

THIS LEAFLET DOES NOT FORM PART OF YOUR TENANCY TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Finding a home

This leaflet tells you how you can find a home with us or move to a new one and explains the different options open to you. If you would like to find out more about homes for key workers, care homes or shared ownership, please contact your local office.

What are we?

We are a non-profit making housing provider offering a wide range of accommodation as listed below. Our aim is to provide decent homes, services and care.

What sort of homes do we provide?

We have a wide range of accommodation including: -

- Family homes - flats and houses with two or more bedrooms
- Homes for single people and couples - studio or one-bedroom flats
- Retirement housing - specially designed accommodation for older people. It is usually for people over 60, but we do have some schemes that accept younger residents. In retirement housing, you have your own flat with a member of staff providing support on site
- Homes for people over 50 - we have some bungalows and blocks of flats that are available only to residents over 50
- Supported housing - these are homes for people with particular needs
- Hostels - these are homes for single people, usually women, under 25
- Residential care and nursing homes for elderly people
- Shared ownership – this is aimed particularly at first time buyers where they purchase a proportion of the property and pay rent to us for the remainder
- Homes for key workers and students - usually provided for NHS trusts and universities

Where are our homes?

We have homes in many areas across the country including: -

- London and the South East
- West Sussex
- East Midlands (Northampton, Daventry and Milton Keynes)
- West Midlands

We have a number of offices in different areas, with our main office being located in London. You do not have to be living in a particular area to apply for a home there.

Who will you consider for housing?

We consider all applications to us for housing. However, we will normally not give you a home if you:

- do not have a legal right to live in the UK
- are under 18, although we may house younger people if asked to do so by a local authority
- have a history of anti-social behaviour within the last two years
- could afford to buy a home or pay for suitable alternative accommodation to meet your housing need. We may consider your application for example if

you need to move to retirement housing, but we will ask for the financial details of the property you own

- need to live in an area or type of home that we do not have

How can I get a home?

There could be a number of options available to you: -

Nomination by your local council - we have nomination agreements with all the councils we deal with. This means that we have agreed to give a percentage of our empty properties to someone from the council's list of people waiting for a home. If you are on the council's waiting list for an area where we have homes, you may find that you are nominated to us. If you need a home, it is important that you contact your local council to find out how to join their waiting list.

Our waiting list – in some instances you can apply directly to us i.e. Retirement housing or housing for older people. If we do not have any suitable homes available, we will put you on our waiting list. In some areas, we also have waiting lists for other types of accommodation – please contact your local office for further information.

Mutual exchanges - a mutual exchange is often the quickest way of moving home. This is when you 'swap' homes with an existing resident of ours. Before the mutual exchange can go ahead, you both need the agreement of your landlords as there are certain circumstances where you will not be allowed to swap: -

- If legal action has been taken against either party
- If either home would be too large for the household
- If the swap would cause overcrowding
- If either party owes rent to their landlord

It is up to you to find someone to swap homes with and to go and look at their home. If you are both interested in swapping your homes, you must let us know and we will ask you to fill in a form and arrange for your housing officer to visit you.

There is a range of ways of finding someone to swap with.

Homeswapper - residents of housing associations can look for other people to swap homes with through the Homeswapper website at www.homeswapper.co.uk. This is the UK's largest community of social housing residents looking to swap homes and is used by both landlords and residents. Many residents use Homeswapper to move locally or across the UK, and this can be a quicker way of moving than waiting on the transfer list.

Other housing associations and councils - many councils and housing associations also hold lists of residents who want to swap home. It is a good idea to visit the local housing offices, particularly if you want to stay in the same area. Your housing officer will be able to tell you which housing associations and councils are in the areas you are interested in.

Word of mouth and advertising - Some residents find people to swap with through friends or by asking around. You may see adverts in free papers or in local shops for people who want to swap their home. For your own security,

never give your address in these adverts – only give a description of your home and a contact telephone number.

Nominations from other housing associations - residents of housing associations can look for other people to swap homes with through the Homeswapper website at www.homeswapper.co.uk. This is the UK's largest community of social housing residents looking to swap homes and is used by both landlords and residents. Many residents use Homeswapper to move locally or across the UK, and this can be a quicker way of moving than waiting on the transfer list.

Referrals - for some of our homes such as supported housing, we accept referrals from other agencies such as housing advice centres, citizens' advice bureaux, Age Concern, Shelter, the Big Issue, Prison Link and Connexions.

