

Eastbourne Borough Council

HomeChoice Lettings Policy March 2002

To create a prosperous, fair and socially inclusive community, which protects people and values and enhances its environment.

Applicants for housing or transfers who are eligible for the list and who are qualifying persons will be accepted onto the Eastbourne HomeChoice Register.

Applicants and tenants will be referred to as Homeseekers unless criteria is specific to applicant or tenant.

Each application will be considered on it's own merit.

1. ELIGIBILITY.

Applicants for housing will be accepted onto the Eastbourne HomeChoice Register if they are aged 16 years or over and are a qualifying person with a local connection.

Local connection is established if the applicant:

- Is or has been resident in Eastbourne for six out of the last twelve months, or
- Is or has been resident in Eastbourne for three out of the last five years
- Is permanently employed in the town (excluding temporary or seasonal work)

In addition, homeless applicants also have a local connection if:

- They have close family in the town (parents, adult child/ren, brother, sister) who have lived in Eastbourne for three out of the last five, or five out of the last ten years.
- Other special circumstances such as returning from abroad to last settled place of residence in the UK.

2. QUALIFYING PERSONS

Homeseekers who have been accepted under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 as being homeless or threatened with homelessness will be qualifying persons.

Other Homeseekers will be qualifying persons unless they fall into any of the following categories:

- i) Anyone who is subject to immigration control within the meaning of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996, unless they fall into a category defined by the

Home Secretary.

ii) Anyone who the DTLR defines as falling into a non-qualifying category such as those who do not have recourse to public funds.

3. GETTING ONTO THE REGISTER

Homeseekers wanting to move will complete a HomeChoice Application Form, which will give basic details of their current housing circumstances. Homeseekers will be asked to provide certain information at the point of application. This information includes:

- Birth Certificate for each member of household
- Copy of current tenancy agreement/mortgage documents
- A recent utility bill (from last 3 months) or other proof of address for each adult on the application
- A recent passport size photo of applicant/joint applicant

At this stage, a decision will be taken whether or not to place the Homeseeker on the Register.

4. DECIDING THE PRIORITY OF PEOPLE ON THE REGISTER

Homeseekers who are on the register will be allocated into one of three categories, dependant upon the degree of housing need.

Homeseekers within the same category will be prioritised according to the length of time on the register within that category.

The categories are:

- **Live**
- **Urgent**
- **Wanting to move**

5. PUTTING PEOPLE INTO THE RELEVANT CATEGORY

LIVE

Homeseekers who show one or more indicators of housing need as outlined below will normally be allocated into the **Live** category.

i) Homelessness

Homeless applicants under the Housing Act 1996 who are homeless or threatened with homelessness within the meaning of Part VII.

ii) Disrepair

Where, on advice from the Environmental Health Team, an applicant's home is in disrepair and their situation can best be resolved through rehousing.

iii) Temporary or insecure accommodation

Applicants living in non-secure accommodation. Examples of non-secure accommodation arrangements are as follows:

- a) Assured Shorthold tenancies
- b) Tenants/ licensees of hostels, refuges, b&b's etc.
- c) Separate households sharing with relatives or friends
- d) Tied accommodation
- e) Applicants with no fixed abode
- f) Homeseekers housed temporarily in Eastbourne Borough Council accommodation on a non-secure tenancy

iv) Lack of Essential Facilities

Where the applicant's home is lacking essential facilities and their housing conditions can best be resolved through rehousing. Essential facilities are defined as follows:

- a) Cooking facilities
- b) Bath or Shower
- c) Internal WC
- d) Piped water supply
- e) Hot water supply
- f) Electricity supply

v) Social, Medical or Economic Circumstances

Where an applicant or household member has a significant medical condition, social problem or economic circumstance, which are caused or aggravated by the property, occupied and where this condition can best be alleviated or resolved by rehousing.

Where the affect of this condition, problem or circumstance may be to cause severe hardship to the applicant, then the applicant may be found to be in urgent housing need. The Officer Panel will make decisions on cases applying under this section. However, cases will not be referred to the panel if it is clear that the applicant would not be found to be in urgent need.

