

Toolkit: Support with Housing



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Aims of this toolkit

- to provide an overview of the rules and process for housing
- to explain the process for bidding for housing
- to encourage individuals to self-advocate for their housing needs



Who can join the housing register?

You need to be a British or Irish citizen or meet the immigration conditions.

You're likely to meet the immigration conditions if you're settled here. For example, if you have settled status under the EU settlement scheme or indefinite leave to remain (ILR).

Most councils have their own local rules about who can join their housing register. These rules are explained in a document called the Allocation Policy. This document is on your council's website. Allocation policies can be long, but the council must provide a summary of the rules if you ask for one.

Find your council's website by using www.gov.uk and search for 'housing'.



Who must be allowed onto the housing register?

By law, the following groups of people must be allowed to apply:

- people who count as legally homeless
- people living in overcrowded accommodation or very bad housing conditions
- people who need to move because of a disability, medical, welfare or hardship reasons

In some areas, the register may only allow people from these groups.

The council could still refuse to allow you onto the housing register if you fall into one of these groups. For example, they may be able to exclude people with a history of antisocial behaviour even if they are homeless.

There are some other common rules that your council might have about who can join the register. For example, some councils may say that you must have lived or worked in the area for a certain time.

These rules should not apply in the following situations:

- you are in a refuge or temporary housing because of domestic abuse
- you have left the armed forces within the last 5 years
- you are the bereaved wife, husband, or civil partner of someone in the armed forces and you have to leave forces accommodation

Some councils will not let you on the housing register if you have rent arrears, especially if you still owe money to the council.

You may get rejected when you first apply.
If you do, ask for a review.



How long can it take to get a council home?

Councils will use bands or points-based systems to decide who gets priority for a home.



This is outlined in their Allocation Policy. The council will tell you what priority you have if they accept you onto the register. When you register, you can ask the council to tell you about your chances of getting a home and how long it is likely to take.

Waiting times depend on:

- your priority band or points
- how many homes are available
- the number of people on the waiting list with higher priority than you
- how flexible you can be about the type of property and areas you will live in

You could be on the register for months or sometimes years even if you are in a priority group. You might not get a home if you are low priority.

Who gets priority for housing?

By law, some groups of people must get 'reasonable preference'. This means people in these groups must get some priority for council and housing association homes.

You must be given reasonable preference if you:

- are homeless or fleeing violence
- live in overcrowded or very bad housing conditions
- need to move for health or welfare reasons

Some councils also give some priority or points to other groups. For example, people who need rehousing because of local regeneration schemes.

If you are or become homeless

The council must give you some priority on the housing register if you are legally homeless.

- this includes when you are at risk of violence or domestic abuse in your home
- this applies to homeless families, couples without children or single people

If you live in overcrowded conditions

You could be classed as overcrowded if you do not have a separate bedroom for:

- each couple
- each single adult aged 21 or over
- 2 young people aged 10 to 20 of the same sex
- 2 children under 10 of any sex

This is called the “**Bedroom Standard.**” Some councils use a different legal measure of overcrowding, this is called Statutory Overcrowding.

If you live in very bad housing conditions

This may apply if your home:

- needs urgent repairs or is in a very bad condition
- is unsanitary - for example, has bad drains or sewerage problems
- lacks basic washing and cooking facilities

You get more points or a higher band if the council decides your home is in such bad condition that it is a health risk and / or dangerous.

If you need to move for health or welfare reasons

You must get some priority if you need to move for health or welfare reasons. For example, if you or anyone in your household needs:

- sheltered housing for older people
- supported housing because of a learning disability
- adapted or accessible housing because of a physical disability
- a larger home because you are a foster carer or looking after someone else’s children

You should tell the council if:

- mobility problems make it difficult to get around your home
- a physical or mental health condition is made worse by where you live

A doctor, healthcare worker, or social worker can support your application.

How do I know where I will be housed?

Councils offer homes to people on the housing register through choice-based letting schemes or as a direct offer.



The main difference is that with choice-based lettings you must express an interest in a property to have a chance of being offered it. With direct offers, the council finds a suitable property for you.

Ask your council which type of scheme they use. Some councils use both.

How to bid with a choice-based letting scheme

You will have to look at properties on the council website or at the housing office.

You need to tell the council if you are interested in a property. You usually do this through your online account, or you can speak to your housing officer. This is often called '**bidding**'.

Some councils only allow you to bid for a certain number of properties at once. You must meet any criteria for the property.

If you are homeless

Your council might bid for suitable properties on your behalf if you are legally homeless. This is sometimes called "**proxy bidding**". Alternatively, they might make you a direct offer.

If you are disabled or need reasonable adjustments

If you need support, the council must:

- help you with the bidding process
- provide information in an accessible format such as Braille or audio

If you have a disability or sensory loss, this means that the service must adapt how they communicate to meet your needs.

This could be through:

- written communication, such as email, text, or text relay
- other forms of communication, such as Braille, audio, large print, or easy read
- providing a professional to support communication at meetings, for example a British Sign Language interpreter

You should let the service know if you need them to adapt their communication to meet your needs. This information should be written on your records so that everyone that speaks with you is aware of what they need to do.

What happens after you bid for a tenancy?

Other people may bid on the property too. The council then looks at everyone's banding or points to decide who should be offered the home first.

The person with the most priority on the housing register usually gets to say if they want it or not first. If they turn it down, it will be offered to the person with the next highest priority.



Options while on the housing waiting list



Council housing waiting times can be very long. You might need to consider other options:

- **Rent privately** - renting from a private landlord or a letting agent is the quickest way to move.
- **Apply to other councils** - you can apply for council housing in multiple areas at the same time and you can join more than one waiting list.
 - Some areas can offer housing quicker. Most councils give priority to people who already have a connection to the area, for example if you have close family living there.
- **Apply to housing associations** - some housing associations have their own waiting list separate from the council's. Search online for housing associations in your area and check how to apply on their website.

If your application is refused

The council should write to you when they have looked at your application. There is no set length of time in which the council must get back to you, but most councils have their own target time in which to respond. It is worth contacting the council if you have not heard back after a month.

If the letter or email says you are not a 'qualifying person' this means the council do not think you meet the local rules to go on the waiting list. You can ask for a review if you think they have made a mistake or overlooked something.

Ask for a review within the time limit set by the council. It is often 3 weeks from when you get a written decision about your application.

Raising a concern about housing – we have a toolkit on how to raise a concern, please make a referral on our website for more information.

VoiceAbility

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🌐 voiceability.org

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About VoiceAbility

We make sure you're heard when it matters most. We've been supporting people to have their say in decisions about their health, care and wellbeing for over 40 years. We're an independent charity and one of the UK's largest providers of advocacy and involvement services.