Bron Afon and the Council websites and other partner websites, and will be available in Bron Afon area offices, Council Customer Care Centres and at the Council's Housing Options Centre.
- 6.5 In exceptional cases, applicants will be sent adverts by post where they have no means of accessing the adverts of available homes and other arrangements cannot be put in place e.g. through an advocate.
- 6.6 Applicants and their authorised advocates will be able to apply for properties through the internet 'web', completion of a coupon, telephone bid and e-mail.
- 6.7 Properties will be advertised on a regular basis with a clear return date and allocation lists provided to Bron Afon of those applicants who are entitled to priority under this policy.
- 6.8 Where a home has been selected for advert, no further offers of accommodation will be made to any applicant listed in paragraph 6.1 on that home prior to closure of the advert except in case of major emergency.
- 6.9 Adverts will be posted on a weekly basis with a specified period within which all bids must be submitted. This period will be set by the Council and Bron Afon from time to time in order to achieve a balance between allowing applicants the maximum amount of time to bid whilst minimising the time that any property will remain empty.
- 6.10 Where properties have had substantial adaptations that make them particularly suitable for a tenant with particular needs e.g. in a wheelchair, then they may be

advertised on the basis that priority will be given to tenants needing accommodation that has been adapted in this way and bidding may be restricted to tenants who have or whose family have these needs.

6.11 Where properties are particularly suitable for older people or people with limited mobility (e.g. bungalows) then they may be advertised on the basis that priority will be given to tenants needing accommodation of that type.

7. Applicants who may join the Partnership Register but who will get no preference to enable them to bid for housing with Bron Afon

7.1 Certain applicants will not be awarded any preference to enable them to bid for housing because of their past conduct or the conduct of someone who would live with them.

7.2 Decisions about eligibility under this section will be made by the Panel on the individual circumstances of each case and there is a right of appeal against the decision. See paragraph 17 for the right of appeal. Applicants will be notified of the decision in writing and the reasons and given details of how to exercise the right of appeal.

7.3 The Panel may decide that an applicant should have no preference for housing under this policy only if:

- He or she or a member of his/her household, has been guilty of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make him/her unsuitable to be a tenant of Bron Afon; and;
- The Panel is satisfied that, in the circumstances at the time the case is considered, he/she deserves not to be treated as a person who should be given reasonable preference.

7.4 For the purposes of paragraph 7.3, “unacceptable behaviour” means behaviour (including non payment of sums owed) by the applicant or by a member of his or her household that would - if the applicant had been a secure tenant of Bron Afon have entitled Bron Afon to an outright possession order under the Housing Act 1985.

8 Applicants who may join the Partnership Register but who will be awarded reduced preference to enable them to bid for housing with Bron Afon

8.1 Applicants whose current or previous conduct where the partnership would not have obtained an outright possession order but who are not acting responsibly either by owing debt to the partnership or by their current behaviour may receive reduced preference. By this statement the partnership may accept an application for housing but will temporarily suspend the applicant until such time that the behaviour has improved. The Panel will decide the length of suspension on an individual basis and will be consistent in its application. There will also be a review mechanism should applicants disagree with individual decisions.

8.2 Applicants will not be declined preference indefinitely but the effect will be that they will be limited to having Bronze priority. The Panel will decide the length of their restriction to Bronze priority, a date for any review and any conditions that may be attached to removal of this limitation enabling them to qualify for higher priority. For example, if the applicant is restricting to Bronze priority due to rent arrears there is

likely to be a condition that a regular pattern of payments must be established and maintained before the restriction is removed. If the applicant is restricted to Bronze priority due to anti social behaviour, it is likely the applicant and their household will have to demonstrate a change in their behaviour.

The applicant can appeal against the restriction or the period of restriction or the conditions. See paragraph 17 for appeals. All suspensions will be reviewed periodically by the Panel.