Similarly, if a particular case has been considered previously by the panel and there has not been a significant change in circumstance then the case will not be referred to the panel for further consideration.

vi) Shared facilities

Where an applicant is sharing essential facilities with other households. Essential facilities are defined under this section as follows.

- a) WC
- b) Kitchen
- c) Living room

vii) Household Separation

Where a household wishes to live together and there is no suitable accommodation for them to do so.

viii) Sheltered Accommodation

Where an elderly person is eligible for sheltered accommodation and wishes to move into retirement housing they will normally be in housing need unless they are able to resource this type of accommodation privately.

ix) Tied accommodation

The applicant is serving in the Armed forces, has a local connection and is financially unable to secure their own accommodation on completion of planned discharge.

The applicant lives in accommodation tied to their employment and is due for retirement.

x) Overcrowding

Applicants who are in overcrowded accommodation will normally be in housing need. For the purposes of defining overcrowding the following factors apply:

- All rooms (except kitchens and bathrooms or any room containing an open flue gas appliance) will be classified as suitable for sleeping accommodation
- Rooms less than 50 square feet are not suitable as sleeping accommodation.
- Children of the opposite sex may share a room until at least one of them reaches the age of 10.
- Special cases as decided by Officer panel.

TRANSFER APPLICANTS

For applications on the following grounds the relevant sections above, which apply to housing applicants, also apply to Council and Housing Association transfer applicants:

- a) Medical/Social/Economic
- b) Household separation
- c) Sheltered accommodation
- d) Overcrowding

Underoccupation

Eastbourne Borough Council and Housing Association tenants with one or more bedrooms than they need will be added to the Live register. Additional assistance will be given to Eastbourne Borough Council tenants moving from a house to a flat.

Eastbourne Borough Council tenants or Housing Association tenants joining the Register will be in housing need if their property has been adapted for a disabled person and these adaptations are no longer required.

URGENT NEED TO MOVE

- i. The applicant is homeless under the meaning of Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 and has no accommodation or who has been placed in emergency accommodation (B&B, EBC hostel or dispersed unit, Refuge.)
- ii. Leaving institutional care/ care leavers who satisfy priority need criteria.
- iii. Prisoners on release who lived in Eastbourne immediately prior to sentencing who satisfy priority need criteria.
- iv. As a result of a Closing or Compulsory Purchase order
- v. People with an urgent need for housing on social, medical or welfare grounds who cannot be expected to find their own settled accommodation, in conjunction with the Officer panel, the Council's medical advisor, social services or other agencies as appropriate.
- vi. Households accepted for rehousing through
 - Children Act joint assessments
 - Community Care assessments, through the Special Needs Housing Officer, including planned hospital discharge, or move on from a supportive environment.
- vii. The applicant has been designated as a key worker and is unable to secure alternative settled housing

Applicants who fall into a group designated by the Council as key workers and who are otherwise unable to secure alternative settled housing will normally be in housing need. Key

Workers are:

- EMERGENCY SERVICE PERSONNEL
- NURSES
- TEACHERS
- Other essential workers where the employer has been unable to recruit locally (These cases will be decided on an individual basis by the Officer Panel).

WANTING TO MOVE

Homeseekers who do not show any element of housing need but who wish to move will be placed into the **wanting to move** category.

Applicants who qualify and are in housing need may be allocated into this category if they have the financial ability to secure their own accommodation in the private sector.

Most commonly, this will be where applicants or tenants have the income and/or assets to purchase a property or perhaps to put right any problems there are with their current home. Cases will need to be dealt with on their own merits with regard to the individual circumstances of the applicant or tenant and conditions in the housing market.

FINANCIAL CRITERIA

1999/2001 Thresholds based on RTB values

Property

Size	1Bedroom	2Bedroom	3Bedroom	4Bedroom
	38,000	46,500	61,000	75,000 (est.)

Thresholds

INCOME	15,000	18,500	25,500	30,000
--------	--------	--------	--------	--------

2.5 x household income = mortgage multiplier

PLUS CAPITAL- 5% of mortgage plus costs or £5k whatever is greater

i.e. a family requiring 2 bedroom accommodation, with an income of £15K would be added to the LIVE register, a similar family with an income of £20K would be added to the WANTING TO MOVE register

Eastbourne Borough Council tenants who request a move and who have sufficient income will be advised of homeownership options.

