

How we allocate accommodation

The Housing Selection Scheme



nihe.gov.uk
03448 920 900

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?

You apply by telephone 03448 920 900 or by completing an application form which you can get from any Housing Executive office or download from the Housing Executive website

www.nihe.gov.uk/index/advice/apply_for_a_home.htm

You may also call in person to your local office to fill in a form. One application form will allow you to be considered by all social landlords - the Housing Executive and all registered housing associations - who have housing in the areas you want to live in. When you apply you can pick at least one area where you want to live.

What happens after you apply?

The Housing Executive will contact you and make an appointment to assess your circumstances and to check that you are eligible for social housing. This assessment may be carried out over the phone, in a Housing Executive office or by visiting you. The Housing Officer will assess your need under the rules of 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 ie if you are a person from abroad; and if you are not guilty of unacceptable behaviour.

Are migrant workers and 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, and also not guilty of unacceptable behaviour which would make them unsuitable to be a tenant, 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 can be summarised as follows:

People from European countries

Most European Union citizens are allowed to apply for social housing but there are some restrictions. For example, European nationals who are not currently working or are out of work and have not worked in the past are usually not eligible for assistance. Family members of the people in those circumstances may also be ineligible.

People from outside Europe

If you need permission to enter or remain in the UK you will not usually be allowed to apply for social housing. However, a small number of people such as those who have been granted:

- Indefinite leave to stay in the UK
- Refugee Status
- Discretionary Leave to Remain
- Humanitarian Protection

are usually eligible to be considered for an allocation of accommodation.

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. 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.

You can change your areas of choice at any time. You need to contact the Housing Executive to do this.

If the Housing Executive has decided that you are statutorily homeless and you are still on the Waiting List after six months, your areas of choice may be widened out to include General Housing Areas around the areas which you picked. This means that you may now be offered properties that may not be in the location that you first chose. You should receive a letter telling you this and you can discuss these areas with your local Housing Officer and advise them if you think that an area is unsuitable for you.

If you've been intimidated out of your home 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.

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 four main categories.

1) Intimidation

Points may be awarded if you are at serious and imminent risk in your current home, and require immediate rehousing.

2) Insecurity of Tenure

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

3) Housing conditions

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

4) 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?

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 with the exception of some points which can be awarded if you need to give or receive support (eg to an elderly family member) in a particular locality.

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 and to 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 Allocations Officer looks at the waiting list for that size of accommodation in that area. The Officer looks 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. The Officer will 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. 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 works 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/index/advice/apply_for_a_home/available_properties.htm)

How many offers do you receive?

All applicants are entitled to three reasonable offers of accommodation. If you do not agree that an offer is reasonable for you then you should contact your local Housing Executive office and explain your reasons. If you are not happy with that decision you can use the Housing Executive's complaint system. If you refuse three reasonable offers, your application will be deferred from consideration for one year. If the Housing Executive has decided that you are a person who is owed a statutory homeless duty and you refuse three reasonable offers then as well as being deferred from consideration for one year, the statutory duty to you will end and all the homelessness points which were awarded to you will be removed.

The waiting lists changes every day as new people are added and other people are taken off and because 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 it is very difficult for the Housing Executive to advise you when you might receive an offer.

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 statutory homeless.

You should contact your local Housing Executive office to get advice on your housing options, including 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. The Housing Executive funds a scheme to help people access accommodation in the private rented sector, including help to find a suitable property, and help with, for example agreeing the lease, a deposit or rent in advance.

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 Executives 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

Middleton Buildings
10-12 High Street
Belfast

Tel: (028) 9024 5640

Monday - Friday

www.housingadviceni.org

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