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Homefinder Somerset Common Lettings Policy

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How the Somerset Choice Based
Lettings Scheme Works





Common Lettings Policy

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Homefinder Somerset - Common Lettings & Assessment Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This document describes the Homefinder Somerset Choice Based Lettings Scheme (CBL) run by the five Somerset district councils in partnership with the majority of housing associations operating within Somerset
- 1.2. The Government's policy objective is for choice based lettings schemes to develop on a sub-regional and/or regional basis. The Secretary of State believes that such schemes involving a partnership of housing authorities and registered social landlords working together with private landlords wherever possible is the best way to achieve the greatest choice and flexibility meeting applicant's needs.

The scheme's key objectives are:

- To create a customer-led choice based lettings system.
- To widen the choice of housing outside traditional local authority boundaries.
- To ensure the scheme is open, fair and accountable to applicants and staff.
- To increase understanding and satisfaction in the lettings system.
- To give new tenants a feeling of ownership of their property.
- To help create 'sustainable' communities.
- To make more efficient use of the available housing stock.
- To help tackle low demand.
- To reduce 'void' turnaround times.
- To reduce the number of refusals on 'hard to let' properties.
- To create a single point of access to all social housing in the County.
- To bring together a larger pool of available housing, giving applicants more choice and helping to ease localised problems of high demand.
- To enable greater regional mobility.
- To meet the legal requirements for the allocation of social housing as set out in the Housing Act (1996) as amended by the Homelessness Act (2002).

2. The Scheme in Brief

- 2.1. All applicants for social housing across Somerset will complete the same application form and will be assessed against the same clear set of criteria laid out in the 'Banding' structure (see section 6). Depending on their circumstances, applicants will be placed into one of four Bands, Gold, Silver, and Bronze or in a very small number of cases an Emergency Priority Band.
- 2.2. Once the application has been registered, applicants will be advised of their banding, application date, the size of property they are eligible for, together with a personal reference number which will enable them to bid for social housing vacancies being advertised across the whole of Somerset. At a later stage, affordable housing including shared ownership and private sector vacancies may also be advertised using this same process.



- 2.3. Bids for properties can be made, by using an automated phone line, the Homefinder Somerset website (via the Internet), or in person by visiting an office of one of the partner landlords. Applicants will be able to monitor the success of their bids and their bidding history via the website.
- 2.4. Once the bidding deadline has passed, the successful applicant will be the person in the highest band with the earliest application date. An offer will then be made subject to a visit from the potential landlord to confirm the details on the original application form. Incorrect information may result in the offer being withdrawn and the band re-assessed.
- 2.5. Applicants for sheltered housing will also have an assessment of their support needs. Applicants bidding for sheltered vacancies with identified support needs will have priority over other applicants within the same band irrespective of whether those with no identified support needs have an earlier application date.
- 2.6. The banding and application date of the top bid, together with the total number of bids made for each property will be published in the subsequent advert. This enables applicants to develop realistic expectations regarding their chances of success and likely waiting period. Feedback on the allocation of properties will be made publically available (e.g. applicants length of duration on waiting list before being rehoused), so that people can make an informed decision on whether to bid or accept a property.

3. Application Procedure - Who Can Apply?

- 3.1. The Homefinder Somerset Register is open to almost any one. It may include existing tenants looking to transfer to another property, homeless families looking for a permanent home and other applicants who either rent in the private sector, own or are buying a property or lodging with family and friends. Civil partners will have equal treatment with married couples under the Lettings Policy.
- 3.2. An applicant may include anyone that may reasonably be expected to live with them as part of their application.
- 3.3. Where more than one eligible applicant wishes to have a shared application they will be known as joint applicants.
- 3.4. To apply for a property, applicants must be registered on the Homefinder Somerset Register.
- 3.5. Application packs are available from the offices of all the partners within the scheme and include details of how the scheme works and how to find and 'bid' for a home.



3.6. Who Cannot Participate?

3.6.1. The Homefinder Somerset Register is open to all applicants except the following:

3.6.2. Persons from abroad who fail the 'habitual residence' test, UNLESS they have refugee status, exceptional leave to remain or indefinite leave to remain. Habitual Residency provides details about an applicant's right to stay in the UK and any eligibility for public housing.

3.6.3. There are certain regulations laid out by statute that govern the allocation of properties to persons from abroad and these should be referred to when assessing applications.

3.6.4. Persons under 16 years of age. It should be noted that a tenancy will not usually be given to applicants under the age of 18 years without a 'guarantor' (e.g. Social Services, parent, guardian, litigation friend). Partner organisations may have different policies in dealing with persons under the age of 18. For more details please contact the individual landlord.

3.7. What Other Factors Are Taken Into Account?

3.7.1. An application can be affected where there is evidence that an applicant has broken their existing or previous tenancy conditions (including rent arrears and anti-social behaviour) for which there are statutory grounds for possession, or who have committed acts of physical violence against staff or other residents. Grounds will not be used as a 'blanket ban' against all such people, but will be considered alongside each applicant's relative housing need. See Selection Procedure 24.3.

3.7.2. Where possible, such grounds will be identified at the initial application stage of the Homefinder Somerset process and the applicant will be informed in writing that any bid may be unsuccessful.

All partners of Homefinder Somerset will also be notified of this decision.

Applicants will be informed, on request, of decisions about the facts of the case that may affect whether to allocate housing.

3.7.3. Any applicant has the right for a review of the following decisions:

- a) That they are ineligible.
- b) That all priority will be suspended because of unacceptable behaviour.
- c) About the facts of their case: e.g. banding or eligibility for a property.

A Senior Housing Officer who has not been involved in the original decision will carry out such reviews.



4. Protocol for Housing Dangerous Offenders and Potentially Dangerous Offenders

- 4.1. All five District Councils within the scheme have entered into an agreement to use the Somerset Multi-Agency Protocol in dealing with dangerous offenders in order to exchange information on any applicant who has been convicted of a serious offence. Any applicant who confirms on their application form, or who is suspected, or accused, of being a dangerous offender, will be subjected to the provisions set out in the information exchange protocol.
- 4.2. There is not a blanket ban preventing dangerous offenders from being included on the housing register. However, before any known offender is offered housing, full consultation will be undertaken with the relevant support agencies to assess the risks involved. Some dangerous offenders will be given a high priority so that the relevant agencies can continue to monitor them. The Somerset Multi-Agency Protocol is only for specific offender group and only covers referrals from the Public Protection Team and Avon and Somerset Constabulary and does not guarantee the provision of a tenancy.
- 4.3. Re-housing of dangerous offenders will be carried out in consultation with the relevant agencies to minimise the risk to the public and with the long term aim of influencing the successful accommodation and resettlement of the offender, thus minimising the risk of re-offending and protecting the public and victims of offenders. The Local Authorities or Probation will bid on behalf of any applicant who falls within this category.
- 4.4. In the interests of public protection, it is essential that the Police and Probation Service are able to control and monitor the behaviour and activities of dangerous offenders. This task is made more difficult if such offenders do not have a fixed address or are housed in circumstances that make it difficult for the agencies to monitor them appropriately.