In order to extend further choice to applicants and tenants we will aim to have reciprocal

arrangements with other areas wherever possible.

Any Member or person employed by or having a family member employed by Eastbourne Borough Council must declare this at the time of applying for the register. The Director of Housing Health and Community Finance must agree any offer of accommodation.

6. KEEPING HOMESEEKERS INFORMED

Once the Homeseeker has been accepted onto the Register, the following decisions will be made, based on the information provided:

- i) Which category they are in
- ii) Whether or not to seek further information from the applicant so that a correct assessment is possible. Any cases where the assessing officer cannot reach a decision will be presented to the Officer Panel who will recommend which category the applicant should be in. Advice may also be sought from other relevant agencies with the applicant's permission.

Once a decision has been reached on the appropriate category, the Homeseeker will receive written confirmation and their details will be input onto the Orchard IT system. The Homeseeker will receive a HomeChoice card containing a photo and details of their application; this card will be presented whenever the Homeseeker makes an enquiry.

This process will have a PI target of 28 days.

Each application will be reviewed annually.

SUSPENSION FROM THE REGISTER

Where an applicant has exhibited behaviour that affects their suitability to be a tenant, such as the likely need for support, further information will be sought from other agencies. The application will be suspended until a care agency advises the Housing Department that steps are in place to support the applicant in their home.

Homeseekers who act in an aggressive, violent or racist manner to any Council or Housing Association staff will have their application suspended initially for six months when the case will be reviewed. Generally a warning letter will be sent prior to suspension except in the case of actual violence.

Homeseekers with a conviction for using or allowing their property to be used for illegal or immoral purposes will be suspended from the register.

Any Homeseeker owing rent to the Council or Housing Association will need to agree and maintain a repayment plan. Failure to do so will result in suspension until resolved.

APPEALS

If the Homeseeker disagrees with the category they have been placed in they should contact the department in writing within 21 days stating their reasons. A senior officer will check the

decision and reply within 10 working days.

Anyone who does not agree with their suspension has the right to appeal and should do so in writing within 21 days. We will reply to the appeal within 10 working days.

Anyone whose application is refused or name is removed from the Register will be informed of their right to request a review of that decision. Other decisions may be subject to statutory review and all reviews will be carried out in accordance with statutory requirements.

The principle of the appeals process means any Officer making a decision as part of the Officer Panel will be excluded from reviewing any decision following an appeal.

7. LETTING VACANT PROPERTIES

The process for letting vacant properties, is as follows:

- i) The property is labelled
- ii) The property is advertised
- iii) Interested Homeseekers respond to the advert
- iv) Homeseekers are sorted and a successful applicant is identified
- v) The Homeseekers' details are verified during a home visit
- vi) The property is offered
- vii) Details of the letting are announced

8. THE LETTING PROCESS

All vacancies will be let under the following process unless there is a specific reason to exclude them (see section 9 below.)

Labelling of Properties

Full details of each vacancy will be gathered including, for example, photo, street location, rent, landlord, property dimensions etc. Unless there is limited local demand, properties will normally be labelled as being available for Homeseekers with a connection to the Eastbourne area.

With regard to the occupancy level for vacancies, the following criteria will normally apply.

Suitable for	Type of Vacancy

Single elderly person	Sheltered bedsit or studio
Elderly single or couple	Sheltered 1 bedroom
Elderly couple with a 2 bedroom need	Sheltered 2 bedroom
Single young couple	Studio or bedsit
Single or couple	1 bedroom flat
Elderly or disabled single or couple	1 bedroom bungalow or other appropriately adapted property
Elderly or disabled couple or single and Carer with a 2 bedroom need	2 bedroom bungalow or other appropriately adapted property
Disabled household with 3 bedroom requirement	3 bedroom bungalow or other appropriately adapted property
Parent/couple with 1 or 2 same sex children	2 bedroom property
Parent/couple with 1 or 2 children of different sex at least one aged over 10	3 bedroom property
Household with 4 bedroom need	3 bedroom parlour house
Parent/couple with 3 or more children	4 bedroom house
Parent/couple with 5 or more children	4 bedroom parlour house

Special Labelling of Properties

In addition to the general labelling criteria, other circumstances may apply which require particular labelling of properties or estates.

