



Communities Overview
Committee

23 March 2022

Item

Public

AN OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL HOUSING IN SHROPSHIRE

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1. Synopsis

1.1. Shropshire Council and housing associations own and lease almost 20,000 social housing dwellings for rent and low-cost home ownership. Views and feedback are welcomed on a draft revised policy for allocations to Council owned stock and nominations to housing associations.

2. Executive Summary

2.1. Together the Council and 32 Private Registered Providers own and lease almost 20,000 dwellings for social and affordable rent and low-cost home ownership across Shropshire. The majority of dwellings are for rent, and of these most are general needs (accommodation which is not specifically designed for older or other vulnerable persons). Compared with the England average of 16%, at 13% Shropshire has a lower proportion of social housing.

2.2. A draft revised allocations policy and scheme has been produced which seeks to reflect statutory guidance and utilise the flexibilities provided to the local housing authority so as to ensure affordable housing is let to those in the greatest housing need and also supports strategic priorities.

2.3. The revised allocations policy for consultation is intended to be presented to Cabinet in April 2022. Following the consultation period, the policy will be brought back to this Committee before proceeding to Cabinet and Council for approval and adoption.

3. Recommendations

3.1. Members are asked to:

- note the information provided on the social housing stock in Shropshire; and
- provide initial views and feedback on the proposed draft allocations policy and scheme.

REPORT

4. Introduction

- 4.1. The dwellings referred to in this report are those owned or leased for rent or low-cost home ownership by the Council (a local authority Registered Provider) and Private Registered Providers (housing associations who are registered with the Regulator of Social Housing).
- 4.2. The report provides a background to the social housing stock found in the Shropshire unitary council area; information about the stock; and presents a draft revised allocations policy.

5. Social housing in Shropshire

- 5.1. Currently there are almost 20,000 dwellings of affordable housing owned and leased by the Council (whose stock of just over 4,000 dwellings is managed by Shropshire Towns and Rural Housing) and 32 housing associations and almshouses registered with the Regulator of Social Housing. This equates to around 13% of Shropshire's housing stock and is below the regional and England averages of 19% and 16% respectively.
- 5.2. Approximately 95% (almost 18,800 dwellings) of social housing is for social and affordable rent and the remainder (just over 1,000 dwellings) is low-cost home ownership. Of those for rent, 87% (around 16,400) are general needs dwellings, 12% are for older persons, this includes sheltered and extra care sheltered housing (just over 2,200 dwellings) and 1% (approximately 150 self-contained dwellings, rooms and shared houses) are supported housing independent living schemes for a range of vulnerable persons.

- 5.3. Approximately 24% of affordable housing has one bedroom (this includes bedsits and rooms in shared accommodation), 38% has two-bedrooms, 36% has three-bedrooms and 2% has 4 or more bedrooms. 56% of dwellings are houses, 24% are flats, bedsits or maisonettes and 20% are bungalows.
- 5.4. Approximately seven per cent of social housing has been empty for over six months. The reasons for dwellings being empty are due to the need for major works, proposals for redevelopment or stock rationalisation.
- 5.5. When considering affordable housing across Shropshire, 38% of dwellings are contained in the Central wards, 32% in the Northern wards and 30% in the Southern wards.
- 5.6. As shown in Appendix I, the ward with the greatest proportion of stock is Oswestry East (around 900 dwellings); this is followed by Harlescott (with just over 730 dwellings); Church Stretton and Craven Arms (around 660 dwellings); Castlefields and Ditherington and Bayston, Hill Column and Sutton (each with just over 650 dwellings); Monkmoor (just over 610 dwellings); and Shifnal North (approximately 600 dwellings). A map of all affordable housing by electoral ward is at Appendix II.
- 5.7. The largest providers of social housing are:
- Housing Plus, with almost 5,800 dwellings;
 - Connexus, with approximately 4,800 dwellings;
 - Shropshire Council, with just over 4,000 dwellings;
 - Wrekin Housing, with approximately 1,800 dwellings;
 - Bromford Housing, with almost 1,300 dwellings;
 - Sanctuary, with approximately 600 dwellings;
 - Stonewater, with just over 300 dwellings; and
 - Shropshire Rural Housing Association, almost 300 dwellings.
- 5.8. It should be noted that three of the five former district councils which now form Shropshire Council previously undertook large scale voluntary transfers (LSVTs) of social housing stock:
- In 1997 South Shropshire District Council transferred almost 5,300 dwellings to South Shropshire Housing Association, which now forms part of Connexus;

- In 2001 Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council transferred approximately 5,500 dwellings to Severnside Housing Association, which now forms part of Housing Plus; and
- In 2007 North Shropshire District Council transferred approximately 2,300 dwellings to Meres and Mosses Housing Association, which now forms part of Connexus.

5.9. Over the years the housing stock has and continues to be reduced through tenants exercising their Right to Buy (this was a preserved right for tenants who were subject to the LSVTs) and other disposals / demolitions; and increases through new developments and acquisitions.

5.10. Since April 2009 just over 300 Council dwellings have been sold under the Right to Buy. Following the introduction of the Reinvigorating Right to Buy and One for One Replacement policy change in April 2012 the average annual number of sales increased from just over four to 29.

5.11. 2020-21 saw a net increase of almost 190 affordable dwellings. It is anticipated that 2021-22 will see a net increase of around 200 dwellings. With new larger developments in Broseley, Burford, Cleobury Mortimer, Highley, Ludlow, Minsterley and Shifnal in the South; Oswestry in the North; and Shrewsbury in Central Shropshire. Looking forward to 2022-23, larger schemes are to be delivered in Chirbury, Much Wenlock and Shifnal in the South; Prees in the North; and Bicton in Central Shropshire.

6. Distribution of stock

6.1. With respect to general needs dwellings for social and affordable rent on an electoral ward geography, Oswestry East has the greatest proportion (almost 800 dwellings); this is followed by Harlescott (approximately 680 dwellings); Castlefields and Ditherington (around 580 dwellings); Sundorne (just over 550 dwellings); Shifnal North (almost 540 dwellings); Church Stretton and Craven Arms and Bayston Hill, Column and Sutton (both with almost 500 dwellings); and Market Drayton West (approximately 490 dwellings). A map of general needs rental stock is at Appendix III.

6.2. 18% (just over 2,900) of general needs rental dwellings have one-bedroom (this includes bedsits), 39% (approximately 6,400) have two-bedrooms, 41% have three-bedrooms (just

over 6,700) and 2% have four or more bedrooms (just over 300). 62% of general needs rental dwellings are houses, 22% are bedsits, flats or maisonettes and 16% are bungalows.

- 6.3. As regards older persons' dwellings for social and affordable rent on a ward geography, Tern has the majority of dwellings (around 115), this is followed by Monkmoor (with just over 100); Church Stretton and Craven Arms and Oswestry West (each with almost 100); and Bayston Hill, Column and Sutton, Abbey and Wem (all with just over 90 dwellings). A map of older persons' rental stock is at Appendix IV.
- 6.4. Six per cent (around 120) of older persons' rental dwellings are bedsits, 67% (just over 1,400) have a separate bedroom and 27% (almost 600) dwellings have two-bedrooms. 58% of older persons' rental dwellings are bungalows, 41% are flats or bedsits and one per cent are houses.
- 6.5. With respect to low-cost home ownership, this is all general needs accommodation. Five per cent has one bedroom, 54% has two-bedrooms, 39% has three bedrooms and three per cent has four or more bedrooms. Approximately 84% of stock are houses, 10% are flats and six per cent are bungalows. On a ward geography, Bayston Hill, Column and Sutton has the majority of dwellings (just over 60), followed by Shifnal North (with almost 60 dwellings); and Church Stretton and Craven Arms and Ludlow South (each with just over 50 dwellings). A map of low-cost ownership stock is at Appendix V.

7. Draft revised allocations policy

- 7.1. This Committee was previously presented a report on Shropshire HomePoint, the Council's allocation policy and scheme, on 28 October 2020. Subsequently in December 2020, a working group of the Committee reviewed the allocations policy. This included consulting all elected Members. The recommendations of the working groups were laid out in a report presented to this Committee on 25 January 2021. This report recommended that the revised allocations policy return to the Communities Overview Committee for further scrutiny before it is referred to Cabinet or Council for approval.
- 7.2. A draft revised allocations policy has been produced (at Appendix VI) and it is intended that this is presented to Cabinet on 27 April 2022 requesting that it is subject to an

eight week consultation period with Private Registered Providers (housing associations registered with the Regulator of Social Housing) who own or lease affordable dwellings in Shropshire and other stakeholders. Following this consultation period, the policy will be brought back to this Committee before it is presented for approval by Cabinet and adoption by Council.

