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# NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE HOUSING PARTNERSHIP



Common Housing Allocation Scheme

**Home4U**

## Introduction

North Hertfordshire District Council, North Hertfordshire Homes and Howard Cottage Housing Association have established the North Hertfordshire Housing Partnership (NHHP). The Partnership works to assist households with a housing need to secure accommodation through the Common Housing Allocation Scheme.

In North Hertfordshire the demand for social rented housing far outweighs the supply. This means that we cannot guarantee to provide social rented housing for everyone who wants it. To ensure that those with the greatest housing need have a prospect of having their needs met, the Common Housing Allocation Scheme awards preference to households according to need.

Summary and full versions of the Common Housing Allocation Scheme are published on the websites of members of the NHHP and a copy will be provided free of charge to anyone requesting it.

## Eligibility

Anyone aged 16 years or over may apply to join the register. However, applicants are ineligible for an allocation in the following circumstances:

- The applicant(s) is a person from abroad and subject to immigration control
- The applicant(s) is a person from abroad, not subject to immigration control, but who is not habitually resident in the Common Travel Area
- The North Hertfordshire Housing Partnership is satisfied that the applicant(s) is unsuitable to be a tenant due to unacceptable behaviour.

### **Examples of unacceptable behaviour include:**

- Anti-social behaviour;
- Failure to pay rent or other charges; and
- Non-compliance with tenancy obligations

All applicants will be assessed for eligibility both at the point of application and at the point of allocation.

# Equal Opportunities

The Partnership endeavours to meet the diverse needs of the community without bias. The Common Housing Allocation Scheme will be monitored to ensure that no groups are unfairly disadvantaged by the operation of the scheme. Should such monitoring expose inconsistencies in outcomes for any group(s), the Partnership will take steps to eliminate any disadvantage experienced by the group(s) concerned.

# Making an Application

Access to the Common Housing Register is via an application form. The form can be requested from any of the partners or completed on-line at [www.home4u.org.uk](http://www.home4u.org.uk). When completing an application to the Common Housing Register, applicants should include members of their household that they wish to be accommodated with them.

Once an application has been received and all supporting evidence assessed, applicants will be notified of the preference they have been awarded and provided with guidance on participating in the choice based lettings scheme Home4U.

## Advice and assistance in making an application

Advice and assistance with making an application is available free of charge to anyone in the district who has difficulty with making an application. Applicants requiring assistance should contact the partner to which they made their application.



## **Translation**

This document will be made available in other languages and a translation service is available. We can also arrange for it to be transcribed into Braille, audiotape or large print on request.

## **Change in circumstances**

All applicants must inform the partner to which they made their application of any changes to the information provided in their application. Changes in circumstances may mean the application will need to be reassessed.

## **Monitoring and reviewing applications**

Applications will be reviewed periodically and applicants will be asked to confirm that their circumstances have not changed and that they wish to remain on the Common Housing Register. Failure to respond to the review may result in the application being cancelled.

## **Withholding information/ giving false information**

It is an offence, under section 171 of the Housing Act 1996, for a person to knowingly make

a statement which is false, or withhold information which is relevant to their application.

The Partnership may prosecute any applicant who commits such an offence or seek possession of any tenancy that has been granted as a result of a false statement by the tenant, or anyone acting at the tenant's instigation or with his knowledge.

## **Intentional worsening of housing circumstances**

Should an applicant perform a deliberate action or inaction that results in a worsening of their housing circumstances, they will not gain preference on the Common Housing Register. The household will be placed in the band that they would have qualified for should they not have worsened their housing circumstances. The situation will be reviewed after 12 months or upon a material change of circumstance within the household.

## **Eligible applicants with housing debts**

Eligible applicants with current or former housing debts owing to a social landlord, which are

not serious enough to make them ineligible, may be relegated to Band D and be required to enter into an agreement to clear the debt.