- 8.3 In exceptional cases, Bron Afon may accept applicants suspended or excluded by the Panel because of housing related debts due to Bron Afon or any partner if the applicant agrees to enter into specific legally binding agreements on repayment, has a track record of regular repayments and/or can provide satisfactory sureties for repayment of sums due.
- 8.4 In exceptional cases, Bron Afon may accept applicants suspended or excluded by the Panel because of anti social behaviour if the applicant acknowledges that past behaviour was inappropriate and needs to change and agrees to enter into specific legally binding agreements on improved future behaviour, engagement with support arrangements such as parenting classes and/or a programme of recompense for those affected by their past behaviour.

9 Procedure for assessing priority for housing

- 9.1 The Panel will assess each applicant on the register and determine their priority for housing in accordance with the categories in paragraph 6.1 or the Bands set out in section 10. There is a right of appeal against the decision of the Panel. See paragraph 17.
- 9.2 The Panel will base its decision on whether an applicant is entitled to priority under paragraph 6.1 or within one of the Bands set out in section 10 relying on evidence provided to it by or on behalf of the applicant.
- 9.3 It is for the applicant to advise the Partnership Team if there has been any material change in their circumstances that may affect their priority and to inform the Partnership if their contact details change.
- 9.4 Applicants placed within the housing need bands will be advised of their Band and given a date when their award of that band has been accepted and entered on the Partnership register.
- 9.5 If an applicant or a member of their household applying to be re-housed with them has a medical condition which is made worse by their existing accommodation, then they can ask for a medical assessment to be carried out. More than one person may qualify for a medical assessment and all medical needs will be taken into consideration. All members of the household affected will need to complete a "Medical Questionnaire" which will allow them the opportunity to explain any medical circumstances and how their current housing situation is affecting their health problems. The information provided will be treated in strict confidence; however we will require the applicants' agreement to disclose their personal information to a suitably medically qualified practitioner to assess their priority to move. The partnership will use a range of practitioners when assessing priority within this category.

Medical assessments priority decisions will be made in accordance with the criteria set out in this policy and a full and comprehensive assessment of the applicant's needs and those of any family members with medical needs will be made by the Panel following advice from appropriate medical and other professionals such as social workers and occupational therapists.

- 9.6 Medical Priorities will only be awarded where the existing housing circumstances are having a detrimental impact on the applicant or member of the family requiring re-housing. During this process consideration will be given as to whether a transfer to alternative accommodation will significantly improve the situation. Where necessary, further advice may be obtained from an independent medical assessment agency and/or an Occupational Health adviser on a case by case basis.
- 9.7 In reaching a decision on the appropriate Banding due to medical factors the Panel will consider whether there are other options available to resolve or alleviate these difficulties and allow the Member to remain in their own home. This might include the provision of support, aids or adaptations.
- 9.8 If the Panel consider that there are medical needs that justify priority for housing, they may attach conditions on the housing for which the applicant may bid e.g. ground floor or suitable for a wheelchair.
- 9.9 Applicants will always receive written notification of the result of their medical assessment and will be advised if there are any conditions which apply to their re-housing such as restrictions on the types of property they will be considered for. They will only be eligible to bid for the homes that fit the criteria specified.
- 9.10 Priority Medical awards are only made in relation to the following circumstances set out in paragraph 9.11. If an applicant is not granted an award, they will remain in the appropriate band for their other circumstances with the date of registration in that Band.
- 9.11 The following circumstances can lead to award of priority on medical grounds:
- The individual's existing housing situation or accommodation is no longer suitable due to his/her medical condition.
 - The individual has a medical condition which may be alleviated by rehousing.
 - The individual's safety, independence or quality of life is seriously affected by their circumstances and rehousing is vital to alleviate the problem.
 - The individual's existing housing circumstances or accommodation is worsening a severe or life threatening medical condition.
 - The individual has support needs which cannot be met in their existing accommodation, and a move closer to support providers is desirable to promote their wellbeing.

The Panel will review all Medical Priority awards on a regular basis to ensure that those with severe medical conditions are being considered for alternative accommodation which will alleviate their medical condition.

