

## **LOCAL CONNECTION AND ALLOCATION OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING.**

With the first Stroud council houses to be built for several decades now under construction, members have shown interest in prioritising applicants from the local area for these new properties. Concerns have been raised that the properties will be allocated to people from outside of the district. This document is to clarify what is meant by “local connection”, the legislation on which allocations are based, and how Gloshomeseecker prioritises applicants.

### **DEFINITIONS:**

**Reasonable Preference:** reasonable preference groups are defined by Part VI of the Housing Act 1996 which was amended by the Localism Act of 2011. It defines who should have preference for the allocation of affordable housing and is the basis of allocation policies for all councils throughout the country. These groups include families living in overcrowded or poor condition properties, people who have a medical need to move and homeless households i.e. households with a housing need. **Allocations policies have to comply with this legislation.** The allocations policy adopted by Stroud District Council is the countywide Gloshomeseecker policy. Households are placed in bands (gold, silver and bronze) depending on the level of their housing need. Once a policy is adopted, councils have a statutory duty to adhere to it.

**Local Lettings Plan:** this is where additional preference criteria are added when allocating properties to meet a defined need and is usually time limited e.g. where a particular area/block of flats has been identified as having significant levels of anti-social behaviour, preference can be given to particular ages and those with no history of ASB. Gloshomeseecker policy includes provision for Local Lettings Plans.

Another example is for a new build site where several properties will become available at one time, so extra preference may be given in terms of employment, ages of children, any history or rent arrears etc. to ensure a balanced community on the initial lettings. In these cases, the LLP is not applied to re-lets.

**Section 106 Local Connection Agreement:** this is where local connection is a requirement of a planning application i.e. the properties would not otherwise be built. There is a legal requirement for parish connection to be considered before the reasonable preference criteria which also applies to re-lets. These properties are in small communities such as villages and are only allowed to be built where a need has been identified.

### **GLOSHOMESEEKER POLICY AND LOCAL CONNECTION:**

Gloshomeseecker allocations policy, as with all local authority allocations policies, is determined by legislation (see “reasonable preference” above).

When affordable housing (council and housing association) properties within Stroud district are allocated through Gloshomeseecker, the overriding priority is local

connection to Stroud District. This means that applicants that have a connection to Stroud through living in the district, being employed in the district or having strong family connection to the district (an immediate family member that has lived in the district for a minimum of 5 years). **This connection is considered before the priority band, which means that applicants from outside of the district will not be considered for a property unless no-one with a connection to Stroud wants the property e.g. someone from Stroud in bronze band would be considered before someone from Cheltenham in gold band.**

## **CONSEQUENCES OF APPLYING LOCAL CONNECTION CRITERIA BY PARISH.**

Affordable housing is a scarce resource with the purpose of meeting housing need within the district. Those in housing need include households living in overcrowded situations, living in poor or insanitary conditions, current housing not meeting medical needs due to disability, homeless or threatened with homelessness and having a social need to move for family or other support (see “reasonable preference” above)..

If a local connection requirement is applied on a parish rather than district basis to existing or new build council stock, then properties will be allocated according to geographical location and housing need becomes a secondary issue. This could lead to consequences for the council including the following:

- Households with a housing need will have to live in poor or unsuitable housing conditions for longer.
- Homeless families are likely to have to live in bed and breakfast accommodation for longer, which could lead to legal challenges against the council and will affect budgets.
- Without a Section 106 legal requirement for local connection, the council will need robust justification to respond to complaints from applicants who are bypassed because, although in great housing need, do not meet the criteria.
- Households with no housing need will be allocated properties. These households are more likely to be in a position to exercise their right to buy, leading to a greater reduction in housing stock and difficulty recovering cost of building.
- Stroud district residents living in parishes with little or no affordable housing stock would be effectively excluded from social housing.
- SDC may have to withdraw from GlosHomeseecker with the resulting costs of developing its own allocations policy, consulting partners, tenants and partners, and buying in new IT systems.
- The need to check and verify local connection could lead to longer void times resulting in reduced rental income.

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