For example, where a property is adapted for disabled use or where it has been provided for a specific purpose, such as supported accommodation, it will be labelled for the appropriate

client group.

If it is known that there are a large number of people with urgent or specific need for a vacancy, the labelling of the property will reflect that.

ESTATE PROFILES

Where there are issues such as low demand schemes or estates, problems with nuisance, crime and disorder, population density, sustainability or social exclusion and it is believed that lettings may have an impact, an individual estate profile for a specific estate or scheme may be appropriate. The estate profile will determine special labelling of vacancies over a defined scheme or estate and for a specific period of time.

If an estate profile is to be considered, regard must be had to the level of housing need and the possible impact on specific client groups such as the homeless, vulnerable people or ethnic minorities.

Estate profiles will be recommended by the Officer panel in consultation with Housing Associations where appropriate.

Advertising Properties

All properties, unless excluded, will be advertised widely to provide Home seekers with the best possible chance of exercising their ability to choose.

The advert will include the full description and labelling of the property.

Where a property is for a specific client group who may need support in seeking accommodation, contact will be made with the client or client's advocate to ensure they are able to apply for vacancies.

Response to advert

Interested applicants will respond to the adverts in person, via e49;mail, by coupon, or by contacting the HomeChoice team by Freephone within the prescribed time limit of 5 working days. Each application will receive an acknowledgement receipt.

Supporting Vulnerable Home Seekers

Some vulnerable applicants will need assistance in responding to advertised vacancies. The Housing needs Team will seek to identify vulnerable Homeseekers at application stage. If there is an agency working with the vulnerable Homeseeker we will liase with them so they may act as advocate. Otherwise a designated officer will be assigned to help them to manage their application for housing by identifying possible vacancies, assisting with completing the coupon, making referrals to other agencies as appropriate and considering other housing options.

Managing Choice for Homeseekers with an Urgent need to move

It will be assumed that households with an urgent need to move will apply for all reasonable

vacancies. If the Homeseeker in this category fails to apply for a reasonable vacancy, their status as urgent will be reviewed.

To ensure that there is a turnover in the supply of temporary accommodation, applicants who have been accepted as homeless will have their applications managed by a case officer in the Housing Needs Team.

Whilst Homeless Homeseekers will be obliged to go onto the Housing Register to ensure that they can be considered for settled housing.

Homeless Homeseekers will then have the same degree of choice as other applicants but their level and choice of applications will be monitored. A timescale will be set depending on the household and the availability of suitable accommodation. If they are not applying for reasonable properties within that timescale, their case officer will make contact to encourage them to apply. If there are insufficient suitable vacancies within the timescale this may be extended.

If the Homeless Homeseeker continue to exhibit a low level of application for suitable properties then they will be advised that a coupon will be completed and submitted on their behalf for reasonable vacancies. The Homeseeker will be advised that if the offer is refused this may mean no further offers are made and the Council's duty is discharged. If the Homeseeker disagrees they will have the right to appeal.

Sorting Applications

As soon as the time limit for applications has expired, the response from Homeseekers will be sorted. The Housing Officer will exclude those applicants who do not meet the advertised labelling criteria. Those that meet the criteria will be prioritised for the vacancy in the following order.

1. Applicants with an URGENT need to move, in date order of application.
2. Applicants on LIVE register, in date order of application.
3. Applicants wanting to move, in date order of application.

Successful Homeseeker identified.

Verification of Details

Before any offer of accommodation is made, the applicant who is first in line for the vacancy will be contacted for verification of all relevant information on their housing application. This will include, for example, family details, housing circumstances etc. If it is not possible to obtain verification of the application within five working days, the applicant will be overlooked and the Homeseeker next in line will be contacted.

