



Downsizing Policy

March 2026

Housing Services

Stroud District Council
Ebley Mill
Stroud
GL5 4UB

Email: customer.services@stroud.gov.uk
Website: <https://www.stroud.gov.uk/>
Telephone: 01453 766321

| Document Responsibility | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Name | Document title | Service |
| Stuart Pattison | Downsizing Policy | Housing Services |
| | | |

| Document Version Control | | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| Date | Version | Issued by | Summary of changes |
| March 2026 | V1.0 | Stuart Pattison | First Draft |
| | | | |

| Policy Review | | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|
| Updating frequency | Review date | Person responsible | Service |
| 4 years unless required earlier | March 2030 | Tenant Relationship Manager | Housing Services |
| | | | |

| Document Review and Approvals | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Name | Action | Date |
| Housing Committee | Adopted | 17 March 2026 |
| | | |

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose and scope

- (a) There is a need to make the most effective use of Stroud District Council (SDC) housing stock to meet known demand on the housing register and in particular reduce long term reliance on temporary accommodation for homeless families. This downsizing policy complements the Homeseeker Plus Allocation Policy.
- (b) SDC recognises that there is a chronic under supply of family homes within the District. To increase the number of larger properties that become available each year, SDC will utilise a 'downsizing incentive scheme' to support tenants seeking to downsize from family sized SDC owned homes (2 bedrooms and above) to smaller accommodation that better meets their housing need.
- (c) The key objectives of the downsizing policy are:
- To support tenants to move into accommodation that is of an appropriate size for their needs, helping them to reduce financial strain and to improve their wellbeing
 - To encourage and assist tenants under-occupying family accommodation to downsize either into Independent Living accommodation (bungalows and flats designated for over 55's), or two bedroom/one bedroom/studio bedsit general needs accommodation
 - To make best use of SDC's housing stock and access to affordable housing
 - To release family accommodation to maximise occupancy
 - To give tenants a financial incentive and support when moving home through this scheme, to help meet the costs incurred in moving home

1.2 Definitions

For the purpose of this policy, the following definitions apply:

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Decant | Where a tenant is required to move to enable SDC to carry out major works, a redevelopment or regeneration scheme |
| Direct Match | Where SDC offers a tenant an alternative property to move to without the need for them to bid via Homeseeker Plus |
| Mutual Exchange | The process by which two or more tenants move by swapping homes |
| Succession | A legal and contractual right for eligible persons to take on a tenancy following a tenant's death |

2 ELIGIBILITY

2.1 Tenants who apply to transfer under the downsizing incentive scheme will be considered providing at the date of their application and move, the tenant:

- Is a tenant of SDC
- Holds a secure tenancy on their current home and has done for minimum of 2 years
- Has kept to the terms of their tenancy agreement and is not subject to legal action for breach of tenancy

- Is under occupying a general needs family home by one or more bedrooms when considered against Homeseeker Plus criteria
- Is registered with Homeseeker Plus and is willing to downsize to a smaller home
- Has no housing related debt with SDC (this is considered as current/former rent arrears, use and occupation charges, housing benefit, court costs, rechargeable repairs)
- Has no council tax arrears
- Agrees to provide vacant possession of their present home

2.2 If tenants with housing related debt and/or Council Tax arrears (but not in excess of the grant limit) agree with SDC that the incentive payment can be used as payment to clear the debts then tenants may still be approved for the downsizing incentive scheme.

2.3 In exceptional circumstances, where the debt is higher than the amount of the incentive amount but the property the tenant currently occupies has been found to be unaffordable, for any unavoidable reason, approval maybe given providing the tenant agrees to adhere to a payment plan following an assessment with SDC Housing Services. Approval from the Head of Tenant Relationships will be required.

2.4 The Council will not accept applications where:

- The move would cause the homelessness of a member of the current household
- A move to a smaller property would result in the tenant and their household being overcrowded
- The tenant moved into their current property under the mutual exchange process within the last two years.
- The tenant has an introductory or flexible tenancy
- The tenant is required to downsize following a succession
- The tenant is being 'decanted' due to their current property being part of a redevelopment scheme
- The tenant is not considered 'a qualifying' applicant on Homeseeker Plus.
- The tenant has previously received a downsizing incentive scheme payment from SDC within the last two years.
- Under-occupying households that are subject to an active anti-social behaviour (ASB) complaint against them are not eligible for a downsizing incentive scheme.

2.5 Those who do not meet the eligibility criteria for the downsizing incentive scheme but who are still under occupying their property may still apply for a transfer in the normal way via Homeseeker Plus (www.homeseekerplus.co.uk)

3 INCENTIVE PAYMENT AND SUPPORT

3.1 Where a SDC tenant of a general needs property is occupying a property that is larger than their assessed needs and they agree to transfer to a smaller more suitably sized property, they may receive support to assist them with finding an alternative property and may be eligible for a downsizing grant.