- 7.3. The draft revised policy incorporates the majority of the recommendations set out in the January 2021 report, however, it proposed that in order to ensure that affordable housing is allocated to those most in need, the revised policy applies to all allocations of Council owned stock (managed by STAR Housing) and all nominations to Private Registered Providers for all rented, supported and low cost home ownership dwellings. The revised policy also includes qualification criteria and extends the number of bands.
- 7.4. In conjunction with the review of the allocations policy, it is intended that existing nomination agreements with the LSVT housing associations be reinvigorated and formal nominations be agreed with all the larger and national housing associations operating in Shropshire, this will include ensuring nomination rights to 100% of new affordable housing.
- 7.5. It is further planned to review the Council's Tenancy Policy and Tenancy Strategy and to produce Specialist Accommodation and Independent Living and Affordable and Intermediate Housing Options Strategies.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1. The operation of the Council's allocation policy is currently funded by the General Fund, with STAR Housing and partner housing associations who advertise their void properties paying the Council a fee for each advertisement. Given the proposed move to a Council housing register and nomination agreements, it will be prudent to review the existing funding arrangements. Any revised proposals will need to ensure that the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) only funds the allocation of dwellings held in the HRA.

9. Conclusions

- 9.1. There are almost 20,000 affordable dwellings in Shropshire owned and leased by a large number of registered providers

and it is important that existing and new housing stock, be this rented or low-cost home ownership is allocated to those most in need.

- 9.2. The draft revised allocations policy seeks to ensure that the Council complies with the Housing Act 1996 and also make best use of the flexibilities introduced under the Localism Act 2011.

List of Background Papers

Shropshire Affordable Housing Allocation Policy and Scheme

Communities Overview Committee report, "Shropshire HomePoint"
28 October 2020

Communities Overview Committee report, "Shropshire Affordable Housing Allocation Policy and Scheme – suggested revisions"
25 January 2021

Cabinet Member

Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Public Health

Portfolio Holder for Physical Infrastructure

Local Member

All

Appendices

Appendix I: Social housing stock by ward

Appendix II: Map to show all social housing stock

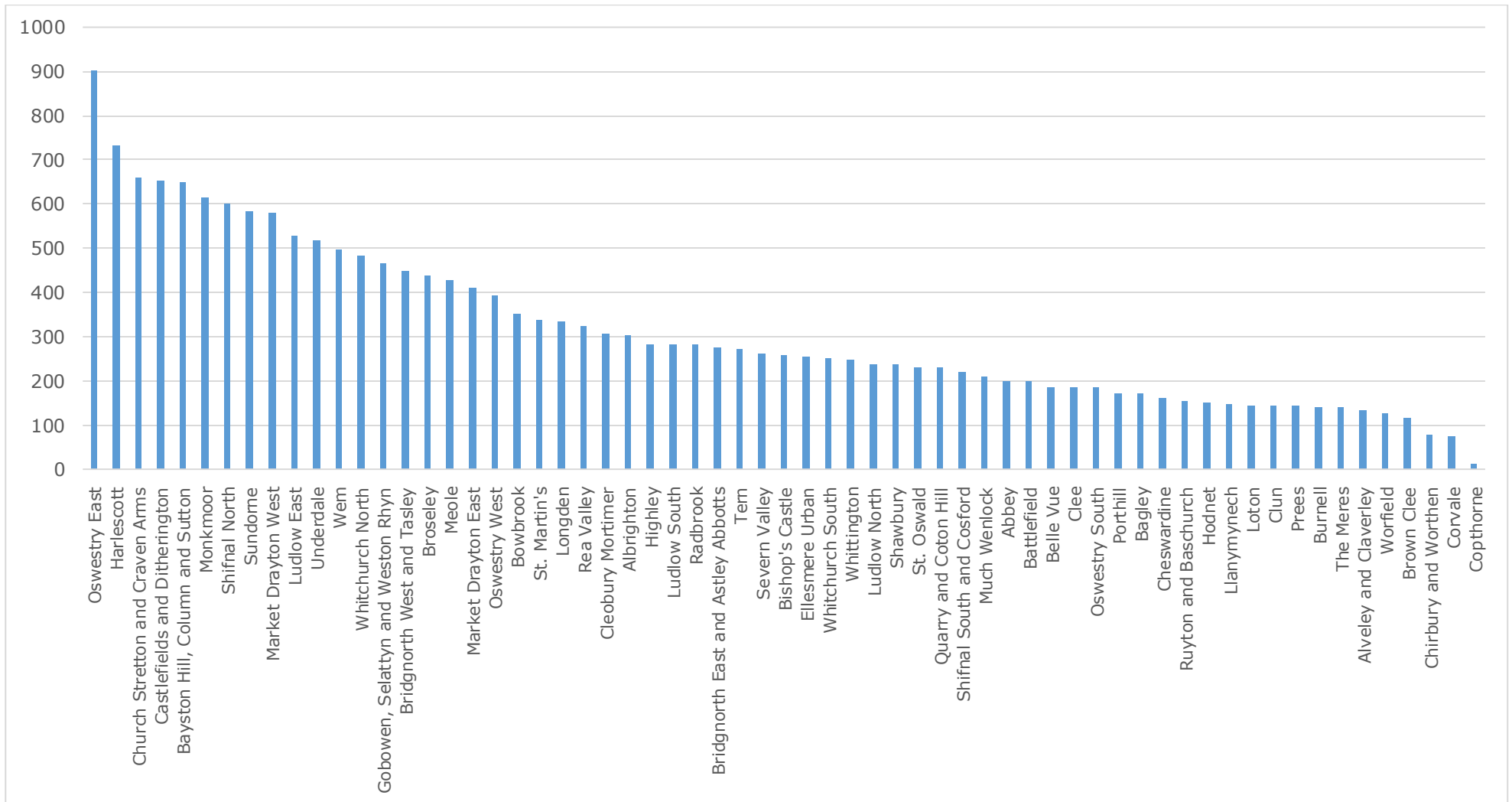
Appendix III: Map to show general needs rental dwellings

Appendix IV: Map to show older persons' rental dwellings

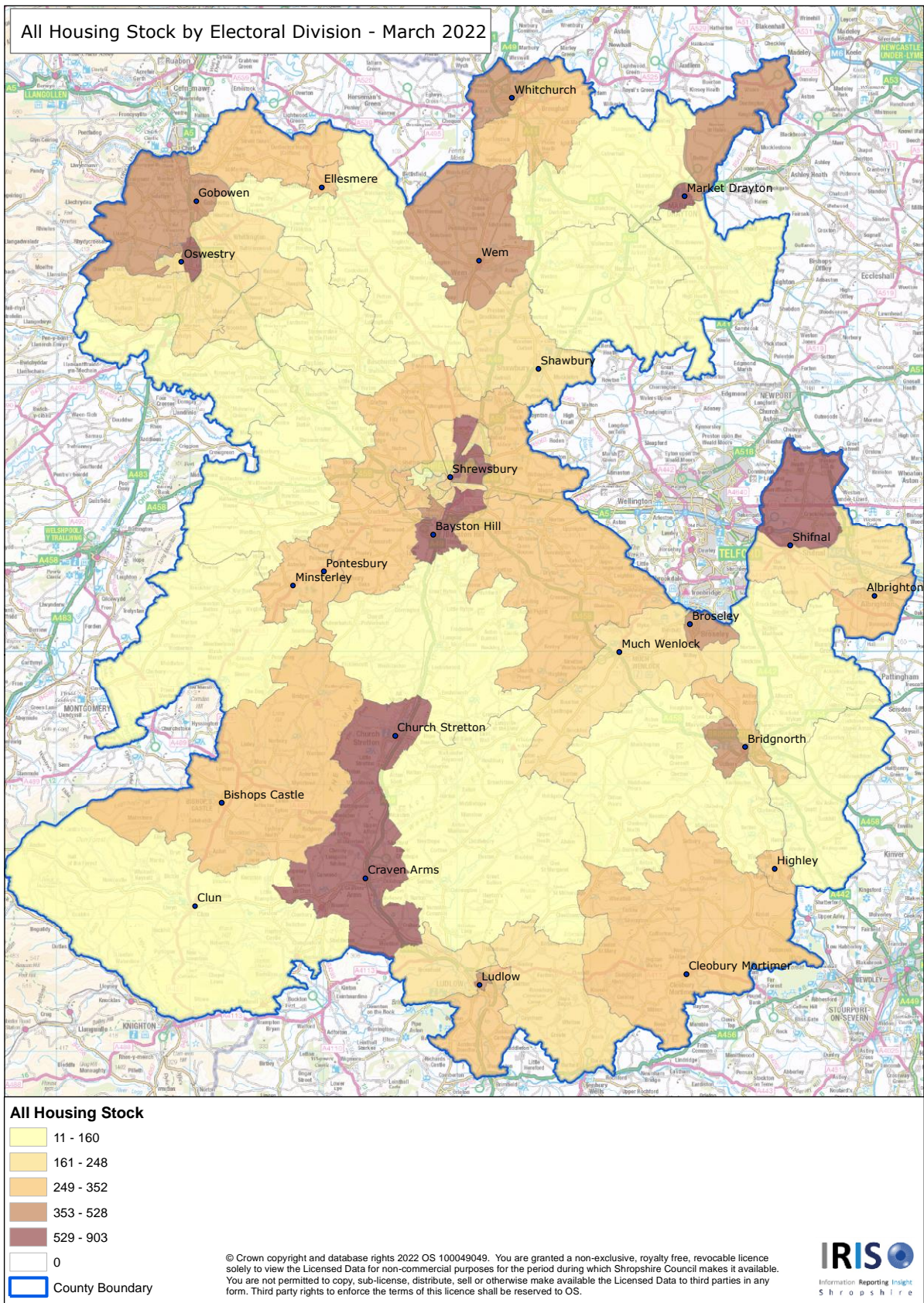
Appendix V: Map to show low-cost home ownership dwellings