5. Transfer Policy

- 5.1. All existing tenants of the partners have the right to apply for a transfer, subject to any restrictions that apply to their tenancy. Tenants' housing needs will be assessed and placed in the relevant band on the register together with all other applicants.
- 5.2. Some advertised properties will be labelled giving preference to transfer applicants to ensure that each landlord makes the best use of their housing stock.



6. Assessment of Applications

6.1. The scheme will assess all applications according to the level of housing need of individual applicants. All applications will be placed into one of four Bands - Gold, Silver or Bronze or in exceptional circumstances placed into Emergency Priority Band (section 7 refers). The criteria for being placed within each band is as follows:

Gold Band

Homeless/Threatened with Homelessness:

Applicants accepted as homeless by a local authority within the Homefinder Somerset area under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) including Rent (Agricultural) Act Cases.

Lack of bedrooms:

Applicants who lack 2 or more bedrooms, (Section 13 refers) UNLESS evidence exists that proves the overcrowding is deliberate.

Applicants who require a property of two or more bedrooms and live in a 'bed-sit' (not temporary accommodation) and share kitchen or bathroom facilities with people who are not included in the application form.

Under-occupation:

The applicant is a tenant of a Homefinder Somerset partner who resides within the Homefinder Somerset area and under-occupies their existing property and is looking to move to a smaller, more suitable property. Note: Where a tenant lives in specialist two-bedroom property this may not apply.

Harassment:

Applicant is a victim of harassment or violence (including racial harassment) at their current property within the Homefinder Somerset area - providing evidence exists to substantiate the claim (e.g. from Police/Housing Officer).

Medical/Welfare:

Applicant awarded a 'high' medical priority (see section 14).

Disrepair:

Applicant living in a private sector property awarded a 'high' disrepair assessment by an appropriate Housing Officer, or following a referral to either an Environmental Health Officer (EHO) or Housing Standards Officer, qualified to Part 1 of the Housing Health & Safety Rating System (Housing Act 2004) (See Appendix 1).



Supported Housing:

The applicant resides within a short-term Supported Housing project (usually up to a maximum of two years) and is seeking to 'move-on' into independent accommodation. NB: The Project Manager of the scheme must confirm in writing that the applicant is ready for such a move and has acquired reasonable skills to sustain a tenancy. Until this time, the applicant will be placed within the Bronze Band. The application date will be the date they entered the Supported Housing, or the date a homeless application was made, where the earliest date will apply.

Combined Medical/Welfare:

Applicant awarded a 'medium' medical priority, combined with a 'medium' disrepair award from the Silver Band (See Appendix 1&2).

Silver Band 

Medical/Welfare:

Applicant awarded a 'medium' medical priority (see section 14).

Disrepair:

Applicant living in a private sector property awarded a 'medium' disrepair assessment by an appropriate Housing Officer, or following a referral to either an Environmental Health Officer (EHO) or Housing Standards Officer qualified to Part 1 of the Housing Health & Safety Rating System (Housing Act 2004) - See Appendix 1. N.B. If an applicant has been awarded both a 'medium' medical and 'medium' disrepair then they will be placed in the Gold Band (See Appendix 1&2).

Lodgers:

Applicant lodging with friends or family.

Lack of bedrooms:

Applicants who lack one bedroom in their current home.

Other Homeless:

Homeless/threatened with homelessness applicants not accepted by the Homefinder Somerset partners under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 and who have nowhere to live (e.g. No Fixed Abode 'NFA').

Split Families:

Applicants who, not by choice are living in separate households due to the lack of suitable accommodation available, and cannot live together and wish to be re-housed and have not been accepted by the Homefinder Somerset Partners under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002). This includes those who may not have been living as part of the household at the time of the application, but whom it would be reasonable to expect to live with the applicant, as part of his/her household.

An application form should be completed by the household living in the worst property out of the households applying, to ensure the application is placed in the correct banding.



Work/Support:

Applicants who are able to demonstrate the need to move into, or within, the Homefinder Somerset area because they have secured/retained permanent employment (over 16 hours) in the area (evidence of the employment must be provided). Also applicants who are able to demonstrate the need to move nearer local facilities or relatives, in order to receive, or give, support or care within the Homefinder Somerset area.

Relationship Breakdown:

Applicants who wish to live independently but who still reside with their ex partner/spouse following a relationship breakdown.

Children in flats:

Applicant who is pregnant or has a child/children under 10 years of age and lives in a first floor flat or above. Proof of pregnancy must be provided.

Gardens:

The applicant has a child/children under 10 years of age and has no access to an enclosed garden.

Bronze Band

Adequately Housed:

Applicants who, at the time of their application, live in a property which is adequate for their needs in terms of size and facilities. This applies to applicants who live in social housing, are owner-occupiers or tenants of private landlords.

Owner occupiers:

Applicants who are owner-occupiers, whose home is not suitable for their needs and who have sufficient equity within the property to obtain suitable alternative accommodation. The Local Authority will consider each application on an individual basis. (Note: high medical needs or disrepair problems may over-ride this rule and place the applicant in a higher band).

Medical/ welfare:

Applicants awarded a low medical/welfare assessment.
(See Section 14)

Disrepair:

Applicants living in a private sector property awarded a 'low' disrepair assessment by an appropriate Housing Officer or following a referral to either an Environmental Health Officer (EHO) or Housing Standards Officer, qualified to Part 1 of the Housing Health & Safety Rating System (Housing Act 2004). (See Appendix 1).

Move-on:

Applicants who are living in short term supported housing, prior to confirmation received by the Project Manager of the scheme that the applicant is ready to move on, (at which point they will be placed into the Gold Band whilst maintaining their original registration date).