The Tenancy is offered

The landlord makes an offer of the vacancy to the successful applicant. A new tenancy visit is arranged and the prospective tenant will view the property and discuss the tenancy with an

Area Housing Officer

Details of the letting are announced

Details of the letting will be published alongside the next advert for vacancies. Whilst the successful applicant's name will not be published, their application category and the length of time waiting will be announced. Feedback on lettings is essential to ensure that customers have enough information to exercise choice.

9. EXCEPTIONS TO THE LETTING PROCESS

Whilst the vast majority of lettings will be managed through the process outlined in section 8 above, there will be some circumstances when it will be necessary to exclude vacancies from the process. Examples of excluded vacancies are as follows.

- a) Management Transfers
- b) Decants
- c) Vacancy being let as temporary accommodation for homeless households
- d) Where community safety may be an issue, for example, rehousing under the Potentially Dangerous Offenders Protocol.
- e) where the applicant has specific needs such as the requirement for support to live independently
- f) Move on from specialist housing such as Carr Gomm, Foyer or Southdown Housing Associations Independent Living Scheme.

To ensure that the letting system is open and transparent, vacancies excluded from the process will be kept to a minimum. The Officer panel will select these properties.

10. ADMINISTRATION

Responsibility for decisions.

Decision	Responsible positions
Eligibility of applicants	Waiting list Officer (WDO) Transfer Officer (TO) or Housing Needs Officer (HNO)

Qualifying Persons	Senior Waiting List Officer or Senior Advice Officer
Category of applicants and tenants	WLO, TO, HNO or Officer Panel
Labelling of properties	Senior Waiting List Officer or Housing Association
Whether to refer case to Panel	WLO, TO, HNO or Senior Officer
Local Connection Band	WLO, TO, HNO
Designation of Key Workers	Panel
Reducing the category of Homeseeker	Senior Officer or Lettings & Advice Manager
Estate Profiles	Panel
Sorting and selecting successful applications	WLO, TO, HNO
Recording successful applicant	Lettings and Advice Manager
Properties excluded from letting process	Panel
Deferrals	Senior Officer or Panel
Reviews (Appeals)	Senior Officer of Panel

Areas of Choice

For administration, planning and information purposes, Homeseekers will be asked to stipulate which areas they would like to be housed in. The choice of areas are:

General and Retirement Housing:

ARCHERY

CENTRAL

LANGNEY

KINGSMERE

NORTH LANGNEY

HAMPDEN PARK

WILLINGDON TREES

OLD TOWN

Retirement housing only

UPPERTON and MEADS

11. Composition of Officer Panel

The panel will meet on a fortnightly basis. The panel will consist of three or more Officers.

The panel may consist of:

Head of Housing Needs and Strategy

Lettings and Advice Manager

Senior Waiting list officer

Senior Advice Officer

Special Needs Housing Officer

Senior Housing Officer (EBH)

Other Council officers, Housing Association officers or representatives from external agencies may be invited to attend specific meetings if they have had involvement with the case.

The main purpose of the panel is:

- i. To decide when unclear, whether clients without other housing need indicators should be placed on the LIVE category due to their medical or social housing circumstances.
- ii. To decide when unclear, whether clients who are in housing need should be placed in the URGENT category due to the severity of their medical or social housing circumstance.

- iii. To provide advice to the Senior Advisor on the suitability of accommodation in cases where homeless clients have requested a review of the suitability of the accommodation.
- iv. To decide if further assistance is required from the Council's Medical Advisor
- v. To decide whether to obtain further information on someone's ability to live independently
- vii. To develop estate profiles
- viii. To decide which accommodation is not to be advertised as described section 11. To review this regularly
- ix. To discuss Homeseekers former tenant arrears and recommend repayment programme in conjunction with arrears officers.
- x. To regularly review the order of priority for vacancies based on level of need and availability of property

Fair Housing Policy

The Council and its partner landlords are committed to providing equality of opportunity to all applicants in housing need. Monitoring of applications and lettings will take place to ensure that everyone is being treated fairly, in line with the CRE Code of practice for rented housing

12. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS IN EACH CATEGORY

NUMBER OF ALLOCATIONS

USE OF TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

VOID TIMES

REFUSALS

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

STAFF FEEDBACK

In order to effectively compare and judge improvements or otherwise, current figures will be compared with the previous year's performance.