3.2 Tenants of a SDC general needs property wishing to downsize (move to accommodation with fewer bedrooms than their current property) will be placed on Homeseeker Plus housing register and will normally be assessed as Emergency or Gold Band. They will be able to 'bid' on all suitable properties advertised through the Homeseeker Plus Choice Based Lettings Scheme. In exceptional circumstances, tenants may be Direct Matched to a property. The decision of a Direct Match will be made by the Head of Tenant Relationships or Strategic Head of Housing.

3.3 Tenants in general needs housing downsizing to either Independent Living Accommodation or other, smaller general needs accommodation will be entitled to the following downsizing incentive grant (subject to the terms in section 7 of this policy):

- Up to £1,500 if moving to a property with one bedroom less
- Up to £2,000 if moving to a property with two bedrooms less
- Up to £2,500 if moving to a property with three or more bedrooms less

3.4 In addition to a one-off downsizing incentive grant payment, SDC may also provide the following practical support on a case-by-case basis:

- Dedicated officer support to oversee the moving process
- Assistance with putting up curtains or blinds
- Disconnection and reconnection of cooker and washing machine (please note that some Independent Living properties are not large enough to accommodate a washing machine)
- Help with disposal of unwanted furniture (conditions apply and prior agreement is required)

3.5 If there are any rent arrears or any other outstanding monies owed to SDC or there are any recharges relating to damage caused to the property then this will be deducted from the downsizing incentive scheme payment. Tenants will be eligible to be paid only one downsizing grant. In very exceptional circumstances, if a tenant needs to move to alternative accommodation again then a second payment may be made, this will be at the sole discretion of the Head of Tenant Relationships.

3.6 Downsizing incentive scheme grants are not payable to under-occupying family member successors as the council can apply for possession of the property. Spouses, partners (including same sex partners) and those in civil partnerships are not family successors and therefore qualify for a downsizing incentive scheme grant upon moving to a smaller property.

4 APPLICATION & ASSESSMENT

4.1 Tenants applying to the downsizing incentive scheme must complete and return the downsizing incentive scheme application form (available on SDC's website www.stroud.gov.uk) in addition to completing an application on Homeseeker Plus and an Income & Vulnerability Assessment. The website also provides details of the documentation to be provided to support the application. Support will be provided to tenants who need assistance in completing the application form.

4.2 The applications will be assessed and notification will be sent to the tenant advising:

- If they are eligible to join the Homeseeker Plus Housing Register
- If they meet the eligibility criteria of the downsizing incentive scheme
- The size of property they are eligible for

4.3 Tenants will be offered an alternative property that is adequate for their housing need and in line with the Homeseeker Plus Allocations Policy.

4.4 Tenants express an interest in properties by bidding via Homeseeker Plus (choice-based lettings); assistance with bidding can be made available under the downsizing scheme if required.

4.5 The Homeseeker Plus Allocations Policy gives the highest priority band to tenants who are releasing under occupied properties if they meet the eligibility criteria. Tenants would need to demonstrate that they are:

- Eligible for accommodation in accordance with the Homeseeker Plus Allocation Policy.
- Able to demonstrate that they have sufficient income to pay rent.
- Receiving an offer that is considered suitable and reasonable in accordance with the Allocation Policy.

4.6 The number of offers of accommodation under the downsizing incentive scheme will be made in line with SDC's Homeseeker Plus Allocation Policy.

5 ACCEPTING AN OFFER OF ACCOMMODATION

5.1 An accompanied viewing will be offered, and the applicant will be shown around the property and will need to decide whether or not to accept.

5.2 If the applicant accepts the offer, a tenancy agreement will need to be signed with an agreed tenancy start date and arrangements will be made with regards to the downsizing incentive scheme e.g. payment of grant, installation of curtains and blinds, disconnection and reconnections and disposal of unwanted furniture.

6 AFTER DOWNSIZING TAKES PLACE

6.1 The tenant/s will receive the downsizing incentive scheme payment via their bank account on completion of the move and SDC has taken receipt of the keys from the home they are vacating. The amount paid will have any void loss incurred (calculated on a daily rate) due to late return of keys deducted from the final downsizing incentive scheme payment.

6.2 Prior to the final downsizing incentive scheme payment being issued an inspection of the vacated property will be undertaken and any rechargeable works identified, over and above normal wear and tear, will be deducted from the final downsizing incentive scheme payment. This also includes the cost of clearing excessive items left in the property or garden without prior agreement with SDC.

6.3 If the tenancy is a joint tenancy, then the payment will be split equally between the joint tenants but can be paid into one bank account on receipt of written authority from both tenants.

