

# A Guide to HomeChoice

## What is HomeChoice?

HomeChoice is a choice based lettings scheme - this is the way we let homes in South Gloucestershire. It aims to give you more choice about where you live whilst making sure that housing still goes to the people who need it the most.

## Qualification Criteria

In order to join the housing register, you must meet the age criteria and one of the other qualification criteria listed below,

- Applicant aged 18 years +.
- Applicant lives in South Gloucestershire and has lived in the district for the last two years.
- Applicant's mother, father, brother, sister or adult child live in South Gloucestershire and have lived continuously in the area for the last five years.
- Applicant is permanently employed in South Gloucestershire, or who need to move to take up a definite offer of paid work, or an apprenticeship and who are unable to commute and:
  - Have signed or have an offer of a contract for a minimum period of 12 months and
  - Work more than 16 hours per week on average and
  - Are based in the district for the majority of that time for the purposes of carrying out their employment (at least 70%)
- Households owed the main housing duty under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017).
- Some other special reason, e.g. Applicant receives specialist medical treatment in South Gloucestershire which they cannot receive elsewhere.

The following groups will not be disqualified,

- Members of the regular armed forces, their bereaved spouses and civil partners and seriously injured reservists.
- Gypsy/Travellers applying for a pitch on a South Gloucestershire Traveller site only.
- Applicant living in a South Gloucestershire supported housing scheme accessed through the Single Access Service.
- Applicant living in a refuge or other form of safe temporary accommodation in South Gloucestershire, where the accommodation is either commissioned, or provided by South Gloucestershire Council, having escaped domestic abuse in another local authority area. This exemption will only apply where the household does not have access to any other suitable, settled accommodation.

## **How To Apply for Housing**

You will need to register with HomeChoice before you can be offered housing. You can register on our website at, <https://homechoice.southglos.gov.uk>. If you cannot complete an application on-line, please telephone our Contact Centre on 01454 868 005.

When completing your application, it is important that you answer all the questions, as we use the information you provide to help us work out how urgently you need housing and which priority “band” you should go into.

When we have received your application and assessed which band you should be in, we will confirm this information in writing.

## **Change of Circumstances**

After we have registered your application, it is important that you tell us about any change in your circumstances (e.g. change of address, changes in your financial situation, or additions to your household), as this may affect the banding we award you.

## **How the Banding System Works**

There is a very high demand for housing in the district and only a small number of homes available, so we award the highest priority to people who need housing the most. We have 4 categories:

- 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 are at risk of homelessness, or are considered to be living in housing circumstances that have an adverse impact on their health, safety or well-being.
- Band C - 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.
- Registered - For everyone else who is looking for housing in South Gloucestershire including those who are suitable housed, or are able to access alternative housing through their own resources.

In some cases, we may be able to award a priority card. This is only awarded to households, whose circumstances mean they need to move as soon as possible. Priority cards are valid for 12 weeks and can only be awarded following a referral to the Council’s HomeChoice Panel.

We prioritise applications by the band you are in and the length of time you have been in that band. This means that the longer you have been waiting the higher up the band you will be.

## **Searching for a home in South Gloucestershire**

### **Advertising vacant properties**

Details of vacant properties will be advertised in the following ways:

- HomeChoice website (<https://homechoice.southglos.gov.uk>).
- HomeChoice advert sheets available in Council One Stop Shops, partner Landlord offices and public libraries. Advert sheets can be posted or e-mailed to applicants on request if applicants cannot access adverts in any other way.

New properties are advertised every week on Friday. An advertising cycle lasts for one week and closes at midnight on the following Thursday. Applicants can bid for up to 3 properties in any one advertising cycle and can change their bids at any time during the cycle.

Property adverts will contain information about each home including how much it costs to rent, who can bid for it and what the closing date for bidding is.

### **Choosing a home**

Once you have seen a property that you are interested in, you can register your interest by placing a bid. To place a bid, you will need your reference number, memorable date and password. You can bid in any of the following ways:

- On the HomeChoice website - go to <https://homechoice.southglos.gov.uk>.
- By telephoning the Housing Contact Centre on 01454 868005.
- By filling in the coupon on the advert sheet and sending it to, South Gloucestershire Council, PO Box 1955, HomeChoice, Bristol, BS37 0DE.

### **Help with bidding**

Staff in Council One Stop Shops and partner landlord offices are available to help customers with the bidding process as and when necessary.

You can choose someone to bid on your behalf. This could be a support worker, family member or a friend. If you agree for us to contact them, we can make sure they understand how HomeChoice works. If you do not have anyone to help you and you would like some help, please contact the HomeChoice Team.

### **How Properties Are Let**

After the closing date for bids, the Housing Association, who manages the property, will offer the home to the first suitable applicant on the shortlist. If you are top for two properties, you may be contacted and asked which property you prefer.

## **Refusing a Property**

If an applicant has bid for a property and then chooses to refuse it, the next applicant will be selected. The following penalties apply where someone refuses a property.

- Applicant with a Priority Card: If an applicant refuses two suitable offers, the application will be reviewed by the HomeChoice panel to decide whether the priority card 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, C or the Registered Category: If an applicant refuses two suitable offers, their application will be suspended for six months. When the suspension is lifted, their application date will remain the same.
- Homeless households where the Local Authority has accepted the 'main housing duty': If an applicant refuses one suitable offer, the council will end its homeless duty. This means that the council will no longer have a duty to provide the household with accommodation.

## **Annual Review of Housing Application**

Every year, we ask households to review their application to ensure the information we hold on file is correct. Where information has changed, applicants will be expected to update their application.

If a household does not review their application within 28 days, we will presume they no longer wish to remain on the register and their application will be cancelled. If the application is cancelled, the household will have to complete a new application if they want to bid for properties in the future.

## **Contact us**

If you need any more information, please do not hesitate to contact us. You can contact us in the following ways,



Visit the HomeChoice website: <https://homechoice.southglos.gov.uk>



By phone: 01454 868005



By email: [HomeChoiceTeam@southglos.gov.uk](mailto:HomeChoiceTeam@southglos.gov.uk)



By post: South Gloucestershire Council, South Gloucestershire Council, PO Box 1955, HomeChoice, Bristol, BS37 0DE.

# South Gloucestershire Area