7. Emergency Priority Band

- 7.1. An 'Emergency Priority Band' will only be issued to any applicant who requires an 'urgent' move to ensure the applicant's safety and welfare for whatever reason. Substantial evidence must exist before such a priority is awarded. This priority may be awarded where circumstances could include:
- a) The award of an 'urgent' medical assessment or
 - b) The award of an 'urgent' disrepair inspection by a Housing Standard Officer or Environmental Health Officer (EHO), or
 - c) Where the Police recommend an urgent move to escape violence or threats of violence, or
 - d) Where the applicant, or a member of their household, has suffered a sudden 'traumatic event' and living within their home will cause considerable distress (e.g. serious sexual assault), or
 - e) Where there are extreme cases of cumulative need and where it is unacceptable for the applicant to remain in the current banding (subject to the discretion of the Assessment Panel).
- 7.2. Please note that awarding of 'Emergency Priority Band' can only be made by the Assessment Panel. Where an immediate decision is required, the Senior Manager within the respective local authority administering the housing register will consult two other members of the Assessment Panel, one of which must be from another partner organisation in order for a decision to be made. The case, and subsequent decision, must be reported to the next Assessment Panel meeting.
- 7.3. Emergency Priority Band may also be awarded where the tenant of a 'sheltered' or 'adapted' property for the disabled has died leaving another family member in the property and the landlord wishes that family member to be moved quickly to enable the property to be let to an applicant who requires it.
- 7.4. Emergency Priority Band is time limited and will last for 28 days. If the applicant has not applied for a property suitable for their needs within that time their Emergency Priority Band will be reviewed by the Assessment Panel and if not renewed the applicant will be placed in the appropriate band for their needs. If no suitable vacancy has arisen within this time then the Emergency Priority Band will be renewed automatically.



8. Application Date

8.1. All applications will be given an 'Application Date'. This will be used when allocating properties to determine how long an applicant has been entered on the Homefinder Somerset Register. The date used for the application date will depend on the type of application. These are:

a) Applicants in short term supported housing

Any applicant living in short-term supported housing will have an application date of the day they moved into the scheme. Verification of this will need to be provided by the Project Manager of the scheme.

b) Homeless applicants accepted under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002)

The date they made their formal homeless application to the local authority. **Note:** If the homeless applicant was already placed in the 'Gold' Band as a result of some other need, then their date of application remains the same and does not change to the date they made their homeless application.

c) General Applicants

Date the Homefinder Somerset Register application was received for assessment.

d) Emergency Priority Band Holders

Length of time 'Emergency' Priority Band held.

9. Change of Circumstances

9.1. Applicants whose circumstances change once they have applied for housing must either complete a 'Change of Circumstances' form or write to the local council housing office before their application is reassessed by a housing officer. A change of circumstances could include the birth of a child, change in medical condition, threat of homelessness or change of address.

9.2. If an applicant moves into a higher band as a result of the reassessment then their original 'Application Date' will change to the date their circumstances changed. If the applicant moves into a lower band then their original 'Application Date' will remain the same.

9.3. In circumstances where registered 'Joint' applicants subsequently separate, the Homefinder Somerset scheme reserves the right to apply the original registration date to the household affected.



10. Application Renewals

10.1. Annual Renewal

Within 12 months from the registration date, all applications will be sent a renewal letter. If the renewal is not returned within a specified time (usually 28 days) a cancellation letter will be sent. If the applicant has been identified as potentially disadvantaged, including prison leavers, a letter will be also be sent to the carer/agency specified. Failure to respond may result in a cancellation of application. Applications that are cancelled are subject to the review process.

10.2. No Bid Renewals

Where an applicant has not expressed an interest in any available properties for one year, from their date of application, they will be contacted to see if they still wish to remain on the Homefinder Somerset Register. If there is no response within the required time limit of 28 days from the letter being sent, the application may be cancelled. The applicant will be notified of the cancellation in writing. If the applicant contacts the Local Authority within 28 days of their application being cancelled and indicates that they still wish to be considered for housing the application will be reinstated from their last application date in band.

11. Cancelling Applications

11.1. An application will be cancelled from the Homefinder Somerset Register in the following circumstances:

- At the request of an applicant,
- Where an applicant does not respond to an application review, within the specified time limit,
- Where a Local Authority or a Registered Social Landlord has housed the applicant,
- When a tenant completes a mutual exchange,
- Where an applicant does not maintain their application through the review process, or where the applicant moves and does not provide a contact address,
- Where the applicant has died,
- Where the applicant has not supplied the relevant information requested within 28 days.

11.2. When an application has been cancelled, the applicant or their representative will be notified in writing. Where an applicant has been highlighted as potentially disadvantaged, the Local Authority will contact the applicant to check their circumstances before cancelling the application.

11.3. Any applicant whose application has been cancelled has the right to ask for a review of the decision.

12. Rejoining the Homefinder Somerset Housing Register

12.1. Where an applicant wishes to re-join the housing register at a later date their new date of registration will be the date they re-apply. Their date in band will be the date that they are placed in the housing needs band following assessment of the new application.



13. Size of Property

13.1. Applicants will be able to bid for selected properties which match the needs of their household. Below are some typical examples of family types together with the size of accommodation they would generally be eligible for.

Household Composition	Assessed Property Size & Type						
	Min Bedroom	Max Bedroom	Bedsit	Flat	Maisonette	Bungalow	House
Single applicant, under 60 years old	1	1	✓	✓			
Single applicant, over 60 years old	1	1	✓	✓		✓	
Childless Couple under 60 Years old	1	2		✓	✓		
Childless Couple over 60 Years old	1	2		✓		✓	
Single applicant or couple with 1 child (of any age)	2	2		✓	✓		✓
Single applicant or couple with 2 children (same sex or under 7)	2	3*		✓	✓		✓
Single applicant or couple with 2 children (same sex, one under the age of 10, and one aged 10 or over)	2	3*		✓	✓		✓
Single applicant or couple with 2 children (mixed sexes, one over seven years)	3	3		✓	✓		✓
Single applicant or couple with 2 children (same sex, one under the age of 16 and one aged 16 or over)	3	3		✓	✓		✓
Single applicant or couple with 2 children (mixed sexes, one under age of 10 and one aged 16 years or over)	3	3		✓	✓		✓
Single applicant or couple with 3 children (same sex, all under age of 16)	3	4			✓		✓
Single applicant or couple with 3 children (same sex, all 16 or over)	3	4			✓		✓



Household Composition	Assessed Property Size & Type						
	Min Bedroom	Max Bedroom	Bedsit	Flat	Maisonette	Bungalow	House
Single applicant or couple with 3 children (mixed sexes, all under the age of 16)	3	4			✓		✓
Single applicant or couple with 3 children (mixed sexes, all aged 16 or over)	3	4			✓		✓
Single applicant or couple with 3 children (mixed sexes, one under 16 and two aged 16 or over)	3	4			✓		✓
Single applicant or couple with 3 children (mixed sexes, two under 16 and one aged 16 or over)	3	4			✓		✓
Single applicant or couple with 4 children (two females and two males all under age of 16)	3	4			✓		✓
Single applicant or couple with 4 children (same sex, three under the age of 16 and one aged 16 or over)	4	4			✓		✓
Single applicant or couple with 4 children (3 mixed sex, under the age of 10 and one of any sex aged 16 or over)	4	4			✓		✓

*Households with 2 children whose dates of birth are more than 5 years apart or of different sex where one or more are over 7 years old should be entitled to a 3 - bed property. (N.B. Applicants still have the option to bid for 2 bed-roomed properties if they wish to do so provided both children are under 7 years of age.

