1. **Purpose Statement**

1.1 The Housing Act 1996 requires all local authorities to have an allocation policy to determine the priorities and define the procedures that will be followed when allocating housing accommodation.

1.2 This policy sets out who can apply for social housing (Council housing and housing association allocations) in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole and how we set priorities for who is housed.

1.3 BCP Council is committed to allocating housing in a fair and transparent manner and aims to use its scarce housing resources to meet the needs of its vulnerable residents and those in the greatest need of housing.

1.4 To meet these commitments the policy:
   - Takes a person-centred approach to allocating housing and prioritises those who are eligible for assistance and are in the greatest need.
   - Gives residents and applicants choice in where they live and promotes safe and sustainable communities
   - Helps residents and applicants to make realistic decisions about their future housing prospects by offering information on a wide range of housing options and needs tailored advice.
   - Provides an accessible, understandable and transparent scheme.
   - Helps the Council effectively manage its housing stock.
   - Recognises the need to balance local connection priorities for vulnerable residents and those with significant housing needs.
   - Aims to make sure that care leavers, families and vulnerable people with support needs are given as much help as possible to find suitable housing
   - Aims to provide help to residents and applicants who are in crisis as early as possible
   - Prioritises providing residents and applicants with a full range of housing options advice and realistic solutions to resolve their housing need, at the point of application.

2. **Who the policy applies to**

2.1 This policy applies to all those who wish to join the BCP Council allocation scheme for an allocation of social housing; Housing staff who are processing applications, providing housing options advice and allocating housing; Members who are acting on behalf of their constituents; and agencies supporting or acting on behalf of residents e.g. Children and Adult Social Care.

3. **This policy replaces**

3.1 This policy replaces the three separate allocations policies in place in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.
4. Approval process

4.1 In developing this policy, the Council has consulted with Members; housing associations who have housing in its area; the general public and local communities; and local voluntary and statutory agencies and partners including those who provide social and health care.

4.2 This policy requires Cabinet approval.

5. Links to Council Strategies

5.1 This policy supports the Housing Strategy.

5.2 During the preparation of this policy document due consideration has been given to the following Key Council Strategies:

- Housing Strategy
- Homelessness Strategy
- Rough Sleeping Strategy
- Tenancy Strategy
- Stronger Community Strategy
- Local Plan
- Corporate Plan
- Safeguarding Strategy
- Adult Social Care Strategy
- Corporate Parenting Strategy for Children In Care & Care Leavers
- Crime & Disorder Reduction and Community Safety strategies
- Customer Access Strategy
- Health & Wellbeing Strategy
- Domestic Abuse Strategy
- Private Sector Housing Strategy
- Equality & Diversity

6. The Policy

6.1 Legal Framework
This policy sits within a legal framework which includes the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Localism Act 2011) the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and regulations issued by Government relating to allocations.

Appendix A – Legal Framework sets this out in more detail.

6.2 Qualification and Eligibility

Subject to rules relating to immigration status, Local Authorities have the discretion to decide which type of applicants can qualify for an allocation of social housing. BCP Council considers qualification based on:
• Housing Need and
• Local Connection to the BCP Council area

Allocations can also only be made to eligible persons and the Council cannot nominate to certain people from abroad with limited rights to remain in the United Kingdom or who are subject to immigration control. Persons from abroad can include British Citizens who have lived outside of the Common Travel Area and are not habitually resident in the Common Travel Area.

Residents and applicants must also not meet any of the criteria which would prevent them from qualifying for the allocation scheme. These criteria include:

• High risk offenders subject to Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements, unless a multi-agency risk assessment has been carried out.
• Home Owners and those who have failed the financial test, subject to the level of housing need and following a financial assessment.
• Deliberately worsening own circumstances in order to gain advantage on the Scheme
• Providing false information or withholding information, which is a criminal offence.

Detailed information is set out in Appendix B – Who Does Not Qualify

Residents and applicants will qualify to join the Scheme if they satisfy all 4 of the criteria listed below. They:

• Be over the age of 16
• Have a housing need; except for those applicants who wish to be considered for over 55 sheltered and accommodation for older people.
• Be unable to financially meet your own housing needs
• Be living or working in the BCP Council area and meet the local connection requirements OR meet one of the requirements for having an exception to local connection.

