East Herts Housing Options Service

The Housing Register

A guide for Applicants

March 2012
If you would like a translation of this document in another language, large print, Braille or an electronic format please contact Communications at East Herts on 01279 655261 or email communications@eastherts.gov.uk

To są ważne dokumenty. Jeżeli ma Pan/Pani problemy z ich przeczytaniem lub zrozumieniem, prosimy o skontaktowanie się z działem Communications Urzędu Rady Miejskiej East Herts pod numerem: 01279 655261 lub wysłanie maila do: communications@eastherts.gov.uk

Estes documentos são importantes. Se tiver dificuldade na sua leitura ou compreensão, deve contactar a Communications, no Município de East Herts, através do número 01279 655261, ou envie um e-mail para communications@eastherts.gov.uk
Introduction
This leaflet is a guide for people requesting accommodation in the East Herts District. This leaflet is a summary of the Council’s Housing Register and Allocations policy and tells you:

- Who can put their name on the Council’s Housing Register
- Other things you need to know about your Housing Register application.
- How we allocate empty homes

You need to be aware that East Herts Council no longer has any homes of its own. Instead we put our applicants forward for rehousing with the registered provider landlords (also called housing associations) that have homes in the district.

Who can join the Housing Register?
Anyone can apply go onto the Council’s Housing Register no matter where they currently live in the country, although we would advise you to apply to the borough in which you currently live. You must be:

- Over 18 years of age although you could be accepted if you are 16 or 17 in exceptional circumstances
- Not subject to Immigration Control rules.

The Council will also want to know that your behaviour in the past doesn’t suggest that you could be a bad tenant for example whether you or anyone else in your household has caused a nuisance in the past or owes money to the Council, a registered social landlord or private landlord on a previous tenancy.

If you are an existing East Herts assured tenant of a housing association and your accommodation is no longer suitable for you, for example because the size of your family has increased, you may go onto the Council’s Housing Register as a transfer applicant. However we would suggest that you contact your existing landlord first to see if they can help with a move.

If you own your own home you can join the Housing Register but you will not be considered for permanent housing unless:

- You have an urgent need to be rehoused and
- You no longer have an interest in the property and
- You cannot afford to purchase another home.

How do I apply?
To join the register you need to apply online. Go to www.HomeOption.org, choose “registration” from the menu on the left hand side and scroll down until you reach the section on East Herts Council, where you will find a link to the online housing application form. There is also a link to HomeOption on the Council’s website.

If you do not have access to the internet at home, you can come into the Council’s offices in Bishop’s Stortford or Hertford and use the computers available in our reception areas, or you can use other public access computers such as in public libraries, etc. If you have a family member or support worker with access to the internet, they can complete the application form for you.
It is a good idea to have all the information you need to complete the form before your start, such as addresses of previous accommodation and the dates you moved into and out of each of those addresses. You will also need details of your income from employment, benefits and tax credits, and the amount of any savings you may have and the value of the equity in your home if you own it.

If you cannot access the internet and have a disability or are vulnerable for some other reason, we can complete an application with you on the telephone. To do this, please telephone the Housing Options team on 01279 655261, and we will make an appointment to call you back and complete the online form with you.

When you submit the completed form, you will be given an application number to use for bidding on properties on HomeOption, but you will also be given list of all the supporting evidence we need in order to process your application and assess your priority for housing. Please note that we cannot do this until we receive all the information we require.

W will also check that you qualify to go onto the Housing Register. If we decide that you don’t qualify, we will write to you within 10 days explaining why. If you disagree with the decision the letter will explain how you can ask for a review.

If you qualify to go on the Housing Register, and we have all the information we require, your application will be set to “live” on HomeOption and you will be sent a welcome letter giving details of your assessment and information on how to bid for properties.

Keeping your application up to date
Your application will be reviewed each year. Each year you will be sent a registration renewal letter, which you will be asked to respond to. If, after one month of receiving the letter, you do not respond your application will be cancelled. If this happens any future request to join the Housing Register will be treated as a new application.

It is your responsibility to tell us about any change in your circumstances that might affect your Housing Register application. This includes a change of address, a change in the size of your family or if you think your housing situation has got worse.

