

Housing Allocation Scheme for Herefordshire 2020 Summary

Introduction to the housing allocations scheme and how to apply

This document summarises the current housing allocations scheme that came into effect in June 2020. The scheme sets out who qualifies for inclusion on the housing register, the process by which applicants' housing need is assessed and the workings of the choice based lettings scheme used in Herefordshire to access social housing.

Every local authority must have an allocation policy. Demand for housing exceeds available supply in the county and therefore the housing allocation scheme endeavours to make best use of the housing stock and to help those who are in most need of affordable rented housing.

Only housing applicants that are eligible for housing and who qualify will be able to join the housing register.

Is everyone eligible to go on the housing register?

The housing register is a list of people who have applied and been accepted onto the register for social housing in the county. Some people's applications are not accepted as they are not eligible for social housing for instance because they are "subject to immigration control" or are "persons from abroad" (which can include British citizens who do not normally live in the UK).

Qualification

To qualify for the register applicants should have a local connection to Herefordshire. Local connection in this context means that the applicant meets at least one of the following criteria:

- a) Currently living in the county (in settled accommodation or accommodation of choice) for at least 2 years continuously or for 3 years out of last 5 years at the point of application;
- b) Have close relatives living in the county (parents, adult children, brothers or sisters) who have done so for at least the last 5 years at the point of application;
- c) Be employed and have worked in the county for at least 12 months and the work has been, and is, for more than 16 hours a week, or has an offer of permanent employment for more than 16 hours a week with a confirmed start date and the applicant continues to work in that job while the applicant is on the register;
- d) Is a Herefordshire looked after child or care leaver, or is a care leaver under the age of 21 who has lived in the county for at least two years, including some time before turning 16.
- e) Exceptional circumstances, at the discretion of the Housing Services Manager (HSM) in consultation with statutory agencies e.g. the police, Children's services, Adults and Communities.

An applicant will not be accepted on to the council's housing register for social housing if at the point of application: -

- i) They have sufficient financial resources to resolve their own housing need. Applicants without dependents with a gross annual household income of £35,000 or above or applicants with dependents with a combined gross annual household income of £45,000 or above will not normally qualify to join the housing register. Gross household income includes any benefits received excluding DLA/PIP or carer's allowance.

- ii) Those with household capital, savings or assets of £50,000 (under 50 years of age) or £100,000 (aged 50 or over) will not normally qualify to join the housing register.
- iii) When making the financial assessment, where capital/savings are available for specific reasons these may be disregarded if there are exceptional circumstances. For example, it is standard practice to disregard any lump sum received by a member of the Armed Forces as compensation for an injury or disability sustained on active service.
- iv) Applicants over 60 years of age with capital, savings or assets worth up to £150,000 may be accepted on to the register for older people's housing schemes only where they have a need for it. Housing associations generally assess the need for this type of housing scheme prior to an offer being made.

Applicants should have a housing need recognised in Bands A –D of the scheme. Applicants who do not have one of these needs can apply to the housing associations through Band E. The housing associations are responsible for managing Band E applicants.

Applicants who do not have a local connection may be accepted on to the register if they have a housing need within the reasonable preference categories.

Making an application for housing

You can make an application for housing on the Home point website www.home-point.info.

Once you have completed the online application you will need to provide supporting evidence such as birth certificates, bank statements and other necessary documents. A full list of the evidence required is available on the Home Point website. It is your responsibility to provide all the information requested during the registration process, and at other times such as where your circumstances change, when requested and in the relevant timescales.

Once you have supplied all the required information, Home Point will verify the details and once you have been assessed as qualifying for the register, you will be notified in writing of your registration number, your date of application, banding and bedroom eligibility. This can take up to 4 weeks from receipt of all evidence required.

If you need help or assistance with making an application please contact the Home Point team on 01432 260300.

You must keep Home Point informed of any changes to your household, housing and/or financial situation or any other circumstances that may impact on your housing need assessment or on any offers of social housing you may receive.

Housing need bands

Unfortunately, there is not enough social housing for everyone who applies. We therefore have a banding system in place which reflects the urgency of the need to be housed. This system is based on:

- your housing need
- the length of time you have waited

There are different types of need, for example being homeless, overcrowded or not being able to manage in your current accommodation because of a medical condition or disability. The housing register is divided into four bands A- D with band A applicants having the most urgent need to be housed.