6.4 An applicant, who has moved home and received a downsizing incentive scheme payment, will not be expected to increase their household size and subsequently overcrowd the new property in line with the Homeseeker Plus Allocations Policy.

6.5 The applicant may apply for a transfer and will be assessed in the usual manner under SDC's Homeseeker Plus Allocation Policy. However, if another transfer is completed within 2 years, SDC reserves the right to request that the full incentive grant amount is returned to SDC.

7 BUDGET LIMITS

7.1 The budget for the downsizing incentive scheme is subject to an annual limit. If there are more requests for downsizing incentive scheme payments than the funding available, priority will be given to those tenants moving from accommodation that is more urgently required. Priority will be decided by the Head of Tenant Relationships or the Head of Housing Solutions.

7.2 SDC reserves the right to reduce the incentive payments by:

- The amount of any current/former rent arrears, use and occupation charges, housing benefit overpayments, court costs, rechargeable repairs and repayable rent deposits owing to SDC at time of transfer
- The amount of any council tax arrears outstanding to SDC at time of transfer
- The cost of any works that SDC has to undertake to the vacated premises as a result of damage or neglect on the part of the outgoing tenant and/or
- Any other reinstatement works to bring the vacated property back to the SDC's lettable standard, that are not regarded as fair wear and tear.

7.3 Payments will be authorised once the tenant has moved and following an inspection of the vacated property. Applicants must be registered and accepted on the downsizing incentive scheme before a move takes place for a payment to be authorised.

8 MUTUAL EXCHANGES

8.1 SDC recognises that mutual exchanges provide a cost-effective solution to help tenants move to more suitable accommodation, to move to take up a job and/or be closer to family. By offering incentives to under occupying tenants who wish to downsize via a mutual exchange, SDC aims to assist those living in overcrowded situations.

8.2 With a view to promoting mutual exchanges SDC works in partnership with Home Swapper, a national web-based scheme, which helps tenants to find another tenant to swap with. This service is free to all SDC tenants.

8.3 Tenants applying to mutual exchange must submit the mutual exchange request in the normal way (details available on SDC's website www.stroud.gov.uk). In addition; an application form for the downsizing incentive scheme should be completed and returned.

8.4 An assessment regarding eligibility of the downsizing incentive scheme must have been made prior to the mutual exchange request being approved.

8.6 Tenants transferring by mutual exchange who are freeing up an underoccupied property will be eligible for the same incentive payments set out in 3.3 of this policy.

8.7 The above is applicable only to tenant/s that are currently under-occupying and exchanging into a property that would not result in additional bedrooms above their assessed housing need in accordance with SDC's Homeseeker Plus Allocation Policy.

9 RIGHT TO APPEAL

9.1 All tenants who have applied to move under the downsizing incentive scheme will be informed in writing of the decision and, if unsuccessful, will have the right to appeal by using the appeals procedure.

9.2 Full details how to appeal will be provided in the decision letter.

9.3 SDC reserve the right to refuse payments under all sections of the downsizing incentive scheme because of breaches of conditions of tenancy and any other breaches as appropriate.

9.4 The downsizing incentives under this revised scheme are only available from the commencement of this policy and whilst there are sufficient funds available.

10 MONITORING

10.1 The downsizing incentive scheme will be reviewed every 4 years unless required earlier and any alteration to the level of assistance paid will be made by the Head of Tenant Relationships in consultation with involved tenants.

11 RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Tenancy Agreement
- Homeseeker Plus Allocation Policy
- Tenancy and Estate Management Policy
- Mutual Exchange Policy

12 RESPONSIBILITIES

12.1 The Head of Tenant Relationships retains the overall responsibility for the implementation of this Policy.

12.2 The Tenancy Relationship Manager, Senior Tenancy and Sustainment Officer are responsible for the operational delivery of this policy and the associated procedures. This includes responsibility for monitoring and reviewing, staff awareness and training, policy development and communication to tenants.

12.3 All housing staff will be made aware of this Policy so that they can identify tenants who may benefit from the scheme and also promote the initiatives.

13 APPENDICES

- A. Downsizing Application Form
- B. Income and Vulnerability Assessment

Appendix A Downsizing Application Form

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Name | |
| Address | |
| Date | |
| Contact Number | |
| Others in Household | |
| Family Support | |
| Other Support | |
| Health considerations | |
| IVA completed and outcome | |
| Reason for downsizing | |
| Evidence to support application | |
| Decision Agreed / Rejected | |
| Signature of STSO | |
| Signature of TRM | |

Appendix B Income and Vulnerability Assessment Form

"\\Stroud.gov.uk\sdata\Housing\Tenancy Management\Tenancy & Sustainment team\IMVA
New tenancies May 2024.docx"