How does the Housing Register work?
The law says that when the Council put people forward for rehousing we must give priority to those with the greatest need to move. To help make the system fair the Council uses a points system. The greater your need for rehousing the more points we will give to your application. A full copy of the Council’s Housing Register and Allocations Policy (including the pointing scheme) is available from the Council’s Housing Options Service (contact details are at the end of this leaflet) or from the Council’s website at www.eastherts.gov.uk. The information on your application form will enable us to assess your housing need and your priority for rehousing. The Council will look particularly at:

- Your existing and prospective housing conditions
- Your ability to cope with those conditions
- The length of time you have had to live in those conditions
If your health could be improved by a move you will be asked to complete a medical assessment form, which will be considered by the Council’s Medical Advisor. This medical form can be sent to you, or downloaded from our website. If you have a disability that could be alleviated in some way by an adaptation to your home you may be contacted by Papworth Housing Advice Agency. The Council have a contract with Papworth Housing Advice Agency and they may be able to assist you with finding alternative accommodation or advising on adaptations to your current home.

How will empty homes be allocated?
The Council allocates the empty homes in its district by a system called Choice Based Lettings (CBL). Choice Based Lettings is a way of allocating housing through choice, giving eligible applicants on the Housing Register greater say over where they live. The scheme in East Herts is called HomeOption and has been set up with five other Local Authorities.

CBL enables Housing Register applicants, including housing association transfer applicants (jointly called home seekers) to express an interest in empty homes, which are advertised, via a ‘bidding’ process. The successful bidder is the home seeker with the highest number of points. If two home seekers have the same number of points then the successful home seeker is the one who has been registered the longest.

Some properties will be prioritised for particular groups of applicants, i.e. properties with adaptations will be prioritised for wheelchair users or other people who need them, and ground floor properties will be priorities for people who cannot manage steps or stairs. Properties with two double bedrooms will be prioritised for households with two children.

Every two weeks we will advertise the properties available in a variety of ways, including:

- On a dedicated website www.homeoption.org. There will also be a link from the Council’s website at www.eastherts.gov.uk to the correct page for the East Herts properties being advertised.
- At the Council and partner offices, including the homeless hostels
- In a free Property List sent to South Anglia and Riversmead Housing Associations, and statutory and voluntary agencies who request it e.g. CABs and also libraries in East Herts including the mobile library service
- Applicants can request a copy of the Property List to be sent to their home address but this will be subject to an assessment by the Housing Options Team.

The adverts will provide details of the properties available including location, size and type, weekly rent, heating, any adaptations, landlord’s name etc. The advert will also include the type of applicant eligible to bid for the home, for example age, disability and, for some housing associations, income levels. You must also be eligible for the size and/or type of property you are bidding for. This information will be in the letter sent to you by the Housing Options Team confirming your eligibility for the Housing Register.
How do I bid for a property?

You can bid for a property in a number of different ways:

- By interactive telephone (24 hours) telephone 8707 270460 or by text telephone 07781 472726.
- On the dedicated website www.homeoption.org. There will be a link from the Councils website at www.eastherts.gov.uk to the correct page on the HomeOption website for the East Herts properties being advertised.
- At the Council’s offices in Hertford and Bishop’s Stortford using the available online facilities.
- By postal voucher. A batch of vouchers will be sent to applicants with their Housing Register acceptance letter.
- By using an advocate that an applicant has given authorisation to such as a family member or a support worker.

Eligible home seekers can express an interest or ‘bid’ for up to three properties each fortnight. You must have your registration number, date of birth of the applicant and the property reference to make a bid.

What happens if my bid is successful?

You will receive a letter from the Housing Options Team once bidding has closed if you are placed first, second or third in the shortlist for a property and you are eligible for the property. The Housing Options Team will forward your name to the relevant housing associations and they will contact you to arrange a viewing of the property. You can change your mind at any stage of the bidding process, including when you view the property or are made an offer. You must make the decision quickly as you will only have a few days to decide.

If you are a homeless applicant the policy is different and refusing a property might discharge our homeless duty to you. Please see the next section.

I am homeless, can I bid for a home through CBL?

Yes, you can use CBL to find a home although you will be given a time limited award of additional points within which you will be reasonably expected to make a successful bid. If you make a successful bid for a property you are eligible for, but subsequently decide that the property is unsuitable, you must request a review of the suitability of the accommodation within 21 days of the offer. You will be advised to move into the accommodation and request a review of the offer. This then means that if the Council believes that the offer is:

a) reasonable, and the duty to provide accommodation is discharged, you will be able to remain in the accommodation
b) unreasonable, then you will be made one further offer of accommodation taking in to account the decision of the suitability review.
If you are homeless and you do not move into the accommodation offered, and the review panel decide that the property was suitable, then the Council will have discharged its duty to you and no further offers will be made in connection with that homeless application. You will be allowed to remain on the Housing Register but your points will be recalculated to reflect your new housing circumstances.