- 9.12 Where home owners or leaseholders join the Partnership Register they are expected to use their own resources where possible either to adapt their existing homes to make them suitable as their needs change or to move to alternative owner occupied

housing. To be awarded any priority they must demonstrate that they are unable to meet their need through the use of their own resources and any resources given away will be taken into account. The partnership will require owner occupiers and leaseholders to undertake a financial assessment to ascertain what resources are available. This will also require disclosure of assets and their disposal, including disposal to a family member or friend.

Priority Bands

- 10.1 A Priority Banding system applies to determine who will be allocated homes (except where applicants are emergency cases referred to in paragraph 10.9 or applicants fall within the categories listed in paragraph 6.1).
- 10.2 There are three bands of housing need which are defined in detail below. These are:-
- **Gold Band 1 and Gold Band 2 both with High Priority**
 - **Silver Band – Moderate Priority**
 - **Bronze Band – Low priority**

10.3 Gold Band 1 High priority

Gold Band 1 will be awarded on any one of the following criteria:

- i An applicant in private rented accommodation which is subject to a Prohibition Order, and recovery of the premises is required in order to comply with the Order as defined by Section 33 of the Housing Act 2004.
- ii An applicant awarded high medical priority for rehousing by the Panel.
- iii An applicant who is a tenant of Bron Afon and who is under-occupying their current home (in line with the Home Size Matrix attached as Appendix A).
- iv An applicant who is a tenant of Bron Afon and must transfer under an approved re-designation or regeneration programme.
- v An applicant awarded a priority for urgent re-housing by the Panel on substantial hardship, welfare or social grounds. Assessments will be made on an individual basis.
- vi An applicant who is a licensee of Bron Afon or the Council or approved partner registered social landlords and voluntary agencies providing supported housing who needs 'move on' accommodation. In these cases written submissions are to be made by the support provider evidencing the requirement and suitability of applicant for accommodation. [In these cases the award of Gold Band will be backdated to the original date of application in order to facilitate move on quickly, or in the case of care leavers to their 16th birthday].
- vii The applicant's current accommodation is overcrowded as defined by the Housing Act 1985 or where a Category 1 hazard has been identified under the provisions of the Housing Act 2004 which cannot be removed in a reasonable time.
- viii Substantial adaptations are needed to the applicants existing home with Bron Afon and they have agreed to move to a property which is suitable to their needs.
- ix The applicant is the victim of domestic violence and has been recommended for rehousing through approved partnership arrangements
- x Any other applicant with high priority determined by the appropriate Bron Afon Senior Manager.

- xi The applicant has a requirement for a suitably adapted property based on individual need and circumstances [only priority for a suitably adapted property].
- xii The applicants' property has a Category 1 hazard within the housing health and safety rating system and/or is in substantial disrepair or is unfit for human habitation and the applicant is unable to get it repaired or made fit within a reasonable time.
- xiii Two or more Silver Band criteria apply.
- xiv Two or more applicants are giving up two or more separate existing Bron Afon or other Registered Social landlord tenancies and requesting a move to a single tenancy as joint applicants.
- xv The applicant is living in a flat on or above the first floor and has 3 or more children under the age of 10.
- xvi The applicant is a tenant of Bron Afon and has been in priority band Silver for 3 years and has fully complied with their tenancy conditions throughout this period.
- xvii Armed forces personnel occupying accommodation supplied by the armed forces and who are being discharged from the armed forces. Their date of registration for this Band will be backdated to the date from which they have continuously occupied armed forces accommodation.

10.4 Gold Band 2: High priority

Gold Band 2 will be awarded on the following criterion:

- The applicant has been accepted as homeless within the meaning of section 193 of the Housing Act 1996 by Torfaen County Borough Council. This means the Council has accepted the applicant is homeless, in priority need and unintentionally homeless.