Example 1:

Occupants of a two bedroomed house:

Bedroom 1 - Occupied by Mr and Mrs Smith
 Bedroom 2 - Occupied by daughters, aged 11 and three.

In this example the household would be eligible to bid for a three bedroom property as there are two children with an age difference of more than 5 years apart sharing a bedroom.

Example 2:

Occupants of a two bedroomed house:

Bedroom 1 - Occupied by Mr and Mrs Smith
 Bedroom 2 - Occupied by son aged 13 and daughter aged 5

In this example the household would be eligible to bid for a three bedroom property as there are children of different sex having to share a bedroom and one of the children is over 7 years old.



- 13.2. Because of the very high demand for properties within Somerset, additional bedrooms cannot be given to applicants who do not have children who normally live with them or who might reasonably be expected to live with them. This will normally be a permanent or regular arrangement and not a temporary agreement.
- 13.3. For any current tenant of a partner landlord downsizing to smaller accommodation there are no restrictions on the size of property they can move to providing no overcrowding will occur. The new property has to have at least one bedroom less than their current home. However in certain circumstances, where an applicant for example is moving from a house to a flat with the same number of bedrooms, then the number of bedrooms maybe disregarded.
- 13.4. Where tenants of a partner landlord are overcrowded within their accommodation account should be taken of the room sizes in determining an applicants banding. For example, where a tenant is living in 2 bedroom, 3 bed space unit, if there is a couple and 2 children living within the property, these applicants should be viewed as one bedroom overcrowded, Silver Band, eligible to apply for a 3 bedroom property, as they are one bed space overcrowded.
- 13.5. Applicants who are overcrowded by 2 bedroom spaces or more should be 'Gold Banded'. Consideration for an extra bedroom will also be given where the applicant has a live-in carer.

14. Medical Assessments

- 14.1. An applicant's (or member of the household included within the application) medical condition can be assessed in one of two ways:

Physical condition/illness:

Applicants complete a Health & Housing Assessment Form, which asks for details of the applicant's medical condition, reasons why their current property affects that condition and reasons why they wish to move.

Mental Health

The Health & Housing Assessment Form also assess an applicant's mental health condition. Applicants may wish this form to be supported by a professional worker (e.g. CPN, Social Services, Doctor) who has knowledge of the applicant and their condition.

- 14.2. All medical applications will initially be assessed by an appropriate Housing Officer or by Assessment Panels.
- 14.3. The assessment will be based on the applicant's (or member of the household included in the application) medical condition, the affect their property has on that condition and how moving to an alternative property can help that condition. (See Appendix 2 for Medical Assessment Notes)



14.4. Following the medical assessment, the applicant will be informed in writing of the outcome and any change to their banding. If the applicant disagrees with this assessment they may appeal to the panel to reconsider their medical application. The Panel will only undertake reviews where further medical evidence is supplied by the applicant to substantiate their application. Any requests for a review of the Panel's decision must be made within 14 days and the decision will be reviewed within 28 days.

14.5. Where an applicant's (or member of the household included in the application) medical circumstances change substantially, a new medical application should be submitted along with any supporting evidence.

15. Disrepair Assessments

15.1. The application form asks applicants about the condition of their current home. Where an applicant indicates the property is in a bad state of repair they will be sent a 'Property Condition Report Form' to complete and return to their local authority housing office. The form asks the applicant for details of the property's disrepair and will be used by an appropriate Housing Officer or referred to an inspector (normally an Environmental Health Officer (EHO) or Housing Standards Officer) when conducting an inspection of the property. If the applicant resides outside of the Homefinder Somerset area, then Homefinder Somerset Partnership will contact the respective Local Authority to arrange an inspection, if required.

15.2. Following the inspection, and depending on the condition of the property, a level of priority will be allocated - either nil, low, medium, high or urgent, which will determine the band in which the applicant is placed. If the applicant is an existing social housing tenant the relevant landlord will be notified of the problem.

16. Notification

16.1. Once an application has been assessed and entered onto the Homefinder Somerset Register, the applicant will receive a letter within 21 days confirming their application details. This notification will include;

- a) The Band in which the applicant has been placed (bronze, silver or gold),
- b) The size of property the applicant is eligible for,
- c) The Application Date,
- d) A reminder about informing us of any change in circumstances,
- e) The Homefinder Somerset review procedure (see section 17),
- f) A personal reference number to allow bidding.

16.2. Applicants will also receive notification of their application details within 21 days if they have submitted a 'Change of Circumstances' form.



17. Review Procedure

- 17.1. Once an applicant has been notified in writing of the band in which they have been placed or their ineligibility, they will have a right to request a review against the assessment. Reviews must be submitted in writing, to the local authority housing office within 21 days of the date on the notification letter and include the reason why the applicant believes their banding or ineligibility is wrong, together with any additional information that the applicant believes is relevant.
- 17.2. The request for a review will be acknowledged by the Local Authority within 7 days. A officer who played no part in the original assessment will carry out the review and respond in writing to the applicant within 28 days of the receipt of the review letter. Following the review, the applicant will be informed of the outcome in writing.
- 17.3. If the applicant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the review then they can request a further review through the relevant local authorities complaints/reviews procedure.

18. Finding a Home

- 18.1. Once applicants have been entered on the Homefinder Somerset Register and notified of banding and reference number; they can start to look for a property of their choice.

19. Advertising

- 19.1. All partner landlords are committed to advertising their available properties as widely as possible. Properties can be advertised on a weekly/fortnightly basis and may be advertised in one or more of the following ways:

a) Newsletters

Adverts may also be placed into free Homefinder Somerset newsletters, which will be available in a number of localities across Somerset.

b) Website

A dedicated Homefinder Somerset website is available (www.homefindersomerset.co.uk) and is accessible to anyone with Internet access. The website will allow applicants to view all available properties across the whole of Somerset and apply 'on-line' for properties of their choice.

c) Local Offices

Computers will be placed in some landlords' offices for applicants to view and bid for available properties. Other sites may also be considered.



d) Hotline

A local number is available for applicants to call to hear what properties are available. Applicants will hear an options menu where different size properties can be selected and heard. This service is important to the Homefinder Somerset service and our efforts to assist disabled applicants, particularly those who are blind or partially sighted to access the service. The Hotline service will also benefit those applicants who are unable to read.