Applicants will either be relegated for 6 months, after which time they will be reinstated into their correct band (if they have made regular repayments during the relegation period), or until the debt is cleared, whichever is the sooner. Once reinstated into their correct band applicants will be expected to continue to make regular payments until the debt is cleared. If repayments on a debt cease, the applicant may be relegated to band D for a further 6 month period.

### **Eligible applicants involved in anti-social behaviour**

Applicants whose household includes a person or persons that have been involved in anti-social behaviour, or other behaviour that affects their suitability to be a tenant, which is not severe enough to warrant exclusion from the Common Housing Register, may be relegated to band D. The situation will

be reviewed after six months or upon a material change of circumstances, whichever is the sooner.

### **Local Connection**

Applicants with a local connection will be given preference for bands A, B and C. An applicant will be deemed to have a local connection if s/he:

- Has been resident, by choice, in the district for 6 out of the last 12 months; or
- Has been resident, by choice, in the district for 3 out of the last 5 years; or
- Is a current or former member of the armed forces and has been resident in armed service accommodation in the district for 6 out of the last 12 months or 3 out of the last 5 years; or



- Has an immediate family member, (normally mother, father, brother, sister, or adult child), living in the district by choice for at least 5 years; or
- Is in permanent employment in the district; or
- Is a former asylum seeker who has occupied accommodation provided by NASS in the district; or
- Has another special reason why they need to live in the district.

## Resources

Applicants who can meet their own housing need by buying a suitable property on the open market will have the preference they receive reduced.

## Owner occupiers

Owner-occupiers accepted onto the Common Housing Register must take all reasonable steps to complete the sale of their property before taking up a social housing tenancy. Where this is not possible they will be required to undertake to bring their interest in the property to an end as soon as possible after being granted a tenancy. Such applicants will be granted an assured shorthold tenancy whilst they retain their interest in the property.

## Applications from households in institutions

Applicants will be deemed to have no housing need until they are within 3 months of leaving an institution such as the Armed Forces, long-term hospital or prison. At this point they will be given preference for leaving an institution with no suitable accommodation to return to and any other housing need they are eligible to receive preference for.

## Medical Grounds for Moving

If applicants feel there may be a medical reason for moving they should complete a self-assessment medical form. The NHHP's Medical Advisor will recommend whether the application should receive any medical priority and may also make a recommendation on the type and location of accommodation and any special aids or adaptations necessary.

Medical priority will only be awarded where other remedies such as the Disabled Facilities Grant have been investigated and eliminated. It may also only be awarded on the

condition that the applicant will accept the type of property recommended.

## There are three levels of medical priority:

### High medical priority

- The applicant or a member of their household has a permanent medical problem that prevents them gaining access to their property or to basic facilities within the property or;
- The medical condition of the applicant or a member of his/her household may lead to danger to life and limb if they are not re-housed.

### Medium medical priority

- The applicant or a member of his/her household has a medical condition that causes them serious difficulty in gaining access to their property or to basic facilities within their property or;
- The applicant's continued occupation of their current property is likely to cause a significant deterioration to their health or the health of a member of the household.

### Low medical priority

- The applicant or a member of his/her household has a medical condition that diminishes their ability to gain access to their property or to basic facilities within their property; or
- The applicant's continued occupation of their current property is likely to cause deterioration to their health or the health of a member of their household.

## Right to access information

Under the terms of the Data Protection Act, applicants can make a written request for personal information held either on computer or manual files that does not identify any other person that has not consented to the disclosure. A reasonable fee may be charged for this service.

## The right to request a review

Applicants have the right to request a review of certain decisions, within 21 days of notification. Requests must be made in writing to the partner to which they made their application.

An officer senior to one who made the original decision, and who was not involved, will make the review decision. Full details of the review procedure will be made available on request.

## How does the register work?

Applicants accepted on the Common Housing Register will be awarded preference according to housing need and placed in the appropriate preference band. There are 5 preference bands from A to E and applicants will be placed in the highest band that their housing need qualifies them for.

