



New Forest Homesearch

A guide to the Homesearch housing waiting list and allocation scheme

Introduction

Homesearch is the housing waiting list and allocation scheme for the New Forest. Most vacancies of Council or housing association accommodation in the New Forest district are allocated through Homesearch.

Homesearch is managed by New Forest District Council in partnership with a number of housing associations which own properties in the district.

To be considered for vacant properties, applicants need to register on the Homesearch waiting list. Once you have joined the waiting list, you will be able to check the vacancies which are advertised every week and you can apply to be considered for any that you are eligible for and interested in. Unfortunately, there are very few vacancies and many applicants on the list, so the wait can be very lengthy.

What happens after I have joined the Homesearch list

When you join the Homesearch list we write to you and tell you:

- Your Homesearch application number. You will need to refer to your application number in any future correspondence or when you telephone the Homesearch office, so please keep it in a safe place.
- The date you have been accepted onto the list.
- Your priority on the list.

- Whether we consider you have a connection with the district. If you have a connection you will be told you are a “Resident”. If you do not have a connection, you will be told that you are a 'Non-Resident' and therefore ineligible to join the waiting list, unless you are single and over 45 years of age, then you are allowed on our waiting list for our hard to let vacancies only. Some applicants are not eligible to be considered for housing because of their immigration status or because they have carried out unacceptable behaviour which makes them unsuitable to be tenants (e.g. anti-social behaviour, rent arrears).

How do you assess my priority on the list?

Affordable housing in the district is in very short supply and we need to make sure that properties are allocated fairly. As far as possible, the list is on a date order basis, so that those who have been waiting longest have a better chance of being housed. However, we also need to have a system for considering those people who have serious housing problems who need to move more quickly.

Applicants joining the Homesearch waiting list are separated into two different priority categories (sometimes called ‘priority bands’):

- Priority
- No priority

Most applicants who have a housing need are placed in the Priority category. Those who would like to be re-housed but don't have a housing need are placed in the No Priority category and are not eligible to remain on the waiting list, unless they are single and over 45 years of age, then they are eligible for our hard to let vacancies only. A very small number of applicants who have serious housing problems which need to be speedily resolved are placed in another band called the High Priority category.

Applicants in the same category are prioritised within that category according to their length of time on the waiting list. When you join the list, you will be placed at the bottom of the priority category you have been allocated into. The longer you are on the list, the higher up the category your application will rise as new applicants join the list below you.

These are some examples of applicants who may be placed in different priority categories

Priority category

- Applicants who are homeless or threatened with homelessness
- Applicants living in temporary or insecure accommodation (e.g. living with family or friends or in most private sector tenancies)
- Applicants sharing facilities with other households
- Applicants who have a home which is in disrepair or lacks essential facilities (e.g. toilet, bathroom)
- Overcrowded households
- Applicants who have significant medical or welfare problems which are caused or aggravated by their housing circumstances and where this problem can best be alleviated or resolved by re-housing
- Split households who need to live together
- Applicants who have a need to move to a particular locality to prevent hardship
- Applicants needing to return to a rural parish where they have a local connection
- Council or partner housing association tenants living in the district who under-occupy their home
- Council or partner housing association tenants with dependant and resident children under the age of 16 living in flats in the district

No priority category

- Applicants who would like to move but are considered to be adequately housed
- Applicants who want to move because they have problems with neighbours or anti-social behaviour in their local area
- Applicants with minor or very common medical or welfare problems which may or may not be related to their housing circumstances
- Applicants with medical or welfare problems which are not related to their housing circumstances
- Applicants who have the resources or capacity to resolve their own housing problems
- Applicants who would normally be in the Priority category but who the Council considers should have their priority reduced on the list because of unacceptable behaviour (e.g. anti-social behaviour, rent arrears, criminal convictions etc)

Applicants placed in the High Priority Category will be experiencing very serious medical or welfare problems which are caused or aggravated by their housing circumstances.

How do you assess whether I have a local connection with the New Forest district?