Appendix VI: Draft revised allocations policy

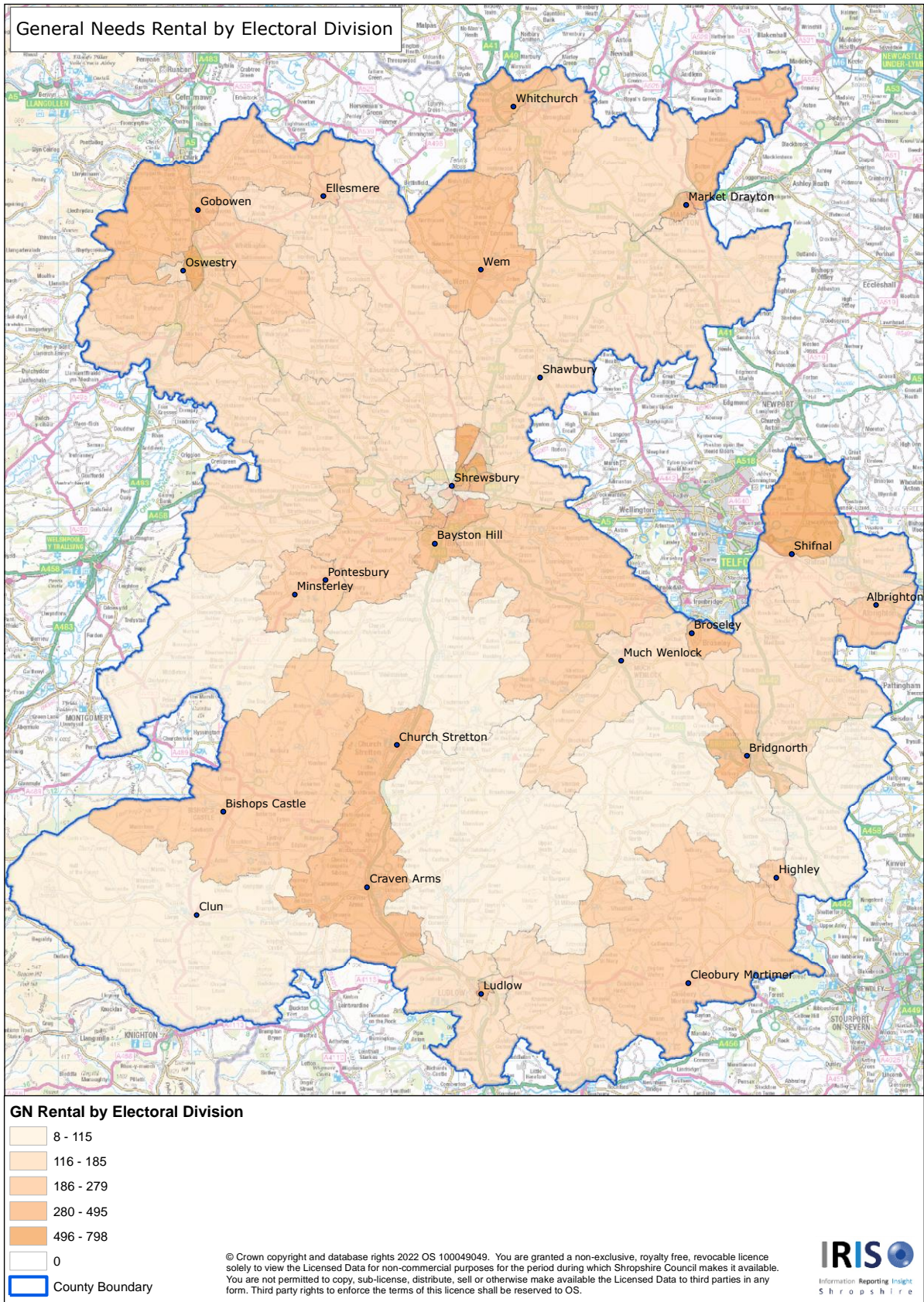
Appendix I: Social housing stock by ward



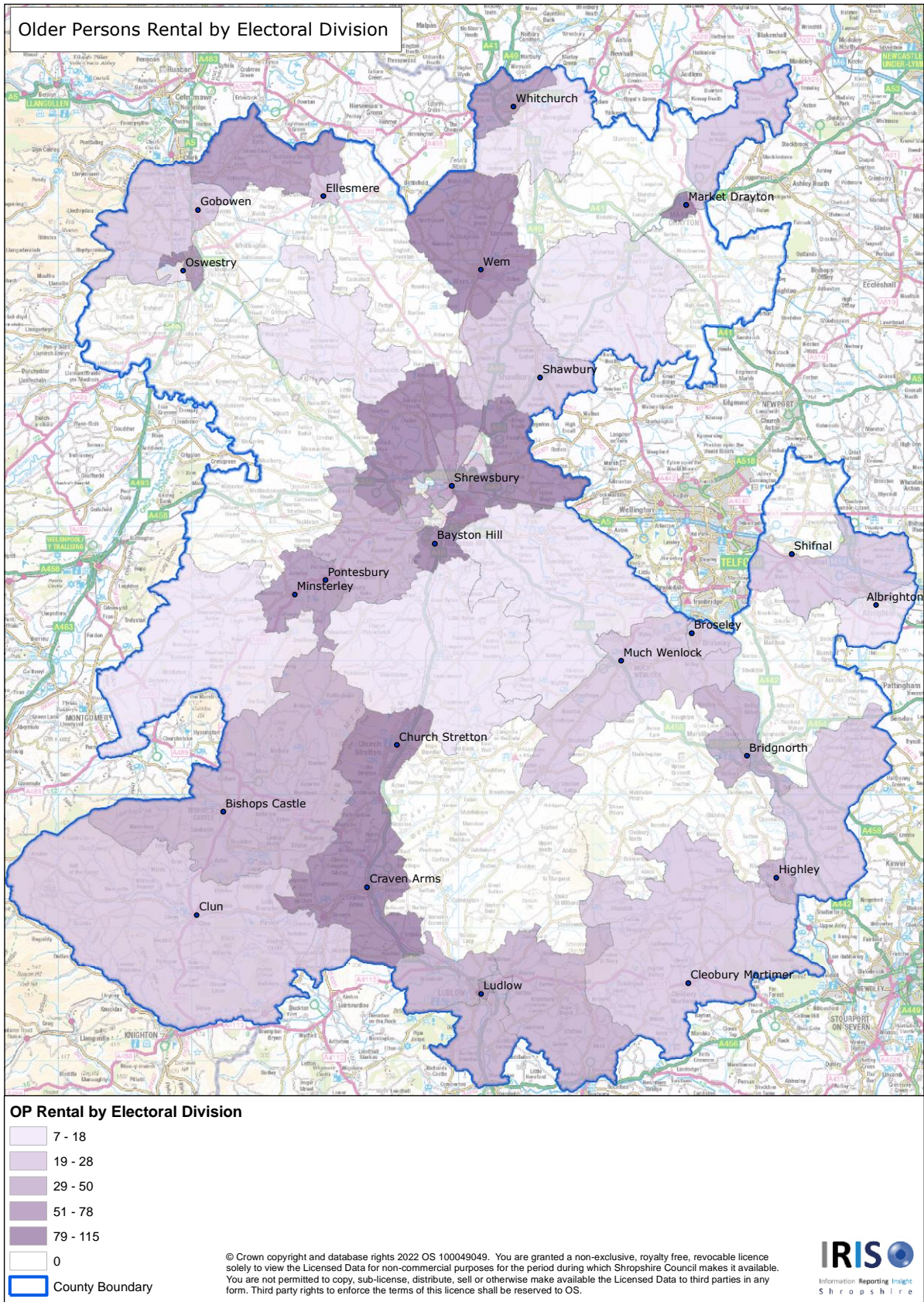
Appendix II: Map to show all social housing stock