10.5 Applicants awarded a Gold Band have thirteen weeks to secure suitable housing making use of the priority awarded. Their award will be reviewed by the Panel after thirteen weeks. If the applicant has not made reasonable attempts to bid for suitable housing that has become available during this period then their priority may be reduced to the next lower band. The review will take account of any special circumstances that may inhibit their ability to bid for homes. If an applicant is in Gold Band 2 and does not use their Gold Band priority within the thirteen weeks and suitable housing has become available then accommodation will be identified and offered to the applicant under paragraph 6.1. Unless there are special reasons why a specific area is required or a particular area is unsuitable, applicants in the Gold Band are expected to bid for properties anywhere in Torfaen.

10.6 Silver Band: Moderate priority

Silver Band will be awarded on one of the following criteria:

- i. The applicant is lodging with friends and family and sharing facilities.
- ii. The applicant is a key worker who has been offered a full-time job in Torfaen and needs accommodation. (This will only apply if there is an agreed and recognised Key Worker scheme).
- iii. The applicant needs to move closer to give or receive essential support/care services to assist them or their family with day-to-day living.

- iv. The applicants' relationship with their spouse/partner has broken down and they want to live separately.
- v. The applicant lacks 2 or more bedrooms in their home for permanent members of their household. Applicants can only bid for properties of sufficient size to address the overcrowding issue as per the Home Size matrix in Appendix A.
- vi. The applicant is a Bron Afon tenant who lacks one bedroom in their home and has been in Priority Band Bronze for at least two years. Applicants can only bid for properties of sufficient size to address the overcrowding issue as per the Home Size matrix.
- vii. The applicant has a medical need for rehousing which is not considered to be urgent.
- viii. The applicant is a tenant of Bron Afon, another registered social landlord or a private sector landlord within Torfaen as been in priority band Bronze for 3 years and has fully complied with their tenancy conditions throughout this period.
- ix. The applicant is accepted by Torfaen County Borough Council as homeless or threatened with homelessness within the definition of the 1996 and 2004 Housing Act but is not in priority need or is intentionally homeless and therefore does not fall into Gold Band 2.
- x. The applicant has one or two children under 10 and lives in a flat above ground floor level (without a lift).
- xi. Homeless or threatened with homelessness (within 28 days) in Torfaen but following enquiries determined as intentionally homeless.

10.7 Bronze Band: Low priority

Bronze Band will be awarded on one of the following criteria:

- All owner occupiers not under any threat of homelessness and having suitable assets to purchase another property.
- Owner occupiers under threat of homelessness but having suitable assets to purchase another property.
- An existing tenant of Bron Afon and in no housing need [but note that they move up a band after 3 years].
- Private sector tenant not under threat of homelessness and in accommodation meeting their housing need.
- Applicants who for reasons of personal circumstances are unable to apply for properties at this time e.g. prisoners, armed forces, residential or nursing care prior to discharge.
- All other categories of general and homeless applicants.

10.8 An applicant must not deliberately/knowingly worsen their personal and housing circumstances to gain advantage of a higher banding or to move through the bands to access a higher priority. If an applicant has deliberately taken this course of action the Panel will remove the applicant to their position within their original band. There is a right of appeal against this removal. See paragraph 17.

10.9 The Panel may determine that a registered applicant who is in exceptional need or who has multiple Gold Band needs and who needs to move as a matter of urgency should be awarded Emergency Priority. The Director of Community Housing or his or her authorised representative will approve the granting of Emergency Priority status. The grant of Emergency Priority Status will be based on the special circumstances of a particular household and reviewed regularly to ensure consistency, with the applicant informed of the outcome.

- 10.10 Emergency Priority status will be granted for 8 weeks and applicants in this category will be sequenced consecutively (i.e. numbered with 1 the highest, 2 second highest, etc) according to need.
- 10.11 If an applicant with Emergency Priority Status does not apply for a home during the 8 week period, their case will be reviewed and their status may be downgraded to Gold Band based on the date of their acceptance into the Gold Band if they have failed to bid for suitable properties that were available during the 8 week period. If their Priority Status is extended, there will be further reviews as required.