Applicants who meet one or more of the following requirements are considered to have a local connection:

- Applicants who have lived in the New Forest district for the 24 months immediately prior to their application or for 10 years or longer in the past.
- Applicants who have their work-base in the district and have done so for 5 years or longer.
- Key-workers (as designated by the Council), working in the district.

The New Forest is a popular place to live and there is huge demand for affordable housing from local people and from people in other parts of the country.

Whilst some applicants without a connection to the district are successful in being offered a property, we do take into account applicants local connection when allocating vacancies and if you do not have a local connection and are classified as a Non-Resident, your chances of ever being re-housed through Homeseach are likely to be low.

How do I find out about vacant properties?

The best way of finding out which vacancies are available is to look at the vacancies page on the Homesearch website newforest.gov.uk/homesearch

If you do not have access to the internet, vacancies are also advertised on notice boards in all of the Council offices in the district and some housing association offices.

Another way of finding out about vacancies is to telephone Homesearch on **023 8028 5234** option 1. Remember to have a pen and paper ready when you call.

The list of vacancies is updated on a weekly basis, every Tuesday afternoon.

How do I know which properties I can apply for?

If you are interested in applying for an advertised vacancy, you need to check that you are eligible to apply for the particular property. Each advert includes details on who can apply for each vacancy.

One of the most important things you need to be aware of is what size property you can apply for. Generally speaking, these are the rules on the number of bedrooms applicants can apply for:

| Family size | Size of accommodation |
|--|-----------------------|
| Single person | Bedsit or one bedroom |
| Two adults living as a couple | One bedroom |
| Adult couple, or single parent with one child | Two bedrooms |
| Adult couple, or single parent with two children of the same sex | Two bedrooms |
| Adult couple, or single parent with two children of opposite sexes | Three bedrooms |
| Adult couple, or single parent with three children | Three bedrooms |
| Adult couple, or single parent with four or more children | Three/Four bedrooms |

This is a basic guide only. Where there is a large age gap between children of the same sex different rules may apply.

Children and other family members must normally live in the applicant's household to be considered as part of the housing application. Children who do not live with the applicant for all of the time (e.g. when there is a split-family situation) are not normally considered to be resident and should not be taken into account when assessing how many bedrooms you are eligible for.

Some properties have different features (for example, a property with a small third bedroom or a two bedroom bungalow which is particularly suitable for elderly or disabled people) and there may be additional restrictions on what households can apply. These will be stated in the adverts.

Some properties are set aside for elderly or disabled people (for example sheltered housing and some bungalows). Details will always be on the advert for each property.

Sometimes we give preference to applicants who are already council or housing association tenants within the district. This allows us to make better use of our stock by transferring tenants to other properties (for example, when they are living in a house that is too large for their needs.) Again, the adverts will state if particular types of applicants will be given preference.

Some examples of typical adverts are below

This is a typical advert for a family-sized property

Address Lawford Way, Totton

Landlord Sovereign Housing Association

Type of property 3 bed house

Households eligible to apply

This property is for applicants in housing need with a 3 or 4 bedroom requirement with a maximum of 5 people in the household. Preference will be given to applicants with a connection to the New Forest

The advert states that this house is for people with a three or four bedroom need (and a maximum family size of five people). Applicants who need a smaller or larger property would not meet these requirements and would not be eligible to apply.

This is a typical advert for a property for elderly people

Address Hanover Court, Hythe

Landlord Hanover Housing Association

Type of property 1 Bedroom ground floor flat for Older People

Households eligible to apply

This property is for applicants aged 60 years and over. Applicants must have a 1 bedroom need. Applicants must demonstrate they will be able to manage a tenancy successfully. Preference will be given to applicants with a connection to the New Forest.

The advert states that the property is only for applicants who are 60 years or older. Applicants who do not meet these requirements or who need larger accommodation than a one bedroom property would not be considered.

How do I apply for a vacancy?

If you meet the eligibility criteria as stated in the advert to apply for a vacancy, you need to submit a Property Request to tell the Council that you want to be considered. The easiest way to do so is to use the Homesearch website newforest.gov.uk/homesearch. On the website, you can look for vacancies and apply directly for them online. You will need to have your Homesearch number available to apply for a vacancy.

