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# HOW WE ALLOCATE ACCOMMODATION

The Housing  
Selection Scheme



**Housing  
Executive**

**This booklet is intended  
to help you understand how  
we allocate accommodation.**



# What is Social Housing?

In Northern Ireland, when we talk about social housing, we mean the flats and houses that are managed by the Housing Executive or Housing Associations (social landlords). You sometimes hear social housing referred to as public or council housing because local councils managed some of these properties in the past.

## How do you apply for social housing?

The Housing Executive use a 'Housing Solution and Support' approach to meet our customers needs.

If your situation means that you are homeless or threatened with homelessness we will take whatever actions are possible to address your homelessness or prevent you becoming homeless.

Our staff will complete a housing solutions interview with you.

During this interview we will not only assess your long term housing needs but also offer advice and assistance on any immediate housing issues.

We can help you make informed choices regarding your permanent housing options.

These options may include social housing, private rented accommodation, home ownership or arrangements to help you remain in your current accommodation.

To discuss your housing solutions options with one of our Housing Advisors or Patch Managers if you are a Housing Executive tenant, you can:

- call us on **03448 920900**
- email us **[information@nihe.gov.uk](mailto:information@nihe.gov.uk)**
- call in to your **local office**
- make a transfer request via '**My Housing Executive**' portal, if you are a Housing Executive tenant

For more information: **[www.nihe.gov.uk](http://www.nihe.gov.uk)**

## **Assessment under the Housing Selection Scheme (HSS)**

If social housing is an option you wish to pursue, the Housing Executive will assess your current circumstances.

The Housing Executive will contact you and make an appointment to check that you are eligible for social housing and assess your current housing need/housing need. This assessment may be carried out over the phone, in a Housing Executive office or by visiting you.

The Housing Advisor will assess your need under the housing selection scheme - this is a scheme containing rules used to decide who to offer houses to.

You will also be advised of the various landlords with houses in the areas you want to live in (known as your areas of choice).

In some circumstances if you prefer a particular housing association you may also receive a follow up visit from that association.

If you are a housing association tenant and you want to move home your landlord will carry out this housing assessment.

## **Is everyone entitled to apply for social housing?**

Everyone over the age of 18 (and in some exceptional cases 16 years) is entitled to apply for social housing in Northern Ireland - but we must decide if you are eligible. By law we are required to consider your behaviour where you are currently living or were previously living, i.e. if you are guilty of unacceptable behaviour, whether you have recently moved to the UK, and whether you are a person from abroad.

If we decide that you are not eligible we will explain the reasons for our decision in writing, along with information on how you can challenge our decision.

## Are persons from abroad entitled to social housing?

It depends. By law, we must carry out a full assessment to ensure that all applicants are eligible for social housing in Northern Ireland before they are placed on the waiting list. Some people are not eligible and are not placed on the waiting list. The rules to decide who is eligible are complicated but as a general rule if you require permission to enter or remain in the UK you will not be eligible, unless you fall into a category specified by law e.g. you have been granted refugee status. Different rules apply for certain European Union (EU), European Economic Area (EEA) and Swiss nationals and their family members following the UK's exit from the EU, for a limited time.

## Where do you want to live?

When you apply for social housing you'll have to choose at least one area where you'd like to live and you can choose as many as you wish. You can change your areas of choice at any time by contacting the Housing Executive or your landlord if you are a tenant of a Housing Association.

Most people can choose any areas they want but under the rules of the scheme in certain situations there are restrictions on some people.

When you choose your areas, think about:

- what size of property you need and what areas have a lot of those properties
- whether there are any new builds planned for the area
- how often properties become available in the area and on what level of points suitable properties are being allocated.
- whether the area is close to any services you use, like schools or clinics
- whether the area would be safe and suitable for you to live in and whether you will be happy living in the area.

Intimidation Points were removed from the Scheme with effect from 1st April 2025. However, if you have been awarded intimidation points, prior to removal, you may not be allowed to choose certain areas because you wouldn't be safe living there.