### Band A - Additional preference

#### **Additional preference will be awarded where applicants or a member of their household:**

- Has been awarded high medical priority with an urgent need to move due to a permanent medical condition or a disability and other remedies such as the Disabled Facilities Grant have been investigated and eliminated;
- Has an urgent need to move

to provide care to a person who has a high medical priority;

- Is under-occupying social rented housing in the district of a type for which there is a high demand;
- A senior officer of the NHHP has decided that a household has cumulative housing needs so great as to necessitate an urgent move;
- Is a tenant of NHH or HCHA and is being permanently decanted from their home. In these circumstances, preference will be awarded for a limited period after which the NHHP will make a direct offer.

### Band B - High preference

#### **High preference will be awarded where:**

- A Household has been accepted as homeless and in priority need and is owed the full housing duty by NHDC, unless they are placed in temporary accommodation which is designated for a special needs client group or placed in supported accommodation outside the district and is ready to move into general needs housing;

- The applicant needs to move and is vulnerable and cannot be expected to find their own accommodation and there is no other person in the household who could be expected to do so on their behalf;
- A member of the household has been awarded medium medical priority;
- There is a need to move to provide care to a person who has a medium medical priority;
- The applicant is in supported accommodation within the district and is ready to move into general needs housing;
- Households living in accommodation that is in such poor condition that it poses an unacceptable risk of accidents and/or ill health;
- Households that include a dependent child or a vulnerable adult that require another bedroom according to the terms of the Common Housing Allocation Scheme;
- Households with dependent children or a vulnerable adult sharing facilities with another household;
- The household is in social rented housing that has

adaptations which are not needed by the household.

## Band C – Moderate Preference

### Moderate preference will be awarded where:

- A household with no dependent children or vulnerable adults is sharing facilities with another household;
- The household has been accepted as homeless but not in priority need by North Hertfordshire District Council, or has been deemed intentionally homeless;
- The applicant has been accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need and placed in supported accommodation by North Hertfordshire District Council but not yet ready to move into general needs housing;



- A household that has been accepted as homeless or threatened with homelessness and in priority need by any local housing authority other than NHDC;
- The applicant or a member of his or her household has been awarded low medical priority;
- There is a need to move to provide care to a person who has a low medical priority;
- The household does not include children or vulnerable adults and they require another bedroom under the terms of the Common Housing Allocation Scheme;
- The household is occupying a property in which a bedroom is too small;
- Single person households who have lived in a bed-sit or studio flat for three years within the district, as tenants, and wish to move to a one bedroom flat;
- Couples living in a bed-sit or studio flat;
- Children under the age of 6 or pregnant women are living in flats above the ground floor;
- Children under the age of 11 who do not have access to a secure garden;
- There is a need to move to avoid hardship;
- Households are in accommodation with limited security of tenure;
- Applicants are within three months of leaving an institution that have no suitable accommodation to return to;
- Applicants are over 55 years of age with a support need and require sheltered accommodation.

## **Band D – Low Preference**

**Low preference will be awarded to households that have any of the housing needs in bands A, B and C who:**

- Do not have a local connection with the district; and/or
- Have sufficient resources to buy a property suitable for their household on the open market; or
- Are owner-occupiers or tenants with relevant repair obligations who have sufficient

resources to bring their current accommodation up to a reasonable standard; or

- Eligible applicants with housing debts owing to a social landlord; or
- Eligible applicants whose household includes a person or persons involved in anti-social behaviour or other behaviour that makes them unsuitable to be a tenant.

## **Band E – No Preference**

No preference will be awarded to households that have do not have a housing need.

### **Cumulative need**

Applicants with more than one need will be awarded a Band preference for the highest need, plus Points for each additional need, ensuring all their needs are accounted for. Needs points will be awarded as follows:

- 10 points for housing needs awarded urgent preference (Band A)
- 6 points for housing needs awarded high preference (Band B)

- 3 points for housing needs awarded moderate preference (Band C)

Needs points will be awarded for every additional housing need. For example a household in band B because they require an extra bedroom will receive an additional 6 points if they require two extra bedrooms. The household would attract another 3 points if they have a tenancy with limited security (band C).