20. Advertisement Deadlines

20.1. All advertisements will carry a deadline by which time applications for particular properties must be received. This will normally be one week from the date of the advert. Any applications received after the deadline has been reached will not be considered for the property.

21. Property Descriptions

21.1. Properties advertised will carry (where possible) a photograph of the property and a full description. As a minimum the description will include:

- a) Type of property
- b) Number of bedrooms
- c) Location of property
- d) Any adaptations (e.g. disabled facilities)
- e) Services provided (e.g. support, caretaker, cleaning)
- f) Heating type
- g) Rent charged/service charges

22. Labelling Properties

22.1. Adverts will also give information on who will be eligible to apply for the property. For example, if the property is a sheltered housing unit the advert may state that only applicants above a certain age with support needs would be eligible or where there are other support needs due to physical or mental disabilities. An adapted property suitable for someone in a wheelchair may be labelled to say that applicants must require such a property.

22.2. Properties will only be available to applicants in certain 'Bands' according to the size and type of the property, the number of annual vacancies and level of demand. For example, a three-bedroom property in a high demand area may only be advertised to 'Gold' Band applicants, areas where there is low demand may be offered to both Gold and Silver Band applicants, or in some cases, all bands.



22.3. Supported Accommodation (e.g. sheltered)

In addition to the banding system, all partner landlords wish to ensure that supported accommodation is allocated to those who have not only a housing need but also a 'support' need (as detailed in the application form). Landlords will therefore be looking to accept bids from applicants in the highest band and who have an identifiable support need in addition to the earliest application date. This support need will be verified at the time of the home visit.

22.4. Local Connection

Although the banding system reflects housing need and subsequently the priority of each application, there may be occasions when it may be appropriate to protect housing for local people. Local connection is defined where an applicant has been continuously resident in the Homefinder Somerset Area for the past 3 years and is currently living in the area. This also applies to members of Her Majesty's Forces (HMF). Preference may be given to local residents who may be economically or socially driven from their community due to a lack of affordable housing. This will usually be due to planning restrictions (Section 106 Agreements).

22.5. Transfer Applications

All the partner landlords are keen to ensure that they make the best use of their own stock. To achieve this, it is likely that a certain proportion of properties advertised will be labelled giving preference to transfer applicants or transfer applicants in a specific band, for example the silver band and in some cases preference will also be given to existing tenants of that landlord. The number of properties labelled as such will be monitored on a regular basis.

22.6. Accepted Duty Homeless Cases

In order to fulfil its statutory duties towards the homeless and to create a through flow of temporary accommodation a Local Authority may label properties allowing only households who have been accepted by that Authority as unintentionally homeless and in priority need, to bid or give preference to this group.

22.7. Labelling Caution

The general effect of labelling can be seen to compromise the extent to which vacancies will be let to the highest priority applicant as described under the banding system. It is therefore important for each landlord to minimise such labelling in order to maintain transparency to the allocation system.

22.8. Complaints

Any complaints about the applicant's banding should be directed to the Local Authority. Complaints regarding the labelling of the property e.g. size, amenities, should be referred to the individual landlord of the property. If a successful applicant is not offered the accommodation for any reason then any complaints regarding this should be directed to the landlord making this decision.



23. Bidding for a Property

- 23.1. Where an applicant meets the eligibility criteria, and is placed within the stated band or bands given in the advert, they may bid for that property within the deadline given.
- 23.2. Applicants are limited to 3 bids per weekly cycle, however, this will be monitored by the Homefinder Somerset Scheme on each weekly advert. Where an applicant bids successfully they will be given a time period (normally 48 hours) in which to decide which property they will accept.
- 23.3. Applicants may apply for properties via www.homefindersomerset.co.uk or by contacting their respective local authority housing office;

a) Mendip District Council,
Cannards Grave Rd,
Shepton Mallet
BA4 5BT
Tel: 01749 648999 web:- www.mendip.gov.uk

b) Sedgemoor District Council
Bridgwater House,
King Square,
Bridgwater,
Somerset
TA6 3AR
Tel: 0845 4082540 web:- www.sedgemoor.gov.uk

c) South Somerset District Council
Housing Advice Centre,
Petters House,
Petters Way,
Yeovil,
Somerset
BA20 1EA
Tel: 01935 462462 web:- www.southsomerset.gov.uk

d) Taunton Deane Borough Council
The Deane House,
Belvedere Road,
Taunton,
Somerset,
TA1 1HE
Tel: 01823 356356 web:- www.tauntondeane.gov.uk



e) West Somerset Council
West Somerset House,
Killick Way,
Williton
TA4 4QA
Tel 01643 703704 web:- www.westsomersetonline.gov.uk

And:
1 Summerland Road,
Minehead
TA24 5BP

24. Selection Procedure

- 24.1. Once the advert deadline has passed, each district will run a report from the computer system, which will list all the advertised properties and all the applicants who have applied for each of them. For each property advertised the successful applicant will be the applicant(s) who has been entered on the housing register for the longest period of time and has been placed in the highest band. The length of time on the housing register is indicated by using the individual 'Application Dates' given to each applicant. The application date will be determined depending on the type of application, as described in section 8 'Application Date'. In the situation where there are two households with the same circumstances, and same waiting time, the landlord will visit both households to assess who is in the greatest housing need and will take into account cumulative preferences. Details of successful applicants will be checked to ensure they are eligible for the property. Only those applicants who meet the stated criteria will be offered the property.
- 24.2. The name of the successful applicant will be forwarded to the agreed officer within each landlords organisation (some landlords will be able to access directly the computer system bids for their respective properties). Each individual landlord is responsible for the verification of the successful applicant. Each applicant will be given the opportunity to view the property before making a final decision on whether to accept or refuse. Assistance with viewing will be available if required.
- 24.3. If an applicant has been identified as being unsuitable to be a tenant due to the grounds described in section 3.7, and has made no attempt to rectify the situation then the applicant may not be allocated the property despite a successful bid. Again the applicant will be informed in writing of this decision. The applicant can make an application if s/he considers that s/he should no longer be treated as ineligible for an allocation of social housing, e.g. because the rent arrears have been cleared or an agreement has been reached and maintained over a reasonable period of time or because the person who had been guilty of anti- social behaviour is no longer part of his/her household.
- 24.4. If a property is subsequently withdrawn after an applicant has successfully bid, because for example the tenant of that particular property has failed to vacate the property or the property has been incorrectly labelled, the landlord will inform the successful applicant that the property is no longer available. If the property is not ready for occupation following a successful bid and the applicant is likely to wait some considerable time before moving in, the landlord will inform the applicant and give them the option to bid for any other suitable properties.



