

HomeChoice - Frequently Asked Questions

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1. How does Choice Based Lettings work?

Firstly, you will need to fill out an application form to join the Housing Register. From the information you give us, we will put you in to either Band A, B or C. You can fill out an application on our website at, www.homechoicesouthglos.co.uk

We advertise empty properties every week. If you see a property that you like and that is the right size for your household, you can place a "bid". Bidding means that you contact us to let us know you are interested in a property.

Properties are advertised for one week. This is known as the 'bidding cycle'. Once the 'bidding cycle' is over, the Housing Association, who manages the property, will offer it to the first eligible person, who has bid and has been waiting the longest.

2. Who can apply?

South Gloucestershire Council operates an open housing register. This means that anyone over the age of 18 can apply other than people who fall into one of categories below:

- Applicants who are subject to immigration controls under the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 and who do not have refugee status, exceptional leave to remain in the UK, or indefinite leave to remain in the UK.
- Applicants, or members of their household, who have been guilty of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable to be a tenant.

If you are under 18 you will not normally be accepted onto the housing register. We will make exceptions in the following circumstances:

- Any person leaving Local Authority care and referred for re-housing via the joint protocol that exists between the Housing department and the Children and Young People's Services department.
- Young people aged between 16-21 yrs (24yrs if in full-time education) who have previously been in care and are covered by the Leaving Care Act 2002.
- Any person accepted as statutorily homeless (if they cease to be homeless they will become ineligible for the housing register until they reach the age of 18.)
- Pregnant women or applicants with dependent children.

In these circumstances the person under 18 will need a responsible adult to act as a guarantor before any housing can be offered. (A guarantor is someone who commits to being responsible for any debts incurred by the person.)

3. Do I need a local connection to South Gloucestershire Council to register with Home Choice?

No, but if you do not have a local connection, for example, you have never lived in South Gloucestershire, or you do not have a close family member who lives in the area, you will probably be placed in band C.

4. What are the bands?

- Band A - For people who need to be rehoused urgently, for example, applicants where there is a serious risk to their safety, health or wellbeing if they remain in their current home.
- Band B - For people who have a housing need, such as overcrowding, or who are sharing a kitchen or bathroom, but who are not at urgent risk.
- Band C - For everyone else who is looking for housing in South Gloucestershire.

5. How will I know what band I am in?

Once you have filled out an application form, your details will be assessed by the HomeChoice Team. They will work out your Band from the information you have provided and will send you a letter/e-mail telling you the Band you are in and the date your application was registered.

6. What happens if I have a medical condition that affects my housing?

If you feel that you have a medical condition, or health need that would improve if you moved, you should fill out a health and housing form. You can ask for a form when you complete your home choice application form, or by telephoning our Contact Centre on 01454 868 005. We will assess the form to see if you should move up a Band. In most cases, we will not contact your GP, so it is important that you fill out the form in full.

7. I need to move immediately - will I get any extra priority?

In extreme cases, for example, if you cannot get in, or out of your home, we can award a priority card. This is a bit like a trump card - when applicants with a priority card bid for a property, they will be selected before applicants in other bands that have bid. Applications for a priority card will be assessed by a panel of professionals and priority cards will only be issued for a short amount of time.

8. What should I do if I move house, or there is a change to my household?

It is important that you tell us about any changes as soon as possible, as this may affect the banding we award you. You can do this by either logging into your on-line account (Please note that you should only use this to tell us about a change in your circumstances), or by telephoning our Contact Centre on 01454 868 005.

In some cases, we may ask you to complete a new application form. We will suspend your application until we receive the new form and assess your new priority.

9. What happens if I do not tell you about a change in my circumstances?

If you do not tell us about changes to your household, or your housing circumstances and you are offered a property, the offer may be withdrawn, or, if you have already started your tenancy, you may be evicted.

10. What does it mean if my application is suspended?

If your application is suspended you cannot bid for properties. Your application could be suspended for the following reasons,

- You have told us that you have moved and we are waiting for a new application form from you.
- You have former tenant arrears, or other housing related debts, with the Council, or a partner landlord.

11. What is meant by the term bidding and how long do I have to make a bid?

Bidding has nothing to do with money. It means that you contact us to let us know you are interested in a property.

The closing date for bidding will be clearly stated on the advert. Usually properties will be advertised every week and you will have one week to make a bid (this is known as the bidding cycle). It does not matter when you bid during the bidding cycle ([see question 21 for further information](#))

12. Can I bid for any properties?

You can bid for any property that is suitable for your needs. When your application has been processed, we will write to you telling you what band you are in, your registration date and the maximum size property you can bid for. You will not be able to bid for a property that is too big or small for you.

13. How many bids can I make?

You can make up to three bids in a bidding cycle.

14. Once I have bid, can I change my mind?

Yes. You can withdraw a bid up until the bidding cycle closes.

15. Where and when are properties advertised?

Vacant properties will be advertised in the following places:

- HomeChoice Website - www.homechoicesouthglos.co.uk (new properties are advertised every Friday).
- HomeChoice Property Sheets available in Council One Stop Shops, Housing Association Offices and Public Libraries.
- If you cannot leave your home, have no access to the internet and no one else can help you bid, we may be able to post the property sheets to you.

16. How do I bid for a property I like?

There are a number of ways to bid for properties that you are interested in, which are listed below.