11. Bidding for housing

- 11.1 Applicants (or advocates) may bid for up to 4 properties during each advert. They must rank the bids in order of their preference, i.e. their first bid (pending eligibility) will be ranked first and so on. Bids must be submitted before the closing date and time set out in the advert without exception.
- 11.2 The size of home that an applicant can bid for depends on household size. If the Member needs an extra bedroom for medical or other reasons, (e.g. if they have a full time carer), the decision of the appropriate size of home will be taken by the Panel when they award the priority Band.
- 11.3 Unless there are exceptional reasons agreed by the Panel, the size of property that an applicant can bid for and be offered is outlined in Appendix A – in the Home Size Matrix.
- 11.4 If no bids are received from applicants that meet the Home Size Matrix guidelines then the property will be offered to the family that most closely matches the bedroom need, has the highest priority banding and earliest registration date.
- 11.5 Where properties have had substantial adaptations that make them particularly suitable for a tenant with particular needs e.g. in a wheelchair, then they may have been advertised on the basis that priority will be given to tenants needing accommodation that has been adapted in this way, and bidding may be restricted to tenants who have or whose family have these needs.

12. Determining who is offered advertised housing

- 12.1 Once the closing date and time have passed the bids received for a property will be prioritised by the Partnership Team. Only bids for the correct home size (see paragraphs 11.2 to 11.4) and which comply with any special conditions arising from the award of the Banding (e.g. to resolve overcrowding or meet a need caused by a disability) will be taken into account.
- 12.2 Unless there are exceptional circumstances, applicants who are transferring from an existing home with Bron Afon who are prioritised for a home following the bidding process, will only be permitted to transfer if they have no outstanding debt to Bron Afon and if Bron Afon is satisfied that their existing home meets the Bron Afon standard for the letting of homes. An applicant who owes money or whose home does not meet the Standard will have their bid discounted. Exceptional circumstances will be determined by the Inclusion Panel.

- 12.3 Bids from applicants with Emergency Priority status will have priority over all other applicants. Only if there are no applicants with Emergency Priority status will other categories of applicant be prioritised. The Panel will determine the priority between applicants with Emergency Priority status; this could include being statutorily homeless and having a medical illness requiring you to move as a matter of the utmost urgency. All claims for this status will be evidenced.
- 12.4 If there are no applicants with Emergency Priority status who have bid for a home, applicants in the Gold Band will be given priority over applicants in all other Bands. Only if there are no Gold Band applicants will other categories of applicant be prioritised.
- 12.5 If the property has been identified as one where preference is given to applicants in Gold Band 2 (homeless applicants) then preference is given to applicants in that category above applicants in Gold Band 1. If the property has not been identified as one where preference is given to applicants in Gold Band 2 then there is no distinction made between Gold Band or Gold Band 1 applicants.
- 12.6 Within each Gold Band, priority between Gold Band applicants will be based on the time spent in the Gold Band.
- 12.7 If there are no Gold Band applicants who have bid for a home, Silver Band applicants will be given priority over Bronze Band applicants. Where there is more than one suitable applicant bidding for the property, priority is given to the applicant who has had their status awarded to them for the longest period.
- 12.8 If there are no Gold or Silver Band applicants who have bid for a home, Bronze Band applicants will be given priority. As between Gold Band applicants, priority is given to the applicant who has had the Bronze Band for the longest period.

13. Allocating homes under paragraph 6.1

- 13.1 The offer of re-housing will be made to the next suitable home available and the advertising and bidding process will not apply to applicants seeking housing under paragraph 6.1. Advice may be sought from relevant agencies about a suitable location where applicants in these circumstances should be re-housed. The size of property that will be offered will comply with the Home Size Matrix.
- 13.2 Where the accommodation is provided on a temporary basis, the tenant will usually be required to return to their home on completion of remedial works or to alternative accommodation that has been purchased or rented to meet their housing requirements.