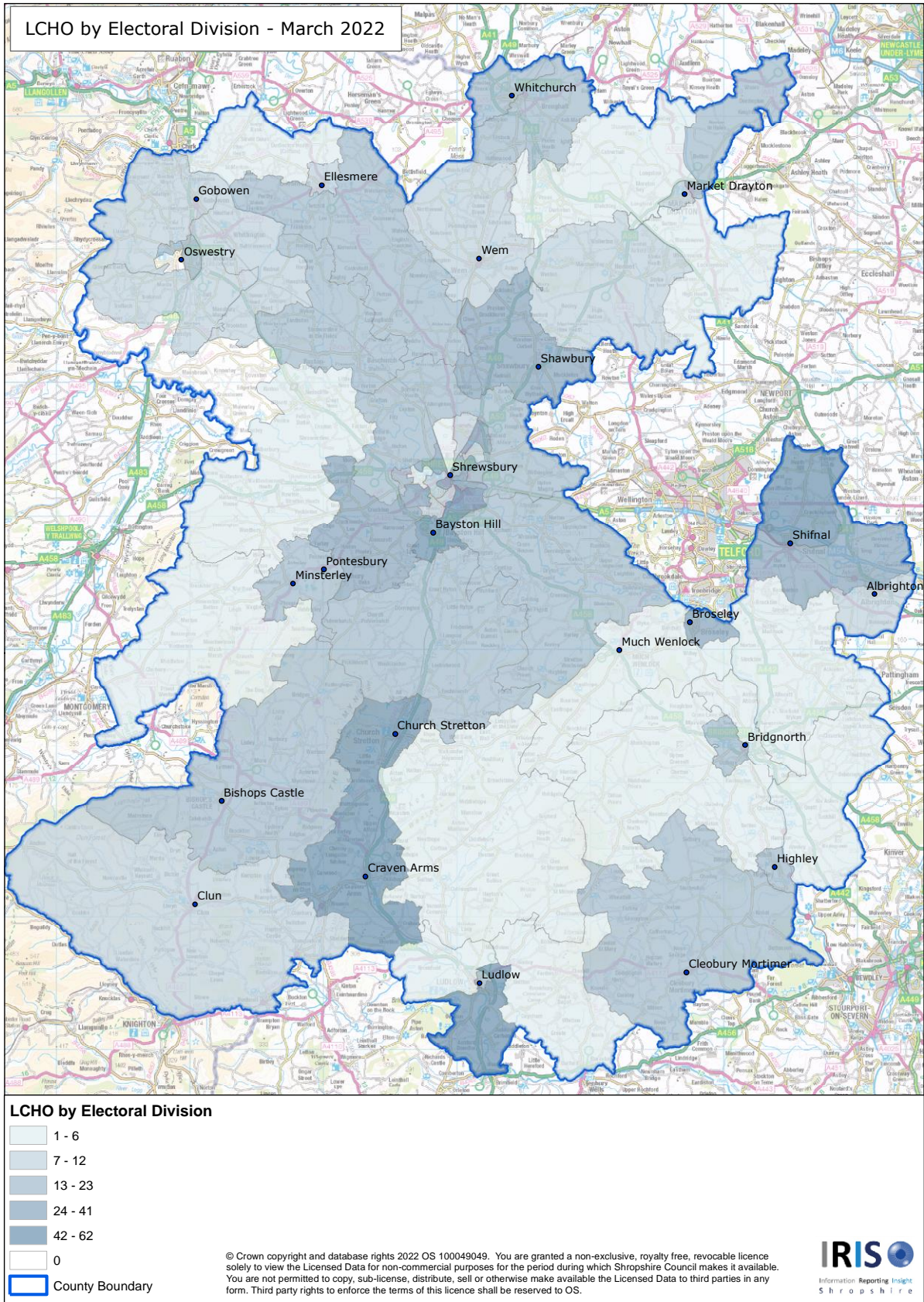
Appendix III: Map to show general needs rental dwellings



Appendix IV: Map to show older persons' rental dwellings



Appendix V: Map to show low-cost home ownership dwellings



Appendix VI: Draft revised allocations policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Housing Allocation Policy and Scheme applies to the Shropshire Council unitary local authority area. References to Shropshire and the Council refer to the unitary local authority of Shropshire.
- 1.2 This document sets out Shropshire Council's Policy for applications to the Housing Register; the allocation of the housing stock owned by the Council, which is managed by its Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO), Shropshire Towns and Rural (STAR) Housing; and nominations to housing associations registered with the Regulator of Social Housing (for social and affordable rented and low cost home ownership¹ properties) and to private landlords.
- 1.3 Officers act under delegated powers in accordance with this policy. All allocations and nominations are made from the Housing Register.

2. Aims of the Allocation Policy and Scheme

- 2.1 In Shropshire the demand for affordable housing exceeds available supply. Therefore, this housing allocation policy and scheme seeks to meet the following aims:
 - Ensure people in the greatest housing need have the greatest opportunity to access suitable housing that best meets their needs;
 - To prevent and relieve homelessness;
 - To make best use of the Council's and housing association stock;
 - To help the Council meet statutory and strategic aims;
 - To help contribute to the development of sustainable communities; and
 - To allow for the greatest degree of choice possible in the allocation of affordable housing.

3. Eligibility

- 3.1 Applicants ineligible under Government regulations will not be eligible to be accepted onto the Housing Register.
- 3.2 Any applicant who has been excluded from the Housing Register on the grounds of ineligibility will be given written notice of the decision and the reasons for it and advise of their right of appeal (see section 40).

4. Qualification Criteria

- 4.1 The Council will usually only accept applications to the Housing Register who are in housing need. Housing need qualifying criteria is set out in Bands 1 to 6 in Appendix A.

¹ With the exception of Homes England grant funded shared ownership properties on non-exception sites

Local connection

- 4.2 The Council will usually only accept applications to the Housing Register from an applicant with a local connection to the Shropshire Council area. Local connection means that the applicant or a person who might reasonably be expected to reside with them either:
- Is normally resident within the local authority area of Shropshire; or
 - Has a local connection with the area by virtue of family association or secure employment.
- 4.3 Normally resident means resident in accommodation for a period of at least one year immediately prior to an application being made. This does not include being detained in prison or resident in a bail hostel. Persons occupying holiday or other temporary accommodation (for example, hospital or student housing) are not considered as normally resident unless they can demonstrate that this has been their sole or main home for a period of at least five years.
- 4.4 Family association normally means that the applicant has parents, grandparents, adult children, grandchildren, a brother or a sister currently living in Shropshire and has been normally resident within Shropshire for at least five years. In exceptional circumstances and where support is required family association may include extended family, each case will be determined on its own merits. Applicants will be required to provide proof of local connection by virtue of family association.
- 4.5 Secure employment means the employment or self-employment of the applicant or an adult member of the household for at least one year's duration and at least 20 hours per week. Where this employment has been for less than one year at the time of application or is on a zero-hour contract, evidence will be required to confirm the nature of the employment.
- 4.6 Local connection requirements will not apply to the following applicants:
- members of the Armed Forces and former Service personnel, where the application is made within five years of discharge;
 - bereaved spouses and civil partners of members of the Armed Forces leaving Services Family Accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner;
 - serving or former members of the Reserve Forces who need to move because of serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service; and
 - existing social housing tenants in England who have a reasonable preference because of a need to move to Shropshire to avoid hardship and if they work or have been offered work in Shropshire and have a genuine intention to take up that offer.

Unacceptable behaviour

4.7 Applicants will not be accepted on to the Housing Register where it is decided that the applicant, or a member of the household with whom the applicant would usually reside, has behaved unacceptably.

