

Home-Link: The Choice Based Lettings Scheme for Cambridgeshire and West Suffolk





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This presentation covers the following :

- An overview of the Home-Link Scheme
- Social Housing and How it's Allocated
- Eligibility and the Application Process
- Some statistics on the Housing Register, Number of Properties Advertised, Lets Made and Average Waiting times.
- Key things which can help speed up the Application assessment process
- Questions/Feedback



What is 'Home-Link'?



Home-Link is the software application and system we use for social housing applications, assessments and the allocation of social housing within the Cambridgeshire and West Suffolk sub-Region. The scheme consists of a partnership between the following 6 Local Authorities:

- Cambridge City Council
- East Cambridgeshire District Council
- Fenland District Council
- Huntingdonshire District Council
- South Cambridgeshire District Council
- West Suffolk Council

There are also currently around 39 Registered Providers (Social Landlords) who use the system to advertise their properties. A list of these can be found on the [Home-Link website](#).



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Social Housing and How it's Allocated



- When we refer to the term social housing, we mean low-cost housing, originally more commonly known as 'council housing'.
- Some of the Home-Link Local Authorities hold their own stock, but in some cases it's managed by Registered Providers, such as Havebury Housing, Sanctuary, Places for People etc.
- Councils have a legal duty to hold and maintain a Housing Register. There is [Sub-Regional Lettings Policy](#) in place, which sets out the framework for both the Housing Register and how properties are allocated. This is governed by the Housing Act 1996 (as amended).
- To ensure that the limited social housing stock is prioritised to those most in need, each application is assessed and awarded a Band (Emergency status, A,B,C,D or D*) according to their situation. Evidence of individual circumstances is required.
- Anyone can make an application via Home-Link for social housing if they are eligible to do so. This is a needs-based system for people who are actively seeking to move to social housing.
- Note: **an active application does NOT guarantee offer of social housing.**



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Eligibility

- Applicants must have a local connection to the area and not be subject to immigration control (no recourse to public funds). Applicants with a history of anti-social behaviour/rent arrears will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.
- Homeowners are eligible to apply, but will receive a low priority banding and are realistically unlikely to be offered a property. However, there may be extenuating circumstances which will be considered, for example very high medical needs which cannot be met in existing property, or repossession and no or very little equity available.
- All applicants must be over the age of 18 and possess capacity to hold a tenancy in their own name. Guarantor/trustee arrangements will need to be in place for those who cannot hold their own tenancy. Young people aged 16 to 18 can apply but would need a guarantor, and any property offered would be at the discretion of the social landlord.





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Making an Application

- All applications are made online at <https://www.home-link.org.uk>
For individuals unable to make their own applications, either family members/friends/other agencies can do this for them. In some instances, Local Authority staff can assist with a paper application form.
- All applicants are advised at the point of application of the documents they need to provide to verify themselves and their circumstances. Customers can upload their documents at the time of application, or by logging into their Home-Link account at a later date.
- The form doesn't time out
- You can save the form and come back to it later
- Once a Home-Link application has been completed and submitted, the applicant will be unable to place any bids until their case has been assessed and a band awarded.





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Banding

- Banding, A-D is awarded according to individual circumstances and our [Lettings Policy](#) explains this in more detail.
- If an applicant is experiencing more than one circumstance, the banding will take this into account.
- All applicants can challenge their banding if they do not agree, within 21 days of the banding being awarded. They are entitled to 1 internal review. If the banding decision is upheld, they are advised that they can contact the Ombudsman should they wish.
- If circumstances change after banding, applicants can submit further information to support their application.
- Letters of support from professionals, illustrating the circumstances, are very helpful.

Home-Link ensures properties are let in a transparent and consistent way

Once an application has been assessed and set to 'Live' applicants can start to place bids on advertised properties. They can place up to 3 bids per week. When they log in, they can see feedback on all properties they have previously bid for. This gives a summary of the status for each shortlist in terms of whether it has been offered, let etc, number of bids and rank.

Your previous bids

Advert	Date	Property	Status 📍	Bids	Your Rank
447	17 Sep 2020	3 bed house - The Green Road	Let	45	1-5
230	20 Aug 2020	3 bed house - Westmoor Avenue	Let	45	6-10
992	11 Jul 2019	3 bed house - Evans Way	Let	97	over 20
791	20 Jun 2019	3 bed house - New Road	Let	44	11-20
592	30 May 2019	3 bed bungalow - New Road	Let	26	11-20

[show all previous bids](#)



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Some Statistics!

