

# Applying for social housing in Bristol

## What is social housing?

Social housing is provided either by housing associations (not-for-profit organisations that own, let and manage rented housing) or the local council.

As a social tenant, you rent your home from the housing association or the council. They act as the landlord.

Social housing is generally more affordable than private renting. It's also usually more secure. Social housing tenancies are longer term, and it is harder for a landlord to evict someone from social housing.

## Social housing in Bristol

In Bristol, there aren't enough social housing properties to house everyone who needs one, and houses are allocated according to need.

This means that households assessed as having a low priority for social housing may be on the waiting list a long time, or they may never receive an offer of social housing.

As a result, households assessed as having a low priority for social housing may be better off looking for an alternative, such as [private rented accommodation](#).

## How do I apply for social housing?

In Bristol, social housing can only be accessed via [HomeChoice Bristol](#).

HomeChoice Bristol is a partnership between Bristol City Council and housing associations across the city.

Through HomeChoice Bristol, you can apply to access social housing.

HomeChoice will assess your application and tell you if you're eligible for social housing or not.

To apply, you need to sign up [here](#) and then complete the online application.

It currently takes HomeChoice Bristol about 17-19 weeks to assess an application, and in some instances may take longer.

If they decide you *are* eligible, you can start to 'bid' for properties you would like to live in (more on this [below](#)).

## What information will HomeChoice need?

The information you need to provide during your assessment will vary depending on your circumstances.

The following things will *always* be necessary:

- ID for each adult in the house (e.g., passports and birth certificates);
- Information about why you want/need to move into social housing;
- Proof of address for all household members.



The following information *may* be required, depending on your circumstances:

- Medical evidence of any condition which gives you a specific housing need;
- Proof of pregnancy (if applicable);
- Evidence of your right to reside in the UK, if you're not a British Citizen (e.g., passport and Home Office documentation);
- Proof of your worker status (if you are an EEA national);
- Details of benefits, earnings and/or savings;
- Details of previous addresses;
- Information about your housing need. This is to allow HomeChoice Bristol to assess how great your need for social housing is. Relevant factors to assess housing need may include:
  - Your current housing is very overcrowded;
  - You have an urgent medical need which is being directly affected by your current housing;

- You're at significant risk of harm due to domestic abuse, violence or other harassment;
- You're experiencing financial hardship;
- You're living in seriously unsanitary or unsatisfactory housing (and an [Environmental Health Officer](#) has confirmed this).

## Am I eligible to apply for social housing?

You *won't* be eligible to bid for social housing if:

- You don't have a right to live in the UK;
- You're subject to 'immigration control';
- You've been found guilty of serious breaches of a current or previous tenancy;
- You're under 16 years of age;
- You currently live abroad, or are not normally a resident in the UK;
- You don't live within the Bristol City boundary or you haven't lived in Bristol for the last 2 years;
- You earn over £40,000, and/or have savings over £40,000;
- You own a home in the UK or abroad;
- You've lied on your HomeChoice application;
- You're currently in prison.

If you don't meet any of the above criteria, the council will most likely decide you're eligible to join the housing register and that you can then place bids on properties (following their [assessment](#) of you).

## About HomeChoice 'banding'

If you've been found to be eligible for social housing following your HomeChoice application, you'll be placed into one of four bands, depending on your housing need. Your housing need will depend on your household's vulnerabilities and how urgently you need to be rehoused.

Below is a brief summary of the criteria for each band. You can find more details on criteria [here](#).

### Band 1

This is the highest priority band for those in most urgent need of housing.

Below are examples of situations where you might be allocated band 1:

- You have a serious and/or life-threatening health problem which is directly linked to your current housing;
- You're about to be discharged from hospital and can't return to your current home as it no longer meets your needs;
- Your current home is at least three bedrooms short of what you need.

## Band 2

This is the second highest priority band.

Examples of situations where you might be allocated band 2:

- You're suffering from severe harassment or are under real threat of significant harm;
- The council has accepted you as being homeless and have determined that they have [a duty to permanently house you](#);
- Your current home is in really poor condition *and* an Environmental Health Officer has advised that the property should not be occupied due to a category 1 hazard. You can learn more about this [here](#).

## Band 3

This is a low level of priority. In practice, someone on band 3 could be on the waiting list for a very long time or may never get rehoused.

Examples of situations where you might be allocated a band 3:

- Your current property is overcrowded and you're one bedroom short of what you need;
- You've been accepted as homeless by the council (following a [homelessness application](#)) and you're [owed the Prevention or Relief duty](#);
- You have a serious health problem partly linked to your current housing which cannot be adapted.

## Band 4

This is for people who are considered to have minimal housing need. These people do not fit into any of the other bands.

In practice, people on band 4 won't be successful in being rehoused through HomeChoice Bristol and should consider other options, such as private renting.

[Have a look at our guide to private renting in Bristol.](#)

If you're unsure whether you've been placed into the correct band, [Housing Matters](#) can advise you on this.

## About bidding

Once you've been placed into a band you will be able to 'bid' for properties.

You can do this:

- Online (via your HomeChoice account);
- By phone (0845 270 1382); or
- In person at the Citizen Service Point at 100 Temple Street, Bristol, BS1 6AG. See [here](#) for opening hours.



Due to the shortage of social housing in Bristol, lots of people may bid for the same property.

The property will generally be offered to the person in the highest band, who has been waiting the longest.

However, if the property has been adapted for people with disabilities, it will likely be allocated to the household who would benefit the most from this, regardless of their wait time.

## When is the best time to place bids?

On Tuesdays, the council will upload all of their available properties.

On Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, housing associations can upload their available properties.

By the Friday of each week, all available properties that week will have been uploaded for you to bid on, so you will be able to see every council property or housing association property that's available around the city.

You can bid earlier than Friday, but you might miss new properties that are added later in the week.

On Monday, the 'bidding cycle' ends. You won't be able to place bids on Mondays.

Therefore, considering the above information, the best times to bid are Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays.

## How many properties should I bid on?

You can bid on up to three properties each week.

Only bid on properties that you think are suitable for you and your family.

You do not *have* to bid on three properties every week. Some weeks, you may find that there are no suitable properties for you to bid on, or you may find that there is just one suitable property for you to bid on.

You should try to avoid having too many weeks when you do not bid on any properties – if you're not bidding regularly, HomeChoice may review your banding.

## Which properties should I bid on?

Only bid on properties that you think are suitable for you and your household.

When thinking about whether to bid on a property, you should consider all aspects of the property, such as:

- What area of Bristol the property is in.

- Is it in a location which will allow you to get to work or get your children to school?
- Consider what the public transport links are like and how far you might be from your support network.
- The type of property it is
  - E.g., is it a house, a bungalow or a flat in a high-rise block?
  - Can you be open-minded as to the type of property you live in, or do you/your family have particular disabilities or needs which mean you must have a certain type of property?
- The features of the property
  - E.g., does it have a garden, does it have step or level access,
  - How many bedrooms and reception rooms does it have?

Some properties may appear on the list available for you to bid on that you do not believe are suited to you/your family.

When deciding whether a property is suitable to bid on, try to be as open-minded as possible – you are likely to have to wait a lot longer for a property if you are very fixed on your wants.

For example, if you're fixed on moving to a particular area of Bristol or having a large private garden or bathroom with a separate shower and bath, you will probably have to wait much longer to be rehoused.

It might be helpful to work out which of your requirements are preferences and which are needs.

You will need to weigh up your requirements with how quickly you need to move house.



*Housing Matters provides free, confidential housing drop-in advice sessions around Bristol. Find your nearest one [here](#).*