4.8 Examples of unacceptable behaviour could include:

- Significant² rent or mortgage arrears or breach of tenancy obligations where no attempt is being made to repay the debt or remedy the breach;
- Cautioned or convicted of a nuisance, anti-social or violent offence;
- Subject to an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO) or equivalent;
- Conduct likely to cause serious nuisance, annoyance or harassment to neighbours;
- Using accommodation or allowing it to be used for immoral or illegal purposes;
- Fraudulent or duplicitous behaviour to obtain accommodation;
- Serious damage to or neglect of a property by the tenant or other occupants; or
- Committing violent or anti-social behaviour, or domestic, racist or other abuse.

4.9 Cases will be considered on an individual basis. The following criteria will be applied in determining whether an applicant (this includes existing Council tenants) is excluded from being able to go on the Housing Register for re-housing because of their unacceptable behaviour:

- There must be reliable evidence of unacceptable behaviour;
- In normal circumstances the behaviour concerned should have occurred within the last two years. In cases of a more serious nature, for example those involving criminal prosecution, a longer timescale may be appropriate; and
- There must be reasonable grounds for believing that the behaviour could continue or be repeated. For example, the applicant may have issued threats or there might be a history of repeat offending.

4.10 The decision as to whether to exclude an applicant from the Housing Register on the basis of unacceptable behaviour, be this due to the applicant's behaviour or the behaviour of a member of the household with whom the applicant would usually reside, will be made by the Shropshire Council's Head of Housing, Resettlement and Independent Living Protection.

Financial and Needs Assessment

4.11 Applicants with a household income of more than £50,000 gross per annum or savings and assets (including equity in a property) of more than

² For example, those with amounts exceeding £1,000 may be disqualified from the Housing Register until the amount has been reduced to below £1,000 or consecutive payments for 26 weeks have been made, unless there are agreed extenuating special circumstances.

£200,000 or both will usually be considered as not being in housing need and will not qualify to be on the housing register. Lump sums awarded to Armed Forces service personnel injured or disabled in action will be disregarded.

4.12 The financial assessment will have regard to the financial resources of the applicant and the cost and availability of alternative suitable accommodation. Such applicants who can demonstrate that they have health or support needs that they are unable to meet in the open market will be considered on their individual merits by the Head of Housing, Resettlement and Independent Living. Examples include:

- an applicant who is eligible for a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) to fund major adaptations to their existing home, where it is more cost-effective for the authority to re-house the applicant in accommodation appropriate to their housing need;
- an older person is committed to paying for care or support costs in order to remain living independently; and
- an applicant who requires specific accommodation to meet their housing needs but this accommodation is not available in the private sector, other than that provided by the STAR Housing or a housing association.

4.13 As with all other decisions made under this policy, any applicant who is deemed to have such resources as not to qualify to be accepted onto the Housing Register will have a right of appeal against that decision. Please see Appeals and Complaints Section (section 40).

4.14 Where an application to the Housing Register would not otherwise be accepted on the grounds of failing to meet the qualification criteria, as the Local Housing Authority, the Council will retain the discretion in exceptional circumstances where it is considered necessary to dis-apply the qualification criteria and / or place the applicant in any other Band as set out in this policy.

4.15 Any applicant who has been excluded from the Housing Register on the grounds of failing to meet the qualification criteria will be given written notice of the decision and the reasons for it and advised of their right of appeal (see section 40).

5. Transitional arrangements

5.1 Subject paragraphs 4.12 and 4.13, existing applicants on the Housing Register with a household income of more than £50,000 gross per annum or savings and assets (including equity in a property) of more than £200,000 or both, who have a local connection to Shropshire (as set out above), will be considered to be able to meet their housing need through the open market and placed in Band 7.

6. Age of Applicants

6.1 Applicants will normally be at least 18 years of age. In the case of 16 and 17 year olds applicants must be care leavers or homeless / threatened with homelessness, and not deemed to be a child in need following an

investigation by Social Services under section 17 of the Children Act 1989³. Applicants under the age of 18 must have a recognised support package and financial guarantor or guardian before being accepted on to the register.

7. Homeless Applicants

- 7.1 Shropshire Council has a duty to secure suitable accommodation for homeless households who are eligible for assistance, in priority need, have a local connection and who are not intentionally homeless, in Council, other Registered Provider (housing associations registered by the Regulator of Social Housing) or suitable private rented accommodation. Discharge of the main homelessness duty to the private rented will be made in line with the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012.
- 7.2 It is important that persons who are homeless or threatened with being made homeless seek advice from Shropshire Council, or their local council, at the earliest opportunity.

8. Transfer Applicants

- 8.1 Existing tenants of Shropshire Council will be subject to the provisions of the Allocation Policy. Tenants wishing to transfer will not normally be considered for re-housing until they have been resident in their present home for one year.

9. Applying to the Housing Register

- 9.1 Persons wishing to register must complete an Application Form. The application can either be completed using a paper application form or online through the Shropshire Council website. Paper applications can be printed from the website and are available by post from Shropshire Council's Customer Contact Points.
- 9.2 Applicants are advised to check carefully the full postage has been paid when sending applications or correspondence, as Shropshire Council cannot collect underpaid mail.
- 9.3 The Application will then be assessed by Shropshire Council. Applicants will receive a written response confirming whether their application has been accepted. If accepted, the applicant will be provided with written notification of the Band in which they have been placed and given a registration date.
- 9.4 Where an applicant is not satisfied with the way their application has been assessed or determined they have a right of appeal (see Section 40).

10. Verification

- 10.1 On completing the Application Form applicants give permission for Shropshire Council to verify (check) the information that they have provided or will re-provide prior to any offer being made or any change of

³ In this instance an application will be made by Social Services on behalf of the child in needs and a support package will be in place.

circumstance. This includes permission to contact other Council departments, for example Council Tax and Social Services, and other people or organisations such as previous and current landlords, the UK Border Agency and the police. Applicants will not be made an offer of accommodation until all information requested has been provided and verified. Appendix C lists the information applicants are required to submit to verify their housing application at both application and offer stage.

10.2 Shropshire Council may share information as appropriate where this is legally required and when providing nominations to housing associations and private landlords.

11. False statements and withholding information

11.1 Ensuring all the information provided is true and accurate is the responsibility of the applicant. Verification checks will be undertaken at the point of offer to confirm the information on the application form is correct and up to date.

11.2 It is a criminal offence for applicants knowingly or recklessly to give false information; or to knowingly withhold information. It can carry a fine and in separate civil proceedings can lead to the loss of any accommodation let as a result of Shropshire Council relying on that false information.

11.3 Applicants are required to sign paper applications and certify online applications confirming the details they have given are correct to the best of their knowledge.

11.4 This Scheme falls within the provisions of Part VI of the Housing Act 1996. Section 171 of the Act states:

- (1) A person commits an offence if, in connection with the exercise by a local housing authority of their functions under this Part:
 - (a) they knowingly or recklessly make a statement which is false in material particular, or
 - (b) they knowingly withhold information which the authority has reasonably required them to give in connection with the exercise of those functions.
- (2) A person guilty of an offence under this section is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale.

11.5 Consequently, where Section 171 applies, Shropshire Council may bring a prosecution which if successful could result in a fine of up to £5,000.

11.6 Where false information is found to have been given, the applicant may also be disqualified from the Housing Register on the grounds of unacceptable behaviour. Where false information has resulted in the applicant obtaining accommodation, the relevant Landlord may bring possession proceedings for recovery of the property.

12. Worsening of Circumstances

12.1 Applicants must not deliberately worsen their circumstances in obtain greater preference on the Housing Register. If an applicant is found to have

deliberately worsened their circumstances they will either be placed in the Band corresponding to their circumstances at the time of their original application or may be disqualified from the Housing Register on the grounds of unacceptable behaviour.

12.2 Examples of deliberate worsening of circumstances might include:

- Selling a property that is affordable and suitable for an applicant's needs;
- Disposing or gifting assets, including property;
- Moving from a secure Assured Tenancy to insecure, overcrowded accommodation, where there is no good reason for this move; and
- Where there is evidence that it was reasonable for an applicant to have remained in their original accommodation.

12.3 Where an applicant has little or no control over their move to alternative accommodation, this will not be considered as a deliberate worsening of circumstances.

13. Change in Circumstances

13.1 If an applicant's circumstances change Shropshire Council must be informed straight away or as soon as is reasonably practicable. Examples of changes include change of address or change in family size.

13.2 If an applicant's circumstances change they may cease to be eligible for inclusion on the Housing Register, and their application will be disqualified. They will be informed if this is the case and advised of any right of appeal (see Section 40).