It is important to note that whilst we allow 16 and 17 year olds to join the Scheme, they cannot legally hold a tenancy in their own name until they turn 18. This means that they need to have someone who can act as a guarantor and hold their tenancy in trust for them.

The Council must give ‘reasonable preference’ to the following groups when it decides how to allocate housing:

• people who are homeless (within the meaning of Part 7);
• people who are owed a duty by any local housing authority under section 190(2), 193(2) or 195(2) (or under section 65(2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985) or who are occupying accommodation secured by any such authority under section 192(3);
• people occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions;
• people who need to move on medical or welfare grounds (including any grounds relating to a disability); and
• people who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or to others)
Additional preference may be given to households in one of the reasonable preference groups listed above where they have been assessed as having urgent housing needs. This includes those who:

need to move urgently because of a life threatening illness or sudden disability; families in severe overcrowding which poses a serious health hazard; those who are homeless and require urgent re-housing as a result of violence or threats of violence, including intimidated witnesses, and those escaping serious anti-social behaviour or domestic violence*

Additional preference must be given to residents and applicants who are current or previous members of the armed forces, who also has an urgent housing need, and who:

- is serving in the regular forces and is suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is attributable (wholly or partly) to the person’s service,
- formerly served in the regular forces,
- has recently ceased, or will cease to be entitled, to reside in accommodation provided by the Ministry of Defence following the death of that person’s spouse or civil partner who has served in the regular forces and whose death was attributable (wholly or partly) to that service, or
- is serving or has served in the reserve forces and is suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is attributable (wholly or partly) to the person’s service.

Detailed information is set out in Appendix C – Who Can Qualify

6.3 Banding Scheme

The Council uses a banding system to prioritise applications on the Scheme. The scheme has 4 bands – Emergency, Gold, Silver and Bronze. All residents and applicants who qualify to join the Scheme will be placed into one of these bands.

Detailed information is set out in Appendix D – Banding Scheme

Residents and applicants who have been assessed as having an exceptional housing need will be awarded an Emergency Band, and will be allocated accommodation directly based on their specific housing needs (See Appendix G – Emergency Band - Emergency Offer)

6.4 Application and Assessment Process

BCP Council uses an online application form process, with support being made available for our most vulnerable residents and those who are unable to complete this on their own and do not have support to do so.

Following application, residents will be contacted by an officer for a pre-assessment interview which could mean that they will be invited to come into the office, or we may carry out a home visit. The pre-assessment interview will allow us to fully:

- consider housing options and formulate individual housing plans
• identify the urgency of the need for housing
• arrange multi-agency meetings (where necessary)

A full assessment will only take place following a pre-assessment interview and once we have received all of the supporting documents and any other information we need, in order to do so.

Following assessment we will provide residents and applicants with a full range of realistic options to resolve their housing need, and which is tailored to their circumstances.

Residents and applicants will be required to provide documents, and evidential information, to support their applications and we will assist our vulnerable residents to do so.

Detailed information is set out in Appendix E Application and Assessment Process

Once assessed, residents and applicants will be awarded the band which has been assessed as most reflects their housing need. They will have the right to request a review of this decision if they do not agree with the assessment. See Appendix H - Administration

6.5 Allocations and Lettings

The majority of BCP Council and housing association vacancies will be let through the choice based lettings scheme

The choice based lettings system will automatically place bids on properties which meet the resident’s and applicants’ needs and the area and property type preferences which were selected by them at the point of application.

Bids can be viewed and amended by the resident and applicant at any time, prior to the bidding cycle closing, and bids can be manually placed on additional properties, up to a total of 6 bids in any one cycle.

At the end of the bidding cycle, all the bids are shortlisted and prioritised by the choice based lettings system based on band.

Unless the property is subject to additional priority preference e.g. to meet the terms of the S106 or Local Lettings Policy, the nominated applicant will be the one who is in the highest band and has the earliest effective band date, except where the property has been labelled to give priority to a particular type of applicant.