### **Waiting time**

Households will be awarded one point for every month that they spend on the Common Housing Register.

### **Discretionary awards of preference**

The Common Housing Allocation Scheme cannot cover every eventuality. In special cases with exceptional needs, senior officers of the NHHP have a discretionary power to award additional preference and approve offers of housing, after having taken into consideration all factors relevant to the housing and social needs of the household.

# Choice Based Lettings Scheme – Home4U

The NHHP allocates available properties through its Choice Based Lettings Scheme (CBL), Home4U. When a property becomes available it is advertised through the Home4U website and in magazines delivered to key sites in the district.

## **The advertisement for the property will include:**

- The location of the property;
- Physical characteristics of the property such as type, number of bedrooms and floor level;
- The rent and any service charges applicable;
- Eligibility criteria;
- Restrictions on households to whom an offer will be made;
- Details of any adaptations;
- A photograph of the property.

Applicants are invited to 'bid' for properties that they are interested in.

The deadline for making a bid will be included in the advertisement and bids received after that date will not be considered.

Bids from applicants who are eligible and meet the advertised criteria will be short listed in order of the amount of preference they have on the Common Housing Register. A maximum of five bidders, with the highest preference on the Common Housing Register, will be invited to view the property. Following the viewing, applicants will be required to confirm whether or not they want to be considered for the property. The property will be offered to the applicant with the highest preference on the register of those who wish to be considered.

Where two or more interested applicants have equal preference, the applicant with the most needs points will be offered the property. If two or more applicants have the same needs points the offer will be made to the applicant who has been on the register the longest.

Applicants who have been offered a property will not be considered for other properties until they have

made a decision on the offer. Should an applicant be at the top of more than one shortlist, they will have a limited time to make a decision on which property they prefer.

If the applicant refuses the offer or fails to respond within the given time, the property will be offered to the applicant with the next highest preference on the Common Housing Register. This process will be followed until the property is successfully allocated.

## **Support for potentially disadvantaged applicants**

Applicants who find participation in the scheme more difficult than others will be provided with assistance in making an application and with making bids. The NHHP will take steps to identify which applicants may need assistance and work with support agencies to ensure the scheme is accessible to all.

Assistance will be provided at an appropriate level to the applicant's needs by NHHP officers and/or statutory and voluntary support and advice agencies.

This may include bids being made on behalf of the applicant where the NHHP has the applicant's written permission to accept/ make such bids.

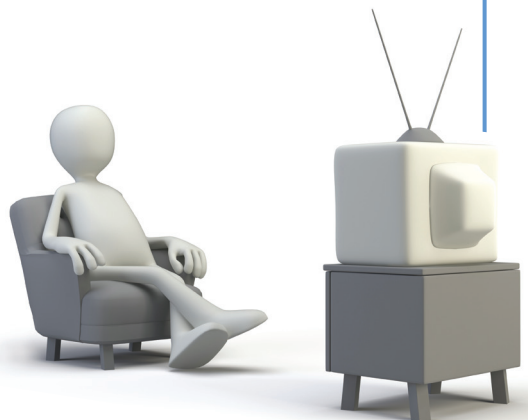
The NHHP's Choice Based Lettings Strategy for Meeting the Needs of Vulnerable People, available on the partners' websites and upon request, gives details of how the NHHP will work in partnership with support agencies to ensure that choice based lettings is accessible to all.

## **Offers to applicants under 18 years of age**

A guarantor may be required by social landlords when offering a tenancy to a person under the age of 18.

## **Direct offers**

In some circumstances the NHHP may make direct offers of accommodation.



When making a direct offer, bids for suitable properties will be made on behalf of the applicant by an officer of the NHHP. Applicants will retain the right to make their own bids. Where a bid whether made by the applicant or the NHHP is successful, the property will be offered to the household.