25. Feedback

- 25.1. An important part of the scheme is giving applicants feedback on who has recently been allocated properties. Accompanying each advert will be a feedback section giving details of the properties allocated.
- 25.2. Applicant's personal details will not be included. However, it is envisaged that the feedback form will include:
- a) Property size and type
 - b) Property location
 - c) Number of applicants who applied for each property
 - d) Band of successful applicant
 - e) Application Date of successful applicant
- 25.3. An overview of this information will be regularly monitored.
- 25.4. Using this information, applicants will be able to see where properties are more likely to become available and where they may have the best chances of making a successful 'bid'. It is essential that with any choice-based lettings scheme, applicants have as much information as possible in order to help them make an informed evaluation of their housing options.

26. Refusals

- 26.1. If an applicant decides to refuse an offer of accommodation, either at the accompanied viewing, or when an initial verbal offer is made, the property will be offered to the next eligible persons.
- 26.2. If a homeless applicant refuses an offer of suitable accommodation, the Local Authority may decide to discharge its duty under the Homeless Legislation.
- 26.3. Homeless applicants have the right to request a review of certain decisions made by the local authority in respect of their homeless application. Within the Homefinder Somerset Common Lettings Policy this includes the decision to discharge the main homeless duty to secure accommodation by providing suitable accommodation for the applicant.
- 26.4. If a homeless applicant wishes to request a review of the suitability of accommodation offered, this should be requested before the end of the period of 21 days beginning with the day on which he/she is notified of the housing authority's decision to discharge its main homeless duty.
- 26.5. A homeless applicant who is requesting a review about the suitability of accommodation will be advised to accept and move into the accommodation pending the outcome of their review request. The Local Authority's Homeless Section will inform the appropriate officer as soon as a decision has been made, normally within 7 days as to whether or not the property will remain available through the review process. It should be noted the property will only be held open in



exceptional circumstances. If a non statutory review is conducted and the offer withdrawn by the Homeless Officer on grounds of suitability then the second placed applicant will be made an offer of the property. If the outcome of a review is overturned in favour of the homeless applicant, the alternative accommodation will be provided as quickly as possible. However if the review of suitability of the offer is upheld the applicant will still have accommodation to live in whilst they consider their further options.

26.6. The Local Authority will normally expect a household with whom it has accepted a main homeless duty to bid for a wide range of suitable properties. If a homeless applicant has not been actively bidding for suitable properties, the Local Authority may automatically bid on their behalf for properties it considers suitable for the applicant. If the homeless applicant refuses such a property, the Local Authority will consider its duty towards them as a homeless household discharged, subject of course to the statutory review process.

26.7. Records will be maintained on the number of refusals for each property and the reason why the applicant decided to refuse.

27. Difficult to Let

27.1. If a vacancy cannot be filled via the CBL scheme, the property can be re-advertised on a wider basis in conjunction with the Local Authority.

28. Excluded Properties

28.1. All the partner landlords are committed to advertising as many of their vacant properties as possible through the CBL system. There will be occasions when certain properties will not be advertised and the reasons for these exclusions will be monitored. Some examples are:-

- Properties required for existing tenants whose properties are subject to major works requiring them to vacate.
- Extra care vacancies which are allocated jointly with Somerset County's Community Directorate (Social Services).
- Applicants who have succeeded to a tenancy who need to move to alternative accommodation.



29. False Information

- 29.1. Applicants who are found to have deliberately given false information on their Homefinder Somerset Register application form will have their application reviewed immediately. This may result in the 'Band' awarded being changed as a result.
- 29.2. An immediate review of an application may also be undertaken if an applicant is found to have deliberately changed or worsened their housing situation in order to be placed into a band higher than they would normally have been awarded. If an applicant is rehoused through false information, steps may be taken to end the tenancy and court action may be taken which could result in the applicant receiving a fine up to a maximum of £5,000.
- 29.3. All landlords in this agreement are committed to taking legal action against any applicant found to have gained a tenancy based on false information in their application form. (Section 171 of the Housing Act 1996).

30. Access to Personal Information

- 30.1. Individuals are entitled under the Data Protection Act (1998) to request details of their personal data held by the five Local Authorities. A charge may be made for providing this information.
- 30.2. The information received, in conjunction with housing applications, may also be used for housing management and research purposes.

31. Monitoring

- 31.1. A number of areas within the CBL system will be monitored on a regular basis to ensure that the system is operating in the most effective way. Areas to be monitored may include:-
- Number of registrations received
 - Percentage of applicants registered and notified within 21 days
 - Number and percentage of applicants registered within each band
 - Number of properties advertised by type, area, landlord
 - Number of properties advertised with local connection label
 - Number of properties, with reasons, excluded from CBL system, by landlord (e.g. decants)
 - Number of bids and method of bidding
 - Number of bids for each property by band
 - Profile of those bidding (e.g. waiting list, transfer; homeless, disabled, ethnic background)
 - Number of applicants bypassed for breach of tenancy conditions
 - Number of accepted offers by band
 - Number of tenancies refused at sign up
 - Number of properties re-advertised due to difficulty in letting
 - Number of review requests
 - Number of complaints



- Number of applicants in short term supported housing awaiting active rehousing (following confirmation by scheme of readiness to move)
- Number of homeless applicants in 'Gold Band' awaiting rehousing (not bidding)
- Number of 'Gold Band' applicants who have not bid for more than 6 months
- Number of Emergency Priority applicants awaiting rehousing
- Number of applicants from outside the Homefinder Somerset area being rehoused
- Banding the property is advertised in
- The use of labelling
- Number of people housed by band

32. Equal Opportunities

- 32.1. All partners of Homefinder Somerset are committed to a fair and equitable housing policy and to providing equal opportunities for all when allocating available properties. All housing applicants will be assessed according to their housing need and in accordance with the published lettings policy.
- 32.2. All partners of Homefinder Somerset are opposed to direct or indirect discrimination and recognise the need for appropriate systems to actively prevent discrimination on the basis of race, colour; ethnic or national origins, gender, sexuality, marital status, religion, physical disability or mental health. Any allegations or concerns that an organisation has not acted appropriately have to be made directly to that organisation. All partner landlords are publicly accountable and must have a complaints policy and an independent Ombudsman.