- Internet: Log onto your account at www.homechoicesouthglos.co.uk
- Telephone: 01454 868005
- Council One Stop Shops. Make bids in person at our offices in Kingswood, Yate & Thornbury.
- Post: Using the coupon available on the bottom of the advert sheet.
- E-mail: homechoiceteam@southglos.gov.uk

When you bid for a property, it is important that you have your reference number, password and the reference number of the property you are interested in. If you do not include this information, your bid may not be registered.

17. Can I bid for a property even if the advert says that preference will be given to a different band?

Yes. Not all properties go to the band specified in the advert. This happens when no one in that band bids for the property, or the people that do bid are not suitable for it. If this happens, the Housing Association will offer the home to the first eligible person, who has bid and has been waiting the longest.

18. I have seen an empty property, can I bid for it?

You can only bid for properties when they are advertised through HomeChoice. Unfortunately, it is not possible to tell you when a property may be advertised. We suggest that you regularly check the property adverts, so you do not miss out on the opportunity to bid for a property.

19. I am pregnant, can I bid for a larger property?

If a member of your household is at least six months pregnant and you would be entitled to a larger property under the Council's Allocations policy when the baby is born, you can now bid for a home one bedroom size up from your current household need. For example, a couple, or a single person expecting a baby, would be able to bid for a two bedroom property.

It is important that you tell us when you become pregnant and when the baby is born (including your child's date of birth and name), so that we can update your application, as this might affect the banding we have awarded you.

20. I am trying to bid on a property and the system will not let me.

It is important that you only bid for properties that you are eligible for. Please read your registration letter (the letter we sent you when you first sent in your application form) to check what size property you can bid for.

You can also find further information on the property adverts, for example, some accommodation is only available for the over 60s, or there might be a limit on the number of children that can occupy a home.

21. If I bid for a property, does that mean I will get it?

No. If the property is in a popular location, or has a garden, it will attract a larger number of bids. Offers will be made based on the band you are in and your registration date. You will only be offered the property if you are the first eligible person, who has bid and you have been waiting the longest. It does not matter when you bid during the bidding cycle ([see question 7 for further information](#)).

22. How long do I have to wait to move?

We cannot tell you how long you will have to wait, as this will depend on who else bids for a property and the priority they have. We have over 7,000 people registered for housing and only a small number of properties available each week. This means that it is likely that you will have to wait a long time for a move. Some people may never receive an offer of accommodation.

23. Can I bid for properties if I have rent arrears on my Council, or Housing Association property?

If you have rent arrears, or any other housing debts with the Council, or a partner landlord, you will be placed on the Housing Register, but you will be suspended from bidding and will not be offered housing. You will be suspended from bidding if you have not arranged to repay this debt, or you cannot show that you have agreed a repayment plan and you have been making regular debt repayments. The length of time your case remains suspended will be considered on a case by case basis.

24. Can I refuse a property that I have bid for?

If an applicant has bid for a property and then chooses to refuse it, the next applicant will be selected. The following penalties apply if applicants refuse two reasonable offers.

- Applicant with Priority Status

The application will be reviewed by the HomeChoice panel to decide whether the priority status should be removed and the application should be placed in Band A. If Band A is awarded, the application date will remain the same.

- Applicants in Band A, B, or C

If applicants refuse two reasonable offers, their application will be suspended for six months. When the suspension is lifted, their application date will remain the same.

If an applicant refuses their first suitable offer, the HomeChoice team will write to them to explain the consequences of refusing a second offer.

- Non-Statutory Successors

The refusal of two reasonable offers may result in the landlord beginning possession proceedings.

25. How will I know if my bid is successful?

Once the bidding cycle ends, the Housing Association, who manage the property, will contact the successful bidder. They will give the successful bidder further details of the property and arrange a viewing.

26. Will you tell me if my bid is unsuccessful?

No, unfortunately, it would be too expensive to contact everyone individually especially if a lot of people have bid for the property.

We publish the results of the bidding on the Internet at www.homechoicesouthglos.co.uk. We publish the band and the registration date (although not the name) of the successful bid so you will be able to see that the process has been fairly managed.

27. If I accept an offer of housing and move into my new home, will I stay on the Housing Register?

No, your application will be cancelled. If you want to bid again you must re-apply.

28. I am homeless and the Council has accepted a statutory duty to house me. Can I still choose a home through HomeChoice?

Yes. You will bid for properties in the same way as everyone else. The only difference is, if you are successful with bidding and refuse two suitable offers of accommodation, you will lose your priority and your homeless duty will be discharged. This means the Council will not have a duty to offer you any further housing.

If you do not bid within six months of being accepted, we will make you a direct offer of accommodation. Once again, if you refuse this offer, you will lose your priority and your homeless duty will be discharged.

29. I have support needs. How will the Council make sure I can take part in Choice Based Lettings on an equal basis with other applicants?

If you have support needs, this should be picked up from your application form. If you are receiving support and agree for us to contact your support provider, we can ensure they understand the system.

You can choose someone to receive any correspondence and bid on your behalf. This could be a support worker, family member or a friend. If you do not have anyone to help you, we may be able to arrange automatic bids for you. If you would like to discuss this in more detail, please telephone our Contact Centre on 01454 868 005.

30. I would like to register for a mutual exchange.

The Council does not deal with mutual exchange. For further information, you should contact either your Landlord, or an organisation like HomeSwapper (www.homeswapper.co.uk). Please remember that you need your Landlord's permission before you can swap homes with another tenant.

31. I have forgotten my user ID and password.

Your user ID is your housing reference number (this is included on any letters we send you) and your password is the date of birth of the lead applicant. This should be entered as shown in the following example,

Date of Birth: 1st January 1990 Password: 01011990

It is important that you do not tell anyone your user ID, or your password.