Transfers - if you are already one of our residents and would like to move to another one of our homes you can apply for a transfer. You should also register for Homeswapper as this may help you to find a new home more quickly.

We keep a list of our residents who want to move to another of our properties. You will need to tell us that you want a transfer as there are some rules you need to follow: -

- We are unlikely to consider you for a home larger than you need
- You must not owe us any rent or other debts
- Your home must be in reasonable condition and you must meet the conditions of your Tenancy Agreement
- If you transferred into your current home, you must have lived in it for at least six months

If you would like to go on our transfer list, please contact us and we will send you an application form and your housing officer will then arrange to visit you. We will write to tell you if we have accepted you onto the transfer list. If we decline your application, we will explain why. We will also tell you where you are on the transfer list, but remember this can change as more residents apply or as we find people new homes.

If your circumstances change, for example you have a baby or someone who lives with you leaves, you must tell us because this could affect your place on the list. If you do not tell us, we may have to withdraw any transfer we offer you in the future because it will have been based on incorrect information.

We prioritise each household on the transfer list according to their needs. When we have a home to offer someone on the transfer list, we offer it to the household who most needs that type of home.

There are often far more residents wanting to transfer than there are homes available. In addition, we have to offer a proportion of all empty homes to the local council to house someone from its waiting list limiting the number of homes we can offer to people on our transfer list.

You could face a long wait for a transfer, particularly in some areas where homes are in very short supply. This is why we advise you to also consider the

other options set out in this leaflet, particularly registering with Homeswapper as this may help you to find a new home more quickly.

You can improve your chance of getting a transfer by being flexible in the areas or type of home that you want. Each office has a list of all the homes it has in the area by size and by local council. Your housing officer can talk through this list with you, explain where our homes are and how you can increase your chance of getting an offer to transfer.

Your housing officer will also be able to tell you how many transfers they have done in a year and in which areas, which may help you to decide your choice of areas.

Once a year we will write to you and ask if you want to stay on the transfer list. Please make sure that you tell us if you do want to stay on the list, otherwise we will cancel your application.

Are there any other ways?

In addition to the above, the following may be of interest to you: -

Moving to retirement housing - if you are over 60 and would like to transfer as you would prefer a flat on a lower floor or your property is getting too big, you might want to think about moving into sheltered housing. Your housing officer can talk to you about the options or arrange a visit to one of our retirement housing schemes - you can get a list of these schemes from your local office.

Council waiting list - many councils allow housing association residents to go onto their waiting lists for housing. Your application will be assessed according to the council's lettings policy, which will vary from council to council. You can get a copy of the policy directly from the council. You will have to be prepared to accept either a council or housing association home.

Shared Ownership - If you would like to own your own home but cannot afford to buy it outright, you may want to think about shared ownership. This is where you buy a proportion of your home, usually between 25% and 75%, and pay rent on the remainder. If you think you may be interested in home ownership or want further information, please contact your local office. There may also be a range of housing associations offering shared ownership in the area you are interested in, and the local council will be able to tell you which housing associations can help.

What should I do now?

In the first instance, you should contact our local office for the area you would like to live in. The staff there will be able to assess your housing need and give you guidance on how to find a home taking into account your own circumstances. If we can consider you for one of our homes, we will send you an application form. You can get help filling in this form at your local office, or if you are applying for retirement housing, any scheme manager will also be able to help you.

What happens next?

When we receive your form, we will arrange to speak to you in person and will either visit you in your current home or ask you to meet with us at one of our offices or a retirement housing scheme. Once we have met we will be able to

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assess your application and write to tell you what will happen. If several people apply for one home, we will always give priority to the person or household who has the greatest need.

You can get more information about our lettings procedure or a copy of our lettings policy from your local office.

What if I think you have not dealt with my application properly?

If you feel you have been wrongly or unfairly treated, in the first instance you should talk to the member of staff you have been dealing with. If you are unable to resolve the problem, you can ask for it to be dealt with through the formal complaints procedure. For more information on how to do this, contact your local office or refer to our leaflet 'Making a complaint'.

How do you check that you are providing a good service?

We regularly monitor the number of homes we let and the time taken to let them. We also ask all new residents what they think of our service through our New Lettings survey, and we review all the complaints and compliments we receive and use this information to improve our services.

Help and advice

If you have any questions, need help understanding this leaflet or would like it in another language or format, for example in large print, Braille or on audio tape, please contact your local office. Full details can be found in our 'How to contact us' leaflet.

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