33. Social Inclusion

- 33.1. All partners of Homefinder Somerset believe that applicants should be given every assistance to access the housing register and search for suitable properties. For example, the provision of the Homefinder Somerset 'Hotline' number will assist those applicants who experience literacy problems or who are blind or partially sighted and unable to read the adverts.
- 33.2. The Mental Capacity Act 2005 came into effect, in England, in April 2007 introducing a major overhaul of the law relating to individuals who lack capacity in decision making, particularly around changes in accommodation. The Act introduces a legal obligation on health and social care commissioners to jointly commission advocacy services and also has significant implications for the provision of supported housing, care and support services. To assist further, all statutory and voluntary agencies who work within the community either helping or advising applicants have been given information and training in order to fully understand the Homefinder Somerset Scheme and there by assist at first hand their clients to search and apply for suitable housing.
- 33.3. To further assist applicants the following methods may be used:-
- Applicants potentially disadvantaged by the scheme will initially be identified from the application form. Staff will contact these applicants and offer them a home visit or interview. Staff will seek to establish what the support needs are and identify ways of enabling the applicants to participate in the CBL system. This may include sending copies of the adverts in large print to an applicant or simply providing advice.



- If the applicant agrees, staff may contact any professional or voluntary workers from health or Social Services with whom the applicant is involved to ensure they understand the procedures and that necessary support is provided. All agencies funded through Supporting People should be in a position to provide their clients with help on housing issues.
- Disadvantaged applicants are able to nominate a person (including family members, friends or professional worker) to bid on their behalf or to help them bid for suitable properties in the office.
- An alternative is for Homefinder Somerset staff to automatically put the applicants forward for vacancies that would be suitable, in the small number of cases where the applicant has no support.

34. Policy Review

34.1. The Homefinder Somerset Scheme is regularly reviewed to ensure that the policy meets its stated objectives and complies with legislative changes. Any changes to the Common Lettings Policy are implemented only after prior notice to members and the majority agreement amongst the partner landlords.

35. Complaints

35.1. Any complaints regarding the scheme should be directed initially to the organisation processing an applicant's claim.

36 The Housing Ombudsman

36.1. If an applicant is not satisfied with the action taken by either the Local Authority or a Registered Social Landlord and has exhausted the complaints procedure available, they can send a written complaint to the ombudsman.



The Housing Ombudsman Service can be contacted at:

Housing Ombudsman Service
81 Aldwych
London
WC2B 4HN

Tel: 020 7421 3800
Lo-Call 0845 7125 973
Minicom 020 7404 7092
Fax 020 7831 1942

Email info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk
Web address www.ihos.org.uk

The Local Government Ombudsman

PO Box 4771
Coventry CV4 DEH

LGO Advice Team on 0845 602 1983
or 024 7682 1960



APPENDIX I

Disrepair Guidance

Gold: High

Hazards: Applicant living in a private sector property awarded with one or more Category 1 hazards as assessed under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System. The assessment to be undertaken by an appropriate Housing Officer or a referral to either an Environmental Health Officer (EHO) or Housing Standards Officer qualified to Part 1 of the Housing Act 2004. The Category 1 hazard(s) resulting in either the serving of a Prohibition Notice, Improvement Notice, or a Demolition Order.

Silver: Medium

Hazards: Applicant living in a private sector property awarded with four or more Category 2 hazards as assessed under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System. The assessment to be undertaken by an appropriate Housing Officer or a referral to either an Environmental Health Officer (EHO) or Housing Standards Officer qualified to Part 1 of the Housing Act 2004. The Category 2 hazard(s) resulting in an Improvement Notice for minor works to remove the hazard(s).

Bronze: Low

Hazards: Applicant living in a private sector property awarded with one or less than three Category 2 hazards as assessed under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System. The assessment to be undertaken by an appropriate Housing Officer or a referral to either an Environmental Health Officer (EHO) or Housing Standards Officer qualified to Part 1 of the Housing Act 2004. The Category 2 hazard(s) resulting in a Hazard Awareness Notice.



APPENDIX 2

Medical Considerations

When ill health, disability or old age is aggravated by housing conditions and would improve if other accommodation were offered. The award for medical consideration is a range from Gold to Bronze Band.

Low	Minor Problems	Bronze
Medium	Significant Problems	Silver
High	Life Threatening Problems	Gold

(See following examples)

In the case of stress this will be reflected when deciding on banding.

The two crucial factors that are looked for in any awards of medical conditions are:

1. The physical link between the identified medical complaint and the current housing accommodation/situation.
2. That there is a realistic expectation that the identified medical condition would improve if alternative, more suitable accommodation was made available.

The Housing Team will carefully consider any representation received and check the circumstances outlined with any banding award that may have previously been made. Where there is a need, a change to banding will be made. The Housing Team does not usually request an applicant or tenant to submit medical certificates or to obtain letters from their GP. The belief is held that this is a purely voluntary matter for the GP and patient. The Housing Team has no wish to create further work for doctors by insisting that medical certificates are produced before any application or transfer request is considered.

When determining what banding to award, staff should approach the matter from the standpoint of assessing what degree of need exists and, secondly, what adverse effect this has on the lifestyle of the household as a whole?

To achieve consistency in the allocation of banding under this heading a descending schedule is detailed below.

High Problems – Gold Band. This top award will be reserved for those exceptional cases where an applicant's or tenant's life can in some way be said to be at risk because of associated medical and housing difficulties which are inherent in the existing accommodation.

Example 1: An elderly applicant who the medical specialists will not allow to be discharged from hospital back to a second floor split-level flat which necessitates the climbing of stairs both to gain access and also within the flat itself. This person suffers from a chronic heart condition and the only accommodation available to them would place their life at risk. This view is amplified when further research reveals that the applicant lives alone, has



virtually no contact with any neighbours, becoming in effect, a prisoner within the flat should the medical authorities decide to discharge him/ her from hospital.

Example 2: Mr Stevens, a frail, elderly gentleman, lives on his own in an old caravan in the grounds of a house in a country area. The only mains service is electricity. He fetches his water from an outside cold water tap and must use an Elsan bucket toilet situated some distance from the caravan. Mr Stevens suffers from dizzy spells, arthritis and was admitted to hospital as a result of the cold during the winter and the danger of falls when collecting water or using the outside toilet.

NOTE: The location of the toilet and water supply are contributory factors when arriving at the decision that this elderly gentleman is vulnerable.