14. Lettings plan

- 14.1 Bron Afon and the Council will agree a Lettings Plan that will be regularly reviewed and updated as often as the Steering Group consider necessary. The Plan will set out the property types and locations that are expected to become available over the period of the Plan and will identify a fair and appropriate proportion of those predicted to become available for which reasonable preference will be given to Gold Band 1 homelessness applicants in order to allow the Council and Bron Afon to discharge their respective duties to homeless people. It will also set out the predicted number of

applicants who will require housing during the period of the Plan under paragraph 6.1, the predicted numbers of applicants likely to be housed from the four Bands and the predicted number of homes that will become available which will be restricted to those with particular needs for adaptations.

- 14.2 The Lettings Plan will be a public document and subsequent Plans will report back on the proportion of lettings to homeless people and to categories of applicant under paragraph 6.1 and in each Band.
- 14.3 The Lettings Plan current at any time will be used by the Partnership Team and Bron Afon to identify properties to be allocated under paragraph 6.1 and those where priority is to be given to applicants in Silver Band.

15. Special local lettings arrangements

- 15.1. There may on occasion and in certain circumstances be a requirement for individual or a group of properties to be considered and let under a local letting policy agreement for a time limited period. This will be done for a specific identified purpose such as to promote community safety and community cohesion. This will not be the norm and must take account of the prevailing housing conditions at the time e.g. demand for certain property types where age restrictions may be an issue. Any such policy must be approved in accordance with the current Welsh Assembly Government regulatory requirements and by the Bron Afon Board.
- 15.2 Where a local letting arrangement is in operation, only those applicants who qualify under the local letting criteria may bid for the properties within the arrangement.

16. Allocating the home and signing up the new tenant

- 16.1 For advertised properties, the Partnership Team will provide Bron Afon with a list of five applicants in order of priority for each property advertised.
- 16.2 Properties allocated under paragraph 6.1 of this policy will be allocated by the Allocations Officer of Bron Afon and Bron Afon will provide the Council with a list of all allocations made within this category on a monthly basis.
- 16.3 For applicants notified by the Council, Bron Afon staff will offer the tenancy of the home to the applicant with the highest priority who is willing to accept the offer of a tenancy.
- 16.4 Applicants will be given no less than one working day to make a decision following the viewing of the property unless there are exceptional circumstances which the Community Housing Officer will record.
- 16.5 Bron Afon staff will inform the Partnership Team of acceptance or refusal for administration purposes. If they refuse a property offered, applicants must provide a reason.
- 16.6 Applicants who have bid for a home and have been successful in their bid will not be eligible to bid for further properties that are advertised until they have decided to accept or refuse this property.

- 16.7 If the Applicant accepts the property, the tenancy commencement date will be agreed and all relevant paperwork completed by Bron Afon staff.
- 16.8 If an applicant bids, is offered and then refuses two properties without good reason then their application will be reduced and they will move down a priority band and awarded a date within that band equalling the reduction in priority. They will not need to reapply to the scheme. They will be notified of the decision and can appeal. See paragraph 16 for appeals.

17 Appeals

- 17.1 All applicants have a right to appeal under this policy if:-
- Their application to join the register has been refused or they have been restricted to the Bronze category because of behaviour or rent arrears.
 - They disagree with their current banding.
 - Their priority is withdrawn.
 - They disagree with their eligibility for property.
 - They disagree with the limitations on the type of property they can bid for.
- 17.2 Applicants and tenants will have no right to appeal if they provide or knowingly give false information.
- 17.3 An applicant who wishes to appeal must do so in writing to the Partnership Team or to Bron Afon within 21 days of being notified of the decision against which they are appealing. The request must outline the reasons for the appeal. (1996 Housing Act Section VII S202-204). Letters notifying applicants of decisions should include information about rights of appeal.
- 17.4 Where an applicant or tenant has requested an appeal they may request an oral hearing or a written review. Where the appeal relates to cases requiring clarification and interpretation of this policy, then the review will be conducted as a hearing by an appeals panel of staff from Bron Afon and the Council with Bron Afon staff in the majority or having the casting vote. Where the appeal relates to suspension because the applicant is not considered a suitable tenant, the appeal will be dealt with by a member of the Bron Afon staff not previously involved in the decision making.
- 17.5 Any documents to be relied on at the review must be made available by both parties in advance of the hearing and no document will be introduced into the proceedings without the consent of the Chair of the appeal panel.
- 17.6 The Panel will be chaired for these appeals by a member of staff of Bron Afon.