14. Statutory Requirements

14.1 Under the Housing Act 1996 Shropshire Council has to ensure that when allocating and nominating to housing accommodation **reasonable preference** is given to the following groups:

- people who are homeless within the meaning of Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (including those who are intentionally homeless and those not in priority need);
- people who are owed a duty by any housing authority under the Housing Act 1996 sections 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 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).

14.2 The Housing Act 1996 also requires that housing authorities must give **additional preference** to the following categories of applicants who fall within one or more of the reasonable preference categories and who have urgent housing needs:

- former members of the Armed Forces⁴
- serving members of the Armed Forces who need to move because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service;
- bereaved spouses and civil partners of members of the Armed Forces leaving Services Family Accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner; and
- serving or former members of the Reserve Forces who need to move because of serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service.

14.3 Those applicants who are in the above categories and are placed in Bands 1 to 6 and are considered to have urgent housing needs will be given additional priority so that they are considered for re-housing ahead of other applicants in their respective Band.

15. The Banding System

15.1 The Allocations Policy is based on six Bands with specific qualifying criteria (see Appendix A for more details). Each applicant's housing need and other circumstances are assessed on the information provided and the applicant is placed in the **highest** Band their circumstances allow. Within each Band applicants are ranked in date order from when they were registered into that Band.

16. Statement of Choice

16.1 Shropshire Council is committed to offering the greatest choice possible in the allocation of affordable housing in the county, whilst ensuring that housing is allocated to those with the greatest need.

16.2 There will be certain situations where choice cannot be offered in the allocation of housing, such as when the Council needs to make a direct let as a matter of urgency. These circumstances are detailed within the scheme.

16.3 With the exception of these limited circumstances, housing will only be allocated to applicants who apply for a specific property, and all applicants have the opportunity to bid for properties they are entitled to be considered for, having regard to household size and other eligibility criteria.

17. How the Scheme Operates

17.1 All properties managed by STAR Housing that become available for letting and all housing association properties where the Council has nomination rights will be advertised through choice-based lettings. Housing associations and private landlords are able to advertise other properties

⁴ Usually where the application is made within five years of discharge.

where nomination rights do not apply. The scheme operates on a weekly property cycle from a Wednesday to the following Tuesday. The exact rent, service charge, for sale price, tenancy type and length of tenancy will be clearly advertised on the property details.

17.2 Those applicants who have been accepted onto the Housing Register can then bid (apply) for properties that are advertised. Applicants able to apply (bid) for one property each cycle. When the bidding period has closed the advertised property will be offered to the bidder in the highest Band for whom the property is suitable and who has been within that Band for the longest period of time, unless otherwise provided by this Policy.

17.3 In the event that the bidder does not want to accept the property then it will be offered to the bidder in the same Band who has been waiting the second longest and then so on. Only when bidders in the highest Band have been considered, will the those in the next highest Band be offered the property.

17.4 When a property is allocated, notification will be given on the Shropshire Council website identifying the Band of the successful applicant and their registration date.

18. Bedroom entitlement

18.1 Where possible, adverts will show the number of bedrooms available and number of people they are suitable for to enable eligibility to be exactly matched, for example, three bedroom five persons. Adverts will also show if any restrictions apply to the type of household that can apply.

18.2 Those applying for properties should ensure their income, including housing and welfare benefits, is sufficient to fully cover all the rent and charges associated with the accommodation.

18.3 The number of bedrooms required for each household is calculated in accordance with age, sex, marital status composition and the relationship of the members to one another. A separate bedroom is required for each married or cohabitating couple, for any other person aged 16 years or over, for each pair of children aged 0 to 15 years of the same sex, and for each pair of children under 10 years of the same or opposite sex. If that is not possible, he or she is counted as requiring a separate bedroom, as is any unpaired child under the age of 10 years. Additional bedroom/s required because of a medical condition/s will be considered as part of the medical assessment procedure.

18.4 Appendix D gives examples of what size and type of property an applicant can usually expect to be offered, therefore, should bid for.

19. Supported accommodation

19.1 Applicants can indicate whether they want to be considered for supported accommodation on the application form but will usually be offered one only if they meet the following criteria:

- Older persons' sheltered or independent living accommodation – applicants aged 55 or over with support needs. Applicants will be expected to sign-up to a support package.
- Older persons' extra care sheltered accommodation – applicants aged 55 or over with support and/or care needs. Applicants require a referral from a social care manager to be considered for this type of housing. Applicants will be expected to sign-up to a support and care package.
- Other supported housing - applicants must meet the requirements set out in each scheme's eligibility criteria. Applicants will usually require a referral from a social care manager to be considered for this type of housing. Applicants will be expected to sign-up to a support and / or care package as appropriate.

19.2 Bungalows will usually only be offered to applicants who have poor health and/or a disability who require accommodation on one level.

19.3 Other properties may be designated, for a limited period of time, for applicants who fall into a particular age category to ensure the continued sustainability of a particular block or area of housing. These may be subject to local lettings policies (see below).

20. Support / Care Packages

20.1 Some applicants (such as care leavers, and people with serious mental illness, dementia, or learning disabilities) will only be eligible for an offer of accommodation once it is confirmed that they have a recognised support/care package in place. This support/care package need not be provided through Social Services, but could include other forms of support, for example from family or friends. The support/care package will be reconfirmed before an offer of accommodation is made to ensure that applicants are supported to live successfully in their new home.

21. Advice and assistance

21.1 Shropshire Council is unable to provide personal appointments. However, staff are able to signpost applicants to other sources of advice and assistance including those of dedicated teams and organisations throughout Shropshire. In particular, assistance will be provided to anyone who may have difficulty participating due to disability, learning disability, illness, age, not speaking English as a first language, or any other reason that might make it harder for them to fully participate within the scheme. Where applicants are unable to submit bids themselves an assisted bidding process can be offered.

22. Information about the Allocation Policy and Scheme

22.1 Anyone who wishes is entitled to a free summary of the Allocation Policy and Scheme, which can be obtained from Shropshire Council. A copy of this document is available to be downloaded from the Shropshire Council website.

22.2 Applicants to the Housing Register are also entitled to request details of information that has been used to assess their application. Requests must be submitting in writing.

22.3 When each property advertised has been successfully allocated, the banding and registration date of the successful applicant will be made available on the website. This information should be sufficient for applicants to determine their prospects of success in obtaining housing, and to estimate how long they are likely to have to wait to obtain such housing.

23. Local lettings plans

23.1 Local Letting Plans are usually introduced to:

- Balance communities to achieve sustainable neighbourhoods;
- Deliver specific local strategic outcomes; and
- Due to planning conditions.

23.2 Affordable housing dwellings may be subject to special planning conditions or legal restrictions applied through Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) specifying local occupancy or employment conditions on who is able to live in the accommodation. These conditions are usually found in rural settlements and aim to ensure that applicants on the Housing Register who have a local connection with a specific parish or defined area are given priority for rehousing, over and above those who do not have that connection. Each Section 106 document will set out the specific detail of the local lettings policy.

23.3 Where a Local Letting Plan is in place, priority will normally be given to applicants who directly meet the criteria of the Plan. Details of each Local Letting Plan will be available on request from the Council. Advertisements for properties included in the Local Letting Plan will specify the required criteria.

24. Letting privately rented accommodation

24.1 Private landlords (this does not include housing associations registered with the Regulator of Social Housing) who offer affordable housing to households on the Housing Register may use additional criteria when selecting prospective tenants. The use of a Private Landlord's Letting Plan must be agreed with Shropshire Council and referred to in the property advertisement. The Plan must also be available to applicants on request.

25. Sensitive lets

25.1 Shropshire Council and its ALMO, STAR Housing, may from time to time identify specific properties for Sensitive Let. This means specific criteria will be applied to individual homes to achieve wider objectives. Where a Sensitive Let is identified, priority may be given to applicants who directly meet the required criteria. Advertisements for properties defined as Sensitive Lets will specify the required criteria.

26. Direct lets

26.1 Shropshire Council may from time to time need to make a Direct Let of a property to an applicant in exceptional or urgent circumstances, for example to facilitate or maintain essential support arrangements, or for an

applicant who has very specific housing requirements. Properties identified for a Direct Let will be advertised in the normal way but will not be available for bids.

27. Adapted properties

27.1 Properties which have been adapted to meet the needs of people with disabilities will be identified when advertised. Priority will normally be given to people requiring the adaptations provided.

28. Offers of accommodation

28.1 Applicants have a responsibility to ensure their contact details are up to date including, change of address, contact telephone numbers and email addresses. Shropshire Council publishes a list of supporting information required at point of offer which applicants are expected to have available immediately for verification. In most instances offers of accommodation will be made by telephone and applicants will be given three working days to respond. If applicants do not respond within this timescale, the offer may be withdrawn.