**What if my bid is unsuccessful?**
We will not be writing to unsuccessful people. We will publish feedback about the number of bids we had for each property including how many points the successful bidder had and how long they had been on the Housing Register in the next Property List.

**What if I am unable to afford the rent?**
If you are on a low income you may qualify for benefits. For more information contact the Benefits Team at East Herts Council. Their details are at the back of this leaflet.

**Your right to request a review**
You can ask for a review if:

- It is decided that you do not qualify for the Housing Register but you disagree, or
- You disagree with the decision to remove you from the Housing Register or
- You do not agree with the number of points that have been awarded to your Housing Register application or
- You are being housed because you are legally homeless but you don’t think the property that has been offered has been is suitable.

The Council carries out all reviews and you should write, within 21 days of the decision, to the Housing Service Manager at Wallfields in Hertford.

**What happens if you are homeless?**
If you are homeless or will be made homeless in the next 28 days you should contact the Council’s Housing Options Team.

Alternatively you can contact a Housing Adviser within the Housing Options Team for housing and benefits advice. They can offer you help by:

- Telling you about your housing options
- Explaining the Council’s rent deposit scheme for the private sector
- Helping you resolve problems you have with a private landlord
- Advising you about the benefits you might be entitled to.

**Confidentiality & your right to see information held about your application**
Under the Housing Act 1996 and the Data protection Act 1998 you have the right to see information held about you. If you wish to do this you need to write to The Housing Options Service at East Herts Council. There may be a small charge.

We handle all the information you give us in accordance with the details specified in the Data Protection Act. We promise that your application will be dealt with in the strictest confidence. However, all the details you have provided on your application form will be investigated and other Council services and outside agencies maybe contacted in the course of assessing your application for housing.
**Contacting us**
The Housing Options Team is based at the Council offices in Pegs Lane, Hertford and The Causeway, Bishop’s Stortford. Ring 01279 655261 for either office and then ask to speak to a member of the Housing Options Team. They can also be contacted by email at Housingoptions@eastherts.gov.uk. The offices are open from 8.30am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday but, unless it is an emergency, you should telephone first to make an appointment to ensure someone is available to see you.

The Council’s Benefits Team is based at the Council’s Offices, The Causeway, Bishop’s Stortford and can be contacted on 01279 655261. Their email address is Benefits@eastherts.gov.uk

**How to complain**
You should first contact the Housing Options Team and they will do all they can in the first instance to sort out the problem. The complaint will be dealt with, either immediately if possible, or within ten working days. If the problem is complicated and we can't solve it within this time, we will let you know.

If you are not satisfied with the action taken, or if the problem persists, you should put the complaint in writing, (or in braille/audio tape) together with details about the complaint and any supporting evidence. Download the "Putting it Right and Keeping it Right" leaflet, or pick one up at any of our Council offices and use that to make your complaint by simply filling in the form and returning it as directed.

**Other useful organisations**

Citizens’ Advice Bureau Hertford and Ware: Block D, Yeomans Court, Ware Road, Hertford. SG13 7HJ. Phone: 08448 489700

Citizens’ Advice Bureau Bishop’s Stortford: 74 South Street, Bishop’s Stortford, Hertfordshire, CM23 3AZ. Phone: 08448 489700

Citizens’ Advice Bureau Buntingford: North Entrance, The Manor House, 21 High Street, Buntingford, Hertfordshire, SG8 9AB. Phone: 08448 489700.

Herts Young Homeless Group: 178 Crossbrook Street, Cheshunt, Hertfordshire, EN8 8JY. Phone: The Gateway 08448 330933

Papworth Housing Advice Service: 13a Apton Road, Bishop’s Stortford Hertfordshire, CM23 3SP.

Shelter: Queensway House, Queensway, Hatfield, AL10 0LS. Phone: 01707 256256, e-mail: hertfordshire@shelter.org.uk

Women’s Aid Harlow and Broxbourne: PO Box 2489, Harlow, Essex, CM20 2PS. Phone: 01279 836611

Women’s Aid National Domestic Violence Helpline 0808 8088088 website: www.womensaid.org.uk

Vale House Stabilisation Services: 43 Cowbridge, Port Vale, Hertford, SG14 1PN. Phone: 01992 553173

YMCA: 4 Northgate End, Bishop’s Stortford, Hertfordshire, CM23 2EX. Phone: 01279 838068