Band E sits outside the council's allocation scheme but enables applicants who do not have a housing need in bands A –D to apply directly to housing associations for properties that are outside the allocation scheme arrangements.

How long will it take to get rehoused?

There is no one answer to this. It will depend on a number of things:

- the band you are in
- the length of time you have been on the register
- the size of property you need
- the choices you made about the area and type of property you will accept, if a choice is available to you

How do we work out which band people are placed in?

Everyone who applies to go onto the housing register is asked to fill in an on-line application form providing details about their household, their current accommodation and personal circumstances such as a medical condition or disability.

We use this information to assess which band someone will be placed in.

Using the application form and any other supporting information we will assess your housing need and decide how urgently you need to move.

Some assessments are straight forward, for example if your home is too small for you. Other issues are not as easy to assess, for example if you are ill or disabled and your medical condition or disability is affected by your housing. In this case we may ask a qualified medical adviser to help us assess your need-

What is 'reasonable preference'?

The council is required to give a "reasonable preference" or in other words more of a chance in the housing allocations scheme to the following groups of applicants:

- people living in unsanitary, unsatisfactory or overcrowded housing,
- people defined as homeless
- people who need to move on welfare or medical grounds (including grounds relating to a disability), and
- people who need to move to a particular area of the county to avoid hardship

Most of the housing need criteria in the allocation scheme fall into a reasonable preference. There are, however, a few local priorities such as under occupation by an existing social housing tenant or affordability.

Suspension

Applicants will be suspended and unable to bid for a property if there is evidence of serious anti-social behaviour or breach of tenancy conditions. This includes significant current or former tenant arrears and/or other housing debts or debts with the local authority. These would be debts where legal action for recovery may have been taken.

It will also include those who have deliberately worsened their circumstances.

Applicants may be suspended if there is evidence of anti-social behaviour.

If there is evidence of a change of behaviour and/or payment of debt over a period of time, applicants can ask for a review of the suspension.

Please note: each housing association has its own exclusion criteria which may apply, usually as part of their lettings policy.

Advice and assistance

Herefordshire Council has a duty to provide housing related advice and assistance to all those seeking it. Assistance will be provided for those who may have difficulty in accessing the housing register.

For further information please contact Home Point on:

- Tel: 01432 260300
- email: info@home-point.info
- visit Blueschool House, Blueschool Street, Hereford, HR1 2LX

Personalised advice is also provided online through the Housing Options Wizard on the Home Point website.

Advertising

Properties are advertised daily on the Home Point website for a period of 7 days. Adverts can be added on any day of the week. Applicants should therefore view the property search pages more than once a week.

The adverts will give information about the property, its size and features. There is also information available about the local area.

Adverts will indicate if there are restrictions on the types of household that can be considered for the specific property. This may be because the property is restricted to people over a given age, or may be for those with a local connection to the ward, parish or village. This is not an exhaustive list.

Bids can be placed at any time during the advertising period by:

- Logging into your account and bidding online;
- By phone or email to Home Point team;
- Using a bidding voucher available at Blue School House.

Applicants can bid for up to 2 properties at any one time.

Queries about properties that are advertised should be made to the housing association **not** Home Point.

Offers

When the advertising period is complete the shortlist of bidders is available to the housing association whose property has been advertised.

The association reviews the bids, taking into account any specific requirements of the property. It will also review bids in the light of their own lettings policy and exclusion criteria. The shortlist position does not guarantee an offer from the housing association.

All offers are made by the relevant housing association not Home Point.

Can I appeal?

All applicants have the right to ask for a review of decisions made in the registration process. This includes applicants who:

- Are not eligible to join the register;
- Are not a qualifying applicant;
- Have had their application closed;
- Have had a banding withdrawn/changed.

The request for a review should be made in writing within 21 calendar days of the date of the decision letter, stating the grounds for the review, and submitting the request to the Home Point Lead officer at Herefordshire Council.

The decision will be reviewed and the outcome normally given within 21 calendar days. In complex cases it may not be possible to give a decision in 21 days. Where this is the case the applicant/advocate will be notified in writing prior to expiry of the 21 day period.

You can download a copy of the full version of the housing allocation scheme from the Home Point and the council's website.