If you do not have access to the internet you can send a Property Request Form to the Council (or take one into a Council office). If you need Property Request Forms, please contact the Homesearch Team.

Remember, properties are advertised from Tuesday 12noon and you will need to apply for a vacancy by midnight on Sunday. Applications received after then will not normally be considered.

You can apply for as many properties as you like each week as long as you are eligible for the vacancies but you must only send one request in for each vacancy you want to be considered for.

There is a very long wait for housing in most areas and if you are a new applicant it may not be worth applying for vacancies until you have spent some time on the list.

How do you decide who to offer tenancies to?

After the closing date of the advert, all vouchers that have been submitted will be considered to make sure everyone that has applied for a particular vacancy is eligible for that property. If you are not eligible, your Property Request will not be considered.

All of those that are eligible are put into order depending on what priority category they are in and the date their application was registered. At the top will be any eligible applicants in the High Priority category in date order, then eligible applicants in the Priority category in date order etc.

Generally speaking, the eligible applicant in the highest category who has been on the waiting list for the longest time will be offered the vacancy (with preference usually going to those who have a connection with the New Forest district over those who do not). However, for vacancies in village areas, the strength of an applicant's connection with the village is also taken into account. For further information on allocating vacancies in village areas, please see the separate information sheet which is available on our website.

What happens after I have applied for a vacancy?

After we have decided who will be successful for a vacancy, we will contact them to check that the details they have provided are correct. We are not able to tell applicants when they have been unsuccessful in applying for a property. We receive hundreds of applications for vacancies every week, the vast majority of which are unsuccessful, and we do not have the resources to advise individual applicants.

Successful applicants will normally hear within a week of the advert closing date. Once the successful applicant has been identified, their circumstances will be verified by the Council to ensure that all of the information on the application form is correct. We cross-check the information against data held by other agencies. If the verification assessment is passed, then the successful applicant will be nominated to the landlord (either the Council's tenancy management team or a partner housing association). The landlord will then contact the applicant and arrange for the tenancy to be signed. If the landlord decides not to accept any nomination, they will advise the applicant of the reasons for refusal.

We know that it can be very frustrating to apply for many properties and not have any success. Applicants who are new to the list may wish to wait for some time

before applying so that their application moves up the waiting list and they have a greater chance of being successful when they do apply for vacancies. Please be aware, we do not give allocations information out over the telephone. Once a vacancy has closed you will need to check recent lettings for information about the allocation.

Can I get help in looking for and applying for vacancies?

As far as possible, we expect housing applicants to look for and apply for vacancies. However, we offer assistance to vulnerable people who are unable to look for or apply for vacancies. Normally we will decide on the information provided on the application form whether an applicant needs assistance and we will write and tell them that we will be helping them.

If your circumstances change and you think you need help, please telephone Homesearch on **023 8028 5234**.

How long will I be waiting?

There is a serious shortage of affordable housing in the New Forest. There are thousands of households on the waiting list, and the wait for most property types in most parts of the district is very long. Applicants may have to wait for many years before they are re-housed.

Generally speaking, the more popular the property type and area that you wish to live in, the longer the wait. For example, houses are usually in higher demand than flats and some estates and areas are more popular than others. The more areas and property types you are able to consider, the quicker you will move.

Some towns and areas have low turnover of stock, as do some property types (for example, four bedroom houses) so vacancies come up very rarely.

A good way of finding out the number of vacancies and waiting times for the areas and property types you are interested in is to check the list of successful applicants. We publish the priority category and waiting list date for successful applicants on the Homesearch website and, using this information, you can get a good idea of the length of time you may be waiting, how many vacancies we have and what the demand is for specific vacancies.

Here is an example of the information we publish on allocations

R421 - Queensway, Ringwood BH24 1QF 13 September 2016

57 applicants

Successful applicant registered - 16 June 2010

Band - PRIORITY

This vacancy was for a three bedroom New Forest District Council house in Ringwood.