Direct offers made to statutory homeless households will be final offers. In these circumstances, should the offer be refused, the household may be required to leave any temporary accommodation that they are occupying in discharge of the Council's duty under part VII of the Housing Act 1996.

## **Withdrawing offers of accommodation**

The NHHP reserves the right to withdraw an offer of accommodation if there has been a change in the circumstances of the applicant which have not been notified to the partnership and such changes result in a reduction in the applicant's preference making the offer no longer applicable.

## **Lettings not covered by the scheme**

Some lettings are excluded from the terms of this scheme; these include:

- Transfers made for housing management purposes;
- Offers of tenancies made under reciprocal arrangements with other local housing authorities or RSLs;
- Lettings to extra-care sheltered housing;
- Lettings of temporary accommodation to statutory homeless households; and
- Lettings made to households under the witness mobility scheme.

## **Accessible properties**

Accessible properties will be categorised according to the level of access that they provide. When advertised, such properties will be labelled accordingly. Households that include a person with a need for an accessible property will be assessed and informed of the category of accessibility deemed suitable for them. Eligibility to bid for an accessible property may be restricted to applicants with a need for the level of access it provides.

## Local lettings policies

In some circumstances properties may be reserved to fulfil an identified housing need or to ensure a mixed, balanced and sustainable community. The criteria of the local lettings policy will be detailed in the advertisement and only applicants who meet the criteria will be eligible to bid.

## Property type

The type of property that an applicant is eligible to bid for is limited to the needs of the household.

Unless there are extenuating circumstances the following restrictions apply:

Property type	Available to
Studio flat	A single person household
Flat	All
Maisonette	All
Bungalow	A household that includes a person age 55 or over and/or with a medical recommendation for ground floor accommodation
Sheltered accommodation	A single person aged 55 or over or couple in which at least one partner aged 55 or over
House	A household with one or more resident children*
Adapted property	A household with a need for adaptations

\* In the case of separated parents staying access will not normally be taken to amount to residence.

## Property size

Households will be eligible for a separate bedroom for each:

- Married or co-habiting couple;
- Lone parent;
- Adult aged 18 or over;
- Pair of children of the same sex with an age difference of 5 years or less between them;
- Unpaired child.

In properties with a self-contained dining room, the dining room may be counted as a bedroom.

Properties with more than three bedrooms are scarce and households requiring larger properties may bid for properties that do not provide the above bedroom standards. In these circumstances, the property must provide a minimum of one bedroom for:

- Each co-habiting couple or lone parent;
- Each adult aged 21 years or over;

- Each pair of children of the same sex aged 10 to 20 years;
- Each unpaired person aged 10 to 20 paired with a child under 10 of the same sex;
- Each pair of children under the age of 10 regardless of sex;
- Each unpaired child.