28.2 Where the offer of accommodation is to an applicant where a statutory homeless duty is owed by Shropshire Council, they will be given three working days for applicants to respond. If no response is received the Landlord will notify the Housing Options Team and agree whether to withdraw the offer.

28.3 Those applicants, with the exception of those with a homeless duty, who have refused or have failed to make contact on four or more occasions within a twelve-month period when suitable offers of accommodation have been made through the Allocation Scheme, will be deferred and therefore be declined further offers for a period of up to six months. The Council will write to the applicant and inform them of the reason as to why they have been deferred.

28.4 Landlords will make formal offers of accommodation in writing, either by letter or email.

29. Medical assessment procedure

29.1 Shropshire Council will assess and verify medical need/s which are directly affected by the applicant's accommodation and where a move to more suitable accommodation is needed.

29.2 Information is taken from the application with any supporting evidence to determine if there is a medical need and the level of this need. In exceptional circumstances, an independent medical assessment may be sought.

30. Joint applications

30.1 Joint applications can be made by:

- A married couple;
- A civil partnership couple;

- Partners (including same sex couples)⁵;
- A parent with a child aged 21 years or over; and
- Siblings.

30.2 Where a sole application becomes a joint application, the original or earliest registration date of the two will apply. Should the parties of the joint application then wish to separate their applications, the respective dates at which they each separately joined will then apply.

30.3 Although the above joint applications, joint tenancies will not usually be issued to parent and a child aged 21 years or over or to siblings.

31. People in prison

31.1 Applications will be accepted from those currently in prison provided eligibility and qualification criteria are met. Shropshire Council works with a range of agencies to prepare people for release from prison and to prevent homelessness. While preparation for release may begin sometime prior to release, applicants should be mindful that bids made one month or more before the release date will not normally be considered.

31.2 Upon release an update application will be required and if applicable liaison with any support workers and agencies.

31.3 Emergency cases will be referred to Shropshire Council's Housing Options Team.

32. Pregnancy

32.1 Where a household member is pregnant, the pregnancy will only be considered once a medical certificate such as a MATB1 is received. Until the birth and the sex of the child or children can be confirmed the bedroom entitlement assumption will be set at the minimum number according to the above criteria.

33. Access to children

33.1 In the case of divorced or separated parents / guardians, a child will typically be expected to reside with one parent / guardian as their main residence. Unless otherwise stated in a legal document, the other parent / guardian will not receive any bedroom entitlement for access visits.

34. Fostering and adoption

34.1 Where a household has formal evidence that, subject to a suitable property becoming available, approval would be given to foster or adopt a child or children, subject to confirmation from a Social Worker, each child would usually be entitled to a separate bedroom. Verification of fostering and/or adoption arrangements will be carried out at point of offer of accommodation.

⁵ This does not include friends.

35. University / full-time study away from home

35.1 Household members studying away from home in full-time courses will be considered in bedroom entitlement unless they are the main applicant.

36. Overnight carers

36.1 Where a household has formal evidence that an overnight carer or team of carers is needed three or more nights per normal week, a carer shall be included in the bedroom eligibility calculation.

37. Applications from employees, board members, councillors and their relatives

37.1 Applications are monitored carefully to ensure that all allocations are made in line with this policy and no favour is given to those with close links to Shropshire Council, STAR Housing or housing associations with housing stock in Shropshire.

38. Property adverts

38.1 Available properties are published each week. The scheme operates on a weekly property cycle from a Wednesday to the following Tuesday with applicants able to bid (apply) for one property each cycle.

38.2 Those applicants with email addresses will be sent a weekly link to available properties. Those applicants who have no internet access, with no one able to bid on their behalf, can request that the Council undertakes bidding on their behalf.

39. Equal Opportunities Statement

39.1 Shropshire Council believes that it is a fundamental right for everyone to be treated fairly, with respect and dignity; in the implementation of this policy it will ensure that this right is promoted and upheld.

40. Appeals and complaints

40.1 Any applicant to Shropshire Council's Housing Register has a right to make an appeal if they disagree with a decision made by the Council, such as disqualifying them from registration, the banding awarded and / or make a complaint if they believe Shropshire Council has done acted incorrectly.

40.2 For decisions made by Shropshire Council the applicant should appeal / complain in writing to the Head of Housing, Resettlement and Independent Living. An applicant can also appoint an advocate and, once appointed, Shropshire Council will deal directly with that advocate.

40.3 There are two stages to the appeal / complaints process:

Stage 1

The appeal must be made in writing within 21 calendar days of the date of the decision letter, stating the grounds for the appeal. The appeal will be considered by the Head of Housing, Resettlement and Independent Living or nominated representative, and a decision will normally be given within

21 calendar days. In complex cases it may not be possible to give a decision in 21 days and may take longer. Where this is the case the applicant will be notified in writing prior to expiry of the 21 day period.

Stage 2

If the applicant is unhappy with the decision made by the Head of Housing, Resettlement and Independent Living they may request that a further review be carried out by the Director of People or their nominated representative. This request must be made in writing within 7 days. Again, a decision will normally be given in 21 days, subject to extension where necessary.

40.4 If still unhappy with the outcome of the appeal, the applicant may make a complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman.

40.5 A copy of the full appeals and complaints procedure is available from Shropshire Council.

40.6 Where an offer of accommodation has been made to discharge the main homelessness duty, this will be subject to a different review process.

41. Monitoring and Review

41.1 Shropshire Council monitors all allocations and reports this in a 'Quarterly Monitoring and Statistics Report' which is published and available to download from the Shropshire Council website.

Appendix A: Bandings

All qualifying applicants will be allocated to one of the following Bands according to their particular circumstances.

Band 1:

Homeless households who are owed the main duty, other emergency cases and where Council tenants need to move due to major works or demolition:

- Households who are homeless and are owed the main duty including when they have become homeless or the Relief Duty has come to an end and they have been assessed as being eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless, in priority need and have local connection.
- Other households where the authority has a statutory duty to provide housing.
- Where Shropshire Council require tenants to move to alternative accommodation to allow major works to be undertaken (such as modernisation or demolition).

Where households are homeless and owed the main duty Shropshire Council's Housing Options Team will bid on applicants' behalf for each suitable property that becomes available. When a successful bid is made for a property the applicant will be notified of this and, subject to rights of review under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended), this will constitute an offer of housing under Part VI as a discharge of the Council's homelessness duty.

Band 2:

Homeless households who are owed the Relief Duty, urgent medical need, hospital discharge; care leavers, serious disrepair and members of the armed forces to be discharged within six months:

- Applicants who are homeless and are owed the Relief Duty and would be owed or likely to be owed the Main duty when the Relief Duty came to an end, because they are or are likely to be in priority need and unintentionally homeless.
- Urgent medical need where the applicant's (or member of their household who is moving with them) condition is currently directly affected by their accommodation and an urgent move is needed to have a positive effect on their medical condition, or where as a result of their condition their current accommodation is not suitable to their needs. An investigation will be carried out. For Urgent Medical Need it is generally expected that the property cannot reasonably be occupied as the applicant is either unable to use or has serious difficulty using an essential part of the property, for example, the WC.
- Applicants who have been released from hospital and cannot return to the property. Severity of medical illness does not determine the housing banding. Medical evidence will be required.
- Where a young person who has been looked after, fostered or accommodated by the Local Authority, is engaging fully with support provided, a duty to rehouse accepted by Shropshire Council and deemed to be within 6 months of being ready for independent living.

- Serious disrepair refers to the condition of the current accommodation. This will apply where the Council has deemed the applicant's home to have the presence of Category 1 Hazards, Bands A - C under the Housing Health & Safety Rating System and these Hazards cannot be resolved or reduced to a Category 2 Hazard with 6 months.
- Where a member of the British Armed Forces is going to be discharged within 6 months or has been discharged but been unsuccessful in finding permanent suitable accommodation. If part of a couple separating, this criterion would not apply to their ex-partner's application. Those that have been dishonourably discharged will be considered individually based upon the circumstances and reasons for the discharge.

Unless specified otherwise in this policy, Band 2 will normally be valid for eight weeks from date of award. If accommodation has not been secured in this period there will be a review carried out. If no suitable properties have become available during the period time in Band 2 will be extended for a further period, usually six weeks. If the applicant has been bidding for suitable properties but has not been successful, the status may be extended. If however, the applicant has failed to bid for properties, or has been bidding for unsuitable properties, the reasons for this will be determined and if there are valid reasons the time in Band 2 may be extended, but where there are insufficient reasons, the Band will be withdrawn and the applicant will be reassessed accordingly.