Home Size Matrix

Family Size	Bedsit/ Studio	Bungalow	1 Bed Flat	2 Bed Flat or Maisonette	2 Bed House	3 Bed Flat/ Maisonette	3 Bed House/3 Bed Bungalow	4 Bed + House
Single Person	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes				
Couple		Yes	Yes	Yes				
*Parent/ couple with 1 child				Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
*Parent/ couple with 2 children						Yes	Yes	
*Parent/ couple with 3 children						Yes	Yes	
*Parent/ couple with 4 + children							Yes	Yes

If you are disabled then you are eligible to bid for appropriately adapted properties within the above matrix. Where bungalows are mentioned in this matrix it refers to non adapted properties.

*Where child, this refers to at least 1 dependent child. Applicants with households where there are no dependent children will not be offered houses except in exceptional circumstances which have been agreed by the Partnership Panel.

The Points Scheme for Sheltered Housing Accommodation

A) Waiting Time

1 point per month (maximum of **60**) for every month the applicant is on the Register and in housing need.

B) Lack of Facilities

- No mains water **20 points**
- No bath / shower **20 points**
- No inside toilet **20 points**
- No hot water supply **15 points**
- No mains sewerage / septic tank **15 points**
- No electricity **15 points**

If the above categories apply, applicants are entitled to claim for all that are applicable

- Property declared 'unfit for human habitation' **50 points**

C) Sharing Bedrooms

- Applicants who have to share a bedroom with relative e.g. grandchildren due to lack of space **20 points**

D) Involuntary Separation

- These points are awarded where an elderly couple who previously lived together in a stable relationship, are being forced to live apart due to the lack of accommodation **25 points**

E) Security of Tenure

Points in this category are awarded for insecurity of tenure and are allocated on a scale which reflects the lack of security in the applicants current accommodation

- Homeless or threatened with homelessness (likely to become homeless within 28 days) **500 points**

NB Homeless applicants will only receive ONE offer of accommodation

- Owner occupiers facing re-possession / arrears (proof of court action being taken by mortgagor must be provided) **70 points**
- Applicants living in B + B, hostel or hotel **60 points**

- Applicants are tied tenants and must leave their accommodation as their employment has finished **60 points**
- Applicants living in property without a tenancy agreement **50 points**
- Applicants hold an Assured Shorthold tenancy agreement **40 points**
- Applicants live in a caravan or mobile home **30 points**

NB Applicants will be able to claim only one category in this section

F) Amenity Points

These reflect the location of the applicant's current accommodation in terms of accessibility to essential facilities

- Applicants home is over ½ mile from GP surgery and no public transport is available **30 points**
- Applicants home is over ½ mile from nearest shops and no public transport is available **30 points**
- Applicants home is over ½ mile from the nearest bus route **30 points**

If the above categories apply, applicants are entitled to claim for all that are applicable

G) Social Factors

- Director's discretion – miscellaneous exceptions **100 points**
(these must relate to circumstances not already identified in the points scheme and be accurately detailed at the time of the award)
- Applicants wishing to move nearer to relatives for added support **80 points**
- Applicants wishing to remain in their present locality but requiring sheltered accommodation **80 points**
- Applicant wishing to move following bereavement or personal trauma **40 points**
- Applicant is unable to afford essential repairs to existing home due to financial hardship **40 points**

NB Applicants will be able to claim only one category in this section

H) Medical Factors

Applicants are awarded medical points based on how their present accommodation affects their medical conditions.

Applicants will be required to submit written evidence from doctors, consultants etc.

- Awarded in bands of **10 points** up to a maximum of **40 points**

I) Other

- Demolition (by Council) **900 points**