3,468

Households housed between
2022-2023
(compared to 3062 in 2021-22 =
an increase of 406 lets)



11,659

Live Applications on the
Home-Link Register as at
March 2023.
(compared to **12,074** as at
March 2024 =
a further increase of 415)

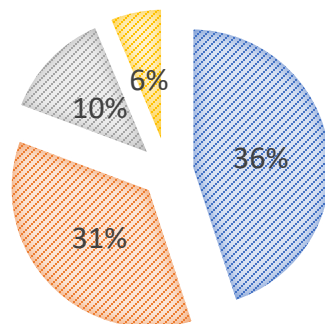
Number of Applicants housed by band

A = 1263 (36%)

B = 1103 (31%)

C = 380 (10%)

D = 119 (6%)



59%

Of applications contain a
working applicant

Social Housing is in high demand and availability is extremely limited

Average waiting time for social housing in each of the Home-Link Local Authorities:

Type / Size	CCC	ECDC	FDC	HDC	SCDC	WSUF
Sheltered accomm.	9 months	13 months	6 months	16 months	15 months	20 months
Studio general needs	20 months	11 weeks		4 months	5 months	11 months
1-bed general needs	14 months	8 months	9 months	15 months	9 months	14 months
2-bed flat or maisonette	9 months	8 months	8 months	9 months	9 months	8 months
2-bed house	14 months	8 months	9 months	13 months	11 months	8 months
3-bed flat or maisonette	16 months		4 months	20 months		12 months
3-bed house	15 months	10 months	9 months	11 months	13 months	9 months
4-bed	19 months	26 months	22 months	15 months	18 months	16 months
5-bed	25 months					18 months



Summary of Allocation Reasons during 2022/23

	Total	Summary of Lettings by Band Reason 2022-23	Total
Owed a prevention or relief duty	564	Urgent multiple needs	85
Lacking one bedroom	538	Emergency	69
Medical Need	482	Other homelessness	64
Homeless households (owed main housing duty)	441	Under-occupancy by two or more bedrooms or release of adapted property	58
Housing conditions	302	Urgent Transfer	44
Current supported housing resident	180	Health and Safety risk	25
Victims of harassment, violence or abuse	165	Financial Resources	16
Low Housing Need	130	Reasonable preference but no connection to local area	9
Need to move for social reasons	119	Sleeping rough	3
Lacking two or more bedrooms	88	Multiple needs	1
Under-occupancy by one bedroom	85	Grand Total	3468

The top three reasons for allocations across the Sub-Region in 2022-23 were:

- Homeless Prevention or Relief (564 applicants, representing 16% lettings during 2022/23)
- Households Lacking one bedroom (538 applicants, representing 15.5% of lettings)
- Households with a medical need (482 applicants, representing 13.9% of lettings)

Lets to Homeless households owed the main housing duty is the fourth most common reason and represents 441 applicants and **12.7%** of lettings during the period.



Properties Advertised:

Typically there were an average of **939** properties advertised through Home-Link per quarter in 2022-23

Q1 22-23 = 792 adverts

Q2 22-23 = 1012 adverts

Q3 22-23 = 957 adverts

Q4 22-23 = 998 adverts



The average number of bids per property was **79**

Key things which can help speed up the Application assessment process:

- ➔ Providing the right proofs with all the information showing
- ➔ Ensure supporting information is provided by professionals
- ➔ Care and Support Plans, which are essential to us to both assess the application and award the right band, but also to understand what housing may be suitable for the applicant
- ➔ The Care and Support Plan and any supporting letters explaining the persons situation and needs are also really valuable at point of offer, so that an RP can understand how best to support the new tenant and which professionals are involved.
- ➔ Depending on the severity of the additional needs, the Local Authority also need to understand the plans for holding a tenancy. If the applicant does not have capacity this really needs to be decided at an early point as an offer will move quickly.





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If an additional bedroom is needed for a live in carer or similar, the Local Authority would need to evidence this as early as possible to get the application up and running.



Being realistic about client's circumstances/needs. Not over-exaggerating, as this can sometimes have the opposite effect and make clients more difficult to house. Sometimes an “ideal” outcome and a “minimum suitable” outcome would help us to understand requirements



The link between the medical condition and how a move would improve this needs to be clear



It's important to remember that, even if there are no issues with the application, this does not overcome the potential lack of a suitable property to offer.

It is therefore helpful if Applicants have realistic expectations in relation to being housed.



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Questions and Comments