People who are being supervised under Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland (PPANI) might have restrictions placed on their choice of area by the relevant agency who is managing them.

## How does the Housing Executive decide what points you are entitled to?

The Rules of the Housing Selection Scheme involve awarding you points based on your personal, housing and social circumstances.

This helps determine your housing need. Social housing in Northern Ireland is allocated on the basis of greatest housing need.

A detailed assessment of the housing circumstances of you and your household will be carried out and points will be awarded to your application under three main categories.

### **1) Insecurity of Tenure**

Points may be awarded if you are homeless or threatened with homelessness and then later if you have been placed in temporary accommodation for more than six months.

### **2) Housing conditions**

This takes into account poor housing conditions and the degree of overcrowding and sharing.

### **3) Health/Social wellbeing**

This section will take account of any social and support needs that you might have and any functionality or mobility problems you may have managing in your present accommodation.

## **How many points do you get for the length of time spent on the Waiting List?**

You don't really build up points for being on the list for a long time. There are some people who have been on the list for many years but have 0 points. You will only get points for your time on the list if you've already got points for other housing need reasons. If that is the case, the Housing Executive will award you 2 more points once you've been on the list for 2 years. You'll get another 2 points for every year you've been on the list. The maximum number of points you can get in this category is 10.

## **Do local people get preference for an allocation of a property that becomes available for re-let in their area?**

No. Anyone who is eligible is usually entitled to choose where they would like to be rehoused. The general principle is that allocations will be made to those in greatest housing need, irrespective of where they were living previously.

Just because you are living in an area does not mean that you will get preference for re-housing in that area. Allocations of suitable properties are always made to the applicant with the greatest level of need and highest points. There are no extra points for wanting to be housed in your local area, but some points can be awarded to reflect a need to move to a specific area (e.g. to support an elderly relative).

## **What happens after the housing assessment?**

Once your assessment has been carried out you will receive written notification of the points you have been awarded and your application will appear on the waiting list for the areas you have chosen. All applications are ranked in order of points. However your position and rank on the waiting list changes on a regular basis - as other applicants who may have applied after you may have greater housing need. This would mean that they may be awarded higher points and therefore be placed ahead of you on the waiting list. As a result it is very hard to tell you how long you will have to wait.

## **Renewing your application and changes in circumstances**

Each year you need to renew your application for housing. The Housing Executive normally issues you with a letter to remind you of this. If you don't renew your application it may be removed from the waiting list. You also need to contact your local office if you move address or your housing circumstances change. A change in your circumstances could mean you're entitled to more points but you can also lose points if your circumstances change.

It is very important that you inform the Housing Executive of any change to your correspondence address or to your household or any change in your housing circumstances that may affect your housing application,

You should also respond to letters very promptly otherwise you could lose out on offers of accommodation.

## **How is Social Housing Allocated?**

When a house becomes available to let, the Lettings Manager/Allocations Officer looks at the waiting list for that size of accommodation in that area. They will look at applicants and tenants who have applied to transfer to decide who should be offered the property first.



Allocations are made in accordance with the rules of the housing selection scheme. All applicants and tenant transfers, appearing on the waiting list, will be considered for suitable vacancies arising within their housing stock.

The Officer will normally offer the property to the person with the highest points and make arrangements for them to view the accommodation. Where points are equal the house will be offered in date order to the person who has been on the waiting list longest.

Properties with special features such as adaptations for disabled people or properties which are on the ground floor may be offered to the highest pointed applicant who needs that type of accommodation.

Where the Housing Executive has decided that the property or the area is difficult to let, the property may be offered to more than one person. This is called a 'Multiple Offer'. If you receive a 'Multiple Offer' invite, you need to contact your local office to express an interest. If more than one applicant expresses an interest in the property, the person who is the highest pointed will be offered the tenancy. This will NOT count towards one of your two reasonable offers of accommodation.