Detailed information is set out in Appendix F Allocations & Lettings

6.6 Allocations Made By Way of An Emergency Offer

In order to meet the needs of its most vulnerable residents, there may be occasions where it will be necessary for BCP to allocate a property outside of the normal choice based allocations process and make a direct offer to a resident, applicant or household. This will only occur when a household have been assessed as having a need which can only be met
by an offer of a Council or housing association property. The emergency offer option will be awarded to those who meet one, or more, of the criteria outlined below:

- there are medical or welfare needs which are so severe that the protection of vulnerable adults or children is only possible in a permanent home and where the present housing circumstances could deteriorate to such an extent as to place household members, particularly children, at risk or in need of residential care unless permanent housing is offered.
- there is a need for extra care or supported housing accommodation and this need is supported by Social Services.
- for community safety purposes, for example re-housing under Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) or the Witness Protection scheme.
- one, or more, members of the household have significant medical needs which can only be met through an offer of a property which meets their specific property adaptation requirements and they have been assessed by the Bespoke Housing Group as requiring such a property.
- victims of domestic violence, where there is a significant risk of violence or harm, and the victim cannot be safely accommodated in a refuge or other temporary accommodation.
- where someone cannot be discharged from hospital because their home is, and will remain, permanently impossible to live in.
- homeless people or families households whose needs are such that BCP Council would only be able to discharge its Duty with an offer of Council or social housing, as agreed by a senior officer. These are exceptional cases and would not be an option for the majority of homeless households, people or families.
- Housing First clients who require a move on to secure accommodation.
- where there is a significant threat to life or risk of serious and permanent disability
- you have been assessed as having an exceptional housing need, but do not otherwise meet the local connection criteria, and would qualify for an Emergency Band - Emergency Offer of accommodation.

These residents and applicants will be awarded an Emergency Band.

Detailed information is set out in Appendix G Emergency Band – Emergency Offer

6.7 Administration

This includes:
- Information Sharing & Data Protection
- Giving false or withholding information
- Cancelling and Suspending Applications
- Confidentiality
- Right to Review
- Transfers
- Equality
- Changes to the Scheme
- Complaints
- The Local Government & Social Care / Housing Ombudsman
- Access to Personal Information
- Who to contact for further advice
Detailed information relating to the administration of the scheme is set out in Appendix H Administration.

7 How to use this policy

7.1 This policy is supported by appendices which detail how the policy is implemented. These are:

- Appendix A – Legal Framework
- Appendix B – Who Cannot Qualify
- Appendix C – Who Can Qualify
- Appendix D – Banding Scheme
- Appendix E – Application and Assessment Process
- Appendix F – Allocations and Lettings
- Appendix G – Emergency Band – Emergency Offer
- Appendix H – Administration

8 Roles and responsibilities

8.1 Decision Making and Changes to the Scheme

To ensure the allocation scheme is operating fairly and within the law, the Director of Housing, in consultation with the Housing Portfolio Holder, will be able to approve minor amendments to the policy and scheme providing that the amendment is not considered to be major or have a negative impact on more than five percent of residents and applicants on the allocation scheme.

The majority of decisions will be made by the officers assessing applications. For decisions required above normal assessments these are detailed below, and will be the responsibility of officers working in named positions or an officer at a higher level within the Housing Service if they are unavailable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision</th>
<th>Responsible Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approval for Emergency Band.</td>
<td>Senior Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Offers &amp; Discretionary Allocations</td>
<td>Senior Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Lettings Plans</td>
<td>Senior Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restrictions from Allocation scheme</td>
<td>Senior Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive Lettings</td>
<td>Senior Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Properties excluded from the letting process</td>
<td>Senior Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suitability of offers and refusals</td>
<td>Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviews and appeals</td>
<td>Senior Officer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9 Enforcement and sanctions

9.1 Failure to comply with the Allocations Policy can leave the Council at risk of a charge of maladministration and judicial review.

9.2 Application assessment will be monitored to ensure compliance.

9.3 Nominations will be reviewed on a quarterly basis to ensure that properties have been allocated as per the terms of the policy.

10 Further information and evidence

10.1 The Equality Impact Assessment that supports this policy is under development and will be fully completed once the consultation period has ended and all feedback has been assessed and considered.