As you can see, 57 applicants applied for the property and the successful applicant was in the Priority category and was registered on the list in June 2010. From this information, you can see that demand is high for this type of property in this area. If a similar property becomes available in the future, demand is likely to be high and applicants in the Priority category with a much later application date than 2010 are unlikely to be successful.

Here is another example, this time of a one bedroom flat in New Milton

A263 - Andrew Lane, Ashley BH25 5QD 28 November 2016

71 applicants

Successful applicant registered - 7 October 2011

Band - PRIORITY

Demand is also high for this property, with 71 applicants. The successful applicant was in the Priority category and had been registered since October 2011.

If the date of your application is much more recent than the application date of successful applicants in the same priority category who are looking for similar types of property in similar areas, then you may wish to broaden your areas of choice (and property types, if possible). Or you can wait on the list and not apply until you have made progress up the list and have a better chance of being successful. If you choose to do this, you should keep an eye on the list of successful applicants so that you start applying when you think you may be successful.

Do I need to tell you if my circumstances have changed?

It is very important that you keep us informed of any changes in your circumstances as this may affect your application. Some changes will mean that you have to complete a new form, although you will normally retain your application date.

Examples of changes in circumstances are

- A change of address (in this case, a new form is always required)
- The number of people in your family increases or decreases
- You lived in the district for less than a year at the time of your application, but you have now lived in the district for more than a year
- The level of your assets or income increases significantly
- You have a new phone number or email address

You can tell us about changes in your circumstances by e-mailing Homesearch at housing.options@nfdc.gov.uk or by telephoning the Homesearch team on **023 8028 5234**. So that we are clear on how your circumstances have changed, we may ask you to complete a new application form. We write to all applicants every year on the anniversary of their application date to renew the application, to ensure they want to remain on the waiting list and to check if there have been any recent changes in circumstances. If applicants do not complete and return this form the application is cancelled.

New Forest Homesearch: The 7 steps to a new home

1. Apply to join the waiting list

To join the list, you will need to complete an application form and send it to the Council. Forms can be downloaded from newforest.gov.uk/homesearch

2. Wait for confirmation that you have been accepted onto the list

We will write to you, normally within 4 weeks, telling you whether we have accepted your application. If your application has been accepted, we will tell you:

- your Priority category (applicants in the No Priority category have little chance of being re-housed);
- your application date;
- whether we consider that you have a connection with the district (applicants without a connection

may have little chance of being re-housed);

- we will also send you some Property Request Forms

3. Look for a new home

Check for vacancies on our website newforest.gov.uk/homesearch, or call our message service on **023 8028 5234**, or check the notice boards in any of the Council offices and some housing association offices

4. Apply for a home

When you see a home you want to be considered for:

- Check on the advert that you are eligible to apply
- If you are eligible, apply directly on the Homesearch website
- Or complete a Property Request Form and send or bring it to a Council office.

Remember, the list is very long for many types of vacancies, so you may decide to spend some time on the list before you start applying for vacancies. Checking the priority category and application dates of successful applicants for the types of property you are interested in is a good way of finding out how long it will take to get re-housed (the successful applicant details are published on the website and notice boards.)

5. Selection

We create a short-list of all the applicants for each vacancy. The successful applicant will be the eligible applicant in the highest category on the list and then with the oldest waiting list date. For village areas, the strength of the local connection of applicants with the village is also taken into account.

6. Verification and nomination

We carefully check the details of the successful applicant to check that all of the information that has been provided is correct and that no money is owed to the Council or a housing association. Applicants who owe money (e.g. for rent arrears, repair costs, damage deposits etc.) are unlikely to be offered housing unless a payment plan is in place and has been adhered to. If the successful applicant's details are verified then the Council will nominate the applicant to the housing association or to the Council's tenancy management team.

7. Tenancy offer

If the housing association or the Council's tenancy management team is happy with the nomination then an offer of the tenancy will be made. If the nomination is refused, then you will be advised of the reason for refusal. Should you refuse the offer, your application on the Homesearch list may be cancelled.