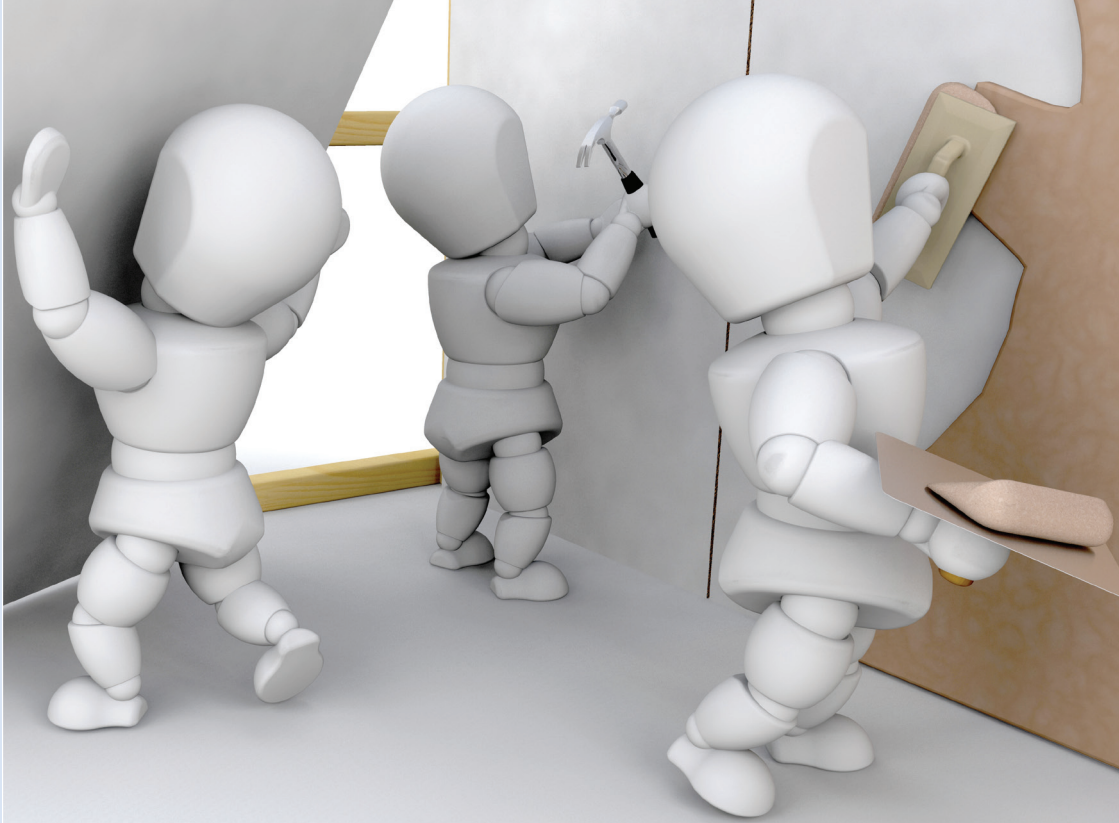
An unborn child will be taken into account for allocation purposes when the mother reaches her sixth month of pregnancy.

Households will be awarded preference if their current housing does not have enough bedrooms or the bedrooms are too small. Where a bedroom is unacceptably small the household will be deemed to lack a bedroom.

The table overleaf sets out how bedroom sizes are assessed:

Bedroom size	Occupant(s)	Lacking a bedroom	Too small adequate	adequate
Less than 48 sq ft (4.459 m <sub>2</sub> )	Any occupancy	✓		
48 to 50 sq ft (4.459 m <sub>2</sub> to 4.645 m <sub>2</sub> )	Child under 10		✓	
	Person over 10	✓		
50 to 70 sq ft (4.645 m <sub>2</sub> to 6.503 m <sub>2</sub> )	Child under 10			✓
	Person over 10		✓	
70 to 90 sq ft (6.503 m <sub>2</sub> to 8.361 m <sub>2</sub> )	Person over 10			✓
	Child under 10 sharing with one other person of any age		✓	
	Two people	✓		
90 to 110 sq ft (8.361m <sub>2</sub> to 10.22 m <sub>2</sub> )	Child under 10 sharing with one other person of any age			✓
	Two people over 10		✓	
110 sq ft or over (10.22 m <sub>2</sub> )	Up to 2 people of any age			✓





# Office Locations

This leaflet is a brief explanation of the allocations policy. A copy of the full Common Housing Allocations Policy is available to inspect at offices of the North Hertfordshire Housing Partnership and is available on the website of each partner:



## **North Hertfordshire District Council**

Customer Service Centre

Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City, Herts, SG6 3JF

Tel: 01462 474000 [www.north-herts.gov.uk](http://www.north-herts.gov.uk)



## **North Hertfordshire Homes**

Customer Services

Rowan house, Avenue One, Letchworth Garden City, Herts SG6 2WW

Tel: 01462 704100 [www.nhh.org.uk](http://www.nhh.org.uk)



## **Howard Cottage Housing Association**

Customer Services

Pioneer House, Norton Way South,  
Letchworth Garden City, Herts, SG6 1NY

Tel: 01462 683307 [www.howard-cottage.co.uk](http://www.howard-cottage.co.uk)