Band 3:

Resettlement, homelessness prevention, serious medical need, use and occupation, over-crowding and under-occupation:

- Resettlement - applicants have been assessed as ready to move from hostel or other temporary supported accommodation into settled accommodation. Where appropriate, arrangements will be made for tenancy support.
- Applicants who are threatened with homelessness and are owed the Prevention Duty and would be likely to be owed the Main duty if both the Prevention Duty and any Relief Duty that followed on were to end unsuccessfully and they would be, or would likely to be, found to be in priority need and unintentionally homeless.
- Serious medical need will apply where the applicant's (or member of their household who is moving with them) condition is currently directly affected by their accommodation and a move is needed to have a positive effect on their condition, or where as a result of their condition their current accommodation is detrimental to health and wellbeing. An investigation will be carried out.
- Use and occupation - following the death of the tenant, occupiers of Council dwellings who either do not have succession rights or a non-statutory succession cannot be granted as the current property would be under-occupied or considered unsuitable. Following notice served by a tenant and an assignment cannot be granted to the remaining occupants.
- Overcrowding – assessments will be based on the bedroom entitlement at Appendix D. Lodgers will be not be included in the assessment.
- Under-occupation by tenant of a Registered Housing Provider where the property is in Shropshire.

Band 4:

Need to give or receive support, moderate medical need, disrepair, overcrowding, excessive travel and homelessness:

- Give or receive support from close family members and / or move closer to local facilities. Where not having a move would result in serious detriment.
- Moderate medical need where the applicant's (or member of their household who is moving with them) condition is currently directly affected by their accommodation and a move is needed to have a positive effect on their condition, or where as a result of their condition their current accommodation is not suitable to their needs
- Disrepair where the Council has deemed the applicant's home to have the Presence of Category 2 Hazards, Band D under the Housing Health & Safety Rating System.
- Excessive travel, where applicants in, or due to be in, permanent full-time employment (20+ hours per week) are subject to excessive travel (over 1 hour each way).
- Homeless is where the Council accepts a household is homeless but to whom it does not owe a duty to secure settled accommodation because they are not considered to be in priority need or because they are intentionally homeless.

Band 5:

Sharing essential facilities, forced to live apart, above ground floor flat with child or pregnant, and key workers:

- Sharing essential facilities such as bathroom, toilet or kitchen with a separate household⁶.
- Family forced to live apart, where the family that has previously lived together find themselves in circumstances where it is impractical to reside in the same house due to financial, work or other commitments.
- The applicant has a child under ten or is pregnant and lives in a first floor flat or above.
- The applicant is considered by the Council to be a key worker.

Band 6:

Following a financial and need assessment, applicant would not be able to purchase or rent market priced housing within Shropshire which is suitable for their needs.

Band 7:

Following a financial and need assessment, applicants who would be able to purchase or rent market priced housing within Shropshire which is suitable for their needs.

⁶ Where the households sharing essential facilities are parents and their adult children this does not apply

Appendix B: Glossary and definition of terms

Allocation Policy and Scheme	This explains the rules that determine how Shropshire Council allocate and nominates to affordable housing properties.
Affordable Housing	Affordable housing comprises social and affordable rented accommodation and low-cost home ownership products [see NPPF]
Affordable Rents	Affordable rents set at up to 80% of local open market rents.
Bidding for a Property	The applicant's way of expressing an interest in being re-housed in that property
Choice-Based Lettings	More commonly known as CBL. A process used to advertise available properties and asking applicants to choose for themselves the properties they would like to be considered for.
Community Benefit	An allocation used to promote the best interests of the local community, detailing how the eligibility for a property departs from the standard criteria within the Allocation Policy.
Direct Let	Used in urgent situations where the Council directly allocates or nominates to a property.
Housing Register	The list of all those registered with Shropshire Council for affordable housing.
Key worker	An essential employment activity which is not limited to public sector employees, but includes the areas of care, support, food, hospitality, SMEs and agriculture where these are deemed essential to ensuring the sustainability and economic growth of the local area.
Local Letting Plans	Specifies how the qualification and eligibility for a property departs from the standard criteria within the Allocation Policy.
Main Duty	Where a homeless household is found by the local housing authority to be eligible for assistance, homeless but not intentionally so, in priority need and with a local connection they are owed the main duty of an offer of suitable accommodation.
Prevention Duty	If a homeless household is eligible for assistance and threatened with homelessness with 56 days, the local housing authority is required to work with them to prevent them becoming homeless.

Registered Providers	Housing organisations that are registered with the Regulator of Social Housing. Local authorities who own social housing stock are Registered Providers. Private Registered Providers are usually called Housing Associations.
Relief Duty	If a homeless household is eligible for assistance and is homeless, regardless of priority need, the local authority is required to take reasonable steps assist the household to obtain accommodation, this duty could last for up to 56 days.
Sensitive Let	Used for specific properties in the best interests of the local community.
Section 21 Notice	A formal document giving two months' notice on an Assured Shorthold Tenancy to vacate a property.
Section 106 Agreement	Some properties may be restricted under agreements pursuant to Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended), imposing conditions on who is eligible to be allocated / nominated, such as including a local connection requirement to a specific parish or area.
Shared Ownership	Where a person buys a proportion of a new home and pays rent on the remaining portion.
Statutory Homeless	A term that refers to people or families to whom a local housing authority has a duty to make an offer of suitable accommodation – this could be a council or housing association property or a twelve-month tenancy of private rented accommodation.

Appendix C: List of information required to verify an offer of accommodation

Local Connection

A copy of one of the following documents either from the applicant or from the close relative must be provided:

- Council tax bill
- Employment or contract of employment details
- Tenancy agreement

Without the documentation shown above, your local connection will not be verified.

Identification

- Passport sized photograph of applicant
- Original or certified copy of birth certificate or passport for applicant and for each household member included on the applicant's application
- Where applicable, proof of name change via Deed Poll
- Where applicable, original or certified copy of Marriage certificate

Housing

- A copy of Tenancy agreement
- A copy of Licence agreement
- A letter from friend or relative confirming the applicant's living arrangements - (letter should state date when the applicant moved in and number of bedrooms to which they have access)
- A current valuation of the applicant's home
- A copy of the applicant's latest mortgage statement
- Confirmation of Tied accommodation

Income

A copy of award letter or bank statements showing the following amounts:

- Employment Support Allowance
- Income Support
- Child Benefit
- Child Tax Credit
- Working Tax Credit
- Incapacity benefit
- DLA
- Carer's allowance
- Pension credit
- State Pension
- Occupational Pension

- Last 3 months or 5 weeks payslips for each employment
- A copy of self-employed accounts

Appendix D: Size and type of properties eligibility criteria

It is expected that working age applicants the size of property for which they are entitled under the DWP bedroom standard, however if applicants can demonstrate that they are able to pay rent with or without recourse to Housing Benefit, they may be considered for a property with an additional bedroom, this being subject to availability.

If a person named on an application as being part of the household is aged 16 or over they are classed as a person who is not a child and, therefore, as needing their own bedroom.

Households will usually be able to choose the floor level on which they want to live (depending on property type) unless there is an assessed need for a particular floor level. For example, if priority for ground floor accommodation is recommended on medical grounds.

The criteria listed below will usually be used when deciding what property is suitable for a household.

Household	Properties usually considered suitable
Single person of working age ⁷	Room in shared house, bedsit or 1 bedroom flat
Single person over working age	Bedsit, 1 or 2 ⁸ bedroom flat or bungalow
Coupe both of working age	1 bedroom flat
Couple with one or both over working age	1 or 2 bedroom flat or bungalow
Pregnant woman with no other children	1 or 2 bedroom flat, maisonette or house
Family with one child	2 bedroom flat, maisonette or house
Family with two children aged under 10	2 bedroom flat, maisonette or house
Family with two children aged under 16 of the same sex	2 bedroom flat, maisonette or house
Family with two children of different sex, where one or both children are aged 10 or over	3 bedroom flat, maisonette or house
Family with three children	3 bedroom flat, maisonette or house
Family with four children	3 or 4 ⁹ bedroom flat, maisonette or house
Family with five or more children	4 or 5 ¹⁰ bedroom house
Household needing 2 bedrooms where all are adults	2 bedroom flat or maisonette

⁷ Working age includes anyone who is under the State Pension Credit age of the time

⁸ Usually only following agreement from Social Services

⁹ Depending on age and sex of children

¹⁰ Depending on age and sex of children

Appendix E: List of local lettings policies

To be completed