In some areas a vacancy might be advertised on the Property News NI website and applicants asked to register if they are interested in it. This is called Choice Based Lettings. If that happens the Allocations Officer will look at the points of all the applicants who contacted the Housing Executive to say that they were interested. The person with the highest points for that size of accommodation (under the rules of the Housing Selection Scheme) will be asked to view the property and then offered the tenancy. If you are applying for accommodation in any of the areas where Choice Based Lettings is in place you will be told about this and what you need to do when you apply.

You can find out more about Choice Based Lettings areas in the Housing Executive's website [www.nihe.gov.uk](http://www.nihe.gov.uk)

## How many offers do you receive?

All applicants are entitled to receive two reasonable offers of accommodation.

## What is a reasonable Offer of Accommodation?

Under the rules of the Housing Selection Scheme an offer of accommodation is said to be reasonable if the property being offered is:

- a suitable size for the applicant and their household (as outlined in the Rules of the Selection Scheme).
- within the applicant's chosen areas of choice;
- in a reasonable condition of repair, and;
- suitable to meet the needs of the applicant and their household

## Refusing an offer of accommodation

If you refuse an offer of accommodation, or do not reply to the offer, it will count as one of your two reasonable offers under the Rules of the Housing Selection Scheme.

We will ask you for your reasons for refusal. In certain circumstances we may consider the refusal reasonable, and where appropriate, we will review your areas of choice and update your housing application with further details about your household, housing needs and areas of choice for re-housing.

If we decide your refusal is reasonable, the offer will not count towards one of your two offers under the rules of the scheme.

If you are a person who is owed the full housing duty then you have a right to request a review if you disagree that an offer of accommodation is suitable.

If you are a person who is not owed the full duty you can make a complaint if you consider that the offer is not reasonable.

You will have 40 days from the date of your offer letter to make a review/complaint.

Upon a second unreasonable refusal, your application will be deferred and you will not be considered for housing for 12 months, the statutory duty to you will end and all the homelessness points which were awarded to you will be removed.

## **Can an offer of accommodation be withdrawn?**

In exceptional circumstances a Social landlord may decide to withdraw an offer of accommodation. This may be done at any stage before the tenancy agreement is signed. If this happens the landlord will write to you explaining the reasons why the offer was withdrawn. You will have the right to appeal this decision. The withdrawal of the offer will not be counted as an offer of accommodation.

## **What can you do if you are not getting any offers of accommodation?**

Because of the shortage of social housing, some areas have very large waiting lists and high demand and some people will wait a very long time before they get offered a property or may not be offered a property at all. You could have a long wait, even if you are accepted homeless.

The waiting list changes every day as new people are added and other people are taken off. The allocations scheme is based on greatest housing need and not waiting time this means that people can go ahead of you on the waiting list.

Due to this it is very difficult for the Housing Executive to advise you when you might receive an offer.

You should contact your local Housing Executive office to get advice on your Housing Prospects.

Speaking with your Housing Advisor about your housing prospects may include advice on registering for an area where there is less demand to improve your chances of an offer.

You can also get advice on private rented sector accommodation in your areas.

You could also look at PropertyNewsNI as the Housing Executive sometimes advertises properties which are available and which you can register an interest in.

## **How can you be sure that Housing Allocations are fair?**

The Housing Executive strives to ensure complete fairness in the treatment of all households and individuals in the provision of housing for those in need regardless of political affiliation, religious belief or racial group.

The Scheme has been created to be fair and open and to give applicants a choice in where they want to live.

If you are not satisfied with any Housing Executive decision regarding your application, assessment or offers of accommodation you may use the Housing Executive's Internal Complaints System. There are two stages to the complaints procedure and if you are unhappy with the outcome of the formal complaint you may ask the Ombudsman to look at your complaint.

Advice agencies who may be able to assist include:

**Housing Rights Service;  
Housing Rights  
Skainos Centre  
239 Newtownards Road  
Belfast, BT4 1AF**

**Office hours:  
9:00am to 5:00pm  
Monday to Friday  
Telephone: 02890245640**







This booklet is available in  
alternative formats.  
Please contact your local  
Housing Executive office.



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