Numerous examples could, of course, be given and one thinks of a younger applicant or tenant where housing circumstances have driven them into a situation where medical authorities and/or social workers feel there is a risk of suicide or child abuse etc.

NOTE: It is expected that any medical award, which is assessed to be an acute problem, will be linked to medical or social service recommendations that have been received by the Housing Team.

Medium/Significant Problems – Silver Band. This again is a high banding award and should only be used to reflect urgent medical difficulties that have a clear relationship to existing housing circumstances. It is distinguished from the previous sub-division (i.e. Acute Problems) because in this instance the person's life cannot be considered to be at risk.

Example 1: Mrs Smith, an elderly widow, lives on her own in a first floor flat. She suffers from severe rheumatoid arthritis, and is unable to climb stairs. As a consequence she is housebound. This is clearly not putting her life at risk, but is having a serious effect on her lifestyle, which a move to ground floor accommodation would resolve.

Example 2: Mrs Coles is living with her common-law husband in a rented property. Mrs Coles considers that their relationship has broken down, although her common-law husband refuses to accept this fact. Whilst she has not been subjected to physical violence, there is a great deal of mental cruelty which has led to Mrs Coles seeking the help of a Consultant Psychiatrist and being unable to work for several months. She has been advised that her mental health is being affected by her relationship with her common-law husband. In a case such as this, it would be essential for the Housing staff to consult the Community Physician before making a banding award.

Example 3: Mr and Mrs Brown, are both aged 70, are the owner-occupiers of a large Victorian property. Mrs Brown also suffers from osteo arthritis and now finds mobility painful, which is aggravated by this large dwelling, where only the WC facilities are on an upper floor. Mr Brown has a blood disorder and has considerable problems keeping warm,



which is aggravated by this old property with its large rooms and high ceilings. The GP is concerned on both accounts and has advised the Housing Team accordingly.

With both serious and significant problems officers have a certain amount of discretion regarding the award. This will be of particular use to visiting officers in assessing the degree of seriousness of any medical problem.

Low/Minor Problems – Bronze Band. The degree of the problem is clearly less severe.

Example 1: A couple in their early 60s have signs of generalised arthritis and rheumatics. There are some difficulties with the accommodation because it is difficult to maintain a constant temperature during winter months. The garden is also becoming an increasing chore, but out of a sense of pride the occupants continue to try and keep on top of it.

Example 2: Minor problems relating to recurring colds or regular depression or unusual allergies could be pointed under this heading providing a link to the existing accommodation could be demonstrated.

Conclusion

When Staff should refer Medical Assessments to the Assessment Panel

The Housing Team will carry out the majority of assessments under the Medical Consideration element. However, there will be occasions when the advice of either the Somerset Primary Care Trust or Now Medical will need to be sought or a referral made to the medical Assessment Panel. For example, where an applicant's housing circumstances are affecting their mental health, or where a GP considers a patient requires over-riding priority as a result of a medical problem.

Now Medical will also need to be contacted whenever an applicant does not normally fall within one of the priority categories under part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the homelessness Act 2002) and experiences health problems which are likely to make them vulnerable in a homeless situation. This information will enable the Housing Manager to decide the Local Authority obligations.

The notes in the Manual should act as a guide to staff. The important aspect is to make a decision on what banding should be awarded and when. The Visiting Officer's report should set out in the rationale as to why bandings have been pitched at that particular level.



The following list covers some of the main factors, which can be reflected in a banding award under medical considerations.

1. Mobility - Inability to manage stairs/control-heating (e.g. put on extra clothing or adjust fire). size of accommodation, garden.
2. Applicants or tenants who are more or less confined to their existing accommodation, or where they depend on others to enable them to leave the dwelling.
3. Where present accommodation is causing the applicant's mental or physical disability, which could be overcome by a move to more suitable accommodation. The approach in this instance is to focus on how the applicant or tenant's circumstances could be **improved** by a move to alternative accommodation - banding will be awarded accordingly.

The possible link between Applicants or Tenants who are assessed to have high Medical Problems (Gold Band) and recognising the scope to regard the Application as an 'Emergency Band'.

Medical factors can constitute one of the most urgent forms of housing need. The Housing Manager should scrutinise, with extreme care, applications which attract Gold Banding for Medical Consideration. It may be appropriate to consider the application as an Emergency Banding.



APPENDIX 3

Glossary of Terms about Choice Based Lettings

Bid or Bidding - To be considered for an available home, applicants are required to contact us to 'make a bid' or 'express an interest' in a property. No money is involved in 'making a bid' or 'expressing an interest' in a property.

Bidding Period - The number of days in which a applicant has the opportunity to 'place a bid' or 'express an interest' in a home once it is advertised.

Choice Based Lettings (CBL) - A new system being introduced for the allocation of social housing. CBL is designed to offer more choice and involvement for applicants in selecting a new home. It is a much more open, transparent and customer-based approach in the allocation of properties.

Consultation Period - A period of three months in which Mendip District Council, Sedgemoor District Council, South Somerset District Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset District Council consulted with all interested parties and stakeholders about its plans to introduce Choice Based Lettings. The consultation period was from May 2007 to August 2007.

Express an Interest - See Bid or Bidding

Housing Register - A list of applicants for housing accommodation.

Banding Scheme - The system currently used by the Homefinder Somerset Scheme to determine the priority of a applicants housing need. Banding is allocated to the applicant to reflect their current circumstances and future housing need. The banding allocated determines the applicant's position in the waiting list for a particular type/size/location of a home.

Property Label - A description of the property being advertised as available to let. The label will generally include a photograph, location, type of property, number of bedrooms, type of heating, any disabled adaptations, whether there is a garden or not, if pets are accepted and other features. The label will indicate who may be eligible to bid for the property. This could include, for example, where a local connection may be required, if there is an age restriction or the property has adaptations.

Registered Social Landlord (RSL) - Term introduced by the 1996 Housing Act applying to housing associations registered with the Housing Corporation. Registered Social Landlords have access to Social Housing Grant public funding for the capital costs of providing housing.

Shortlist - Once the deadline has passed for registering a 'bid' or 'interest', a list of bidders who have met the advertising criteria for each individual property is taken from the computer system. Generally, the applicant offered the property will be the person who has been in the highest housing needs band for the longest period of time.



Social Rented Housing - Housing of a high standard, which is provided at below market cost for households in housing need by local Authorities and Registered Social Landlords. It operates on a basis of accepted and regulated standards of good practice in relation to physical conditions, management, allocation, equal opportunities and accountability. The Housing Corporation sets the maximum rent levels.