



New Forest Homesearch

A guide to the Homesearch housing
waiting list and allocation scheme

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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 interested in. Unfortunately, there are very few vacancies and many applicants on the list, so the wait can be very lengthy.

How do I apply to join the Homesearch housing waiting list?

To join the list, you need to complete a Housing Waiting List Application Form. The form can be downloaded from the Homesearch website: newforest.gov.uk/homesearch

Alternatively, you can pick up a form from any of the local Council offices in the New Forest.

Anyone over 16 years of age can ask to join the list, but some people from abroad may not be eligible.

Once you have completed the form, you need to send it to:

Homesearch Team
New Forest District Council
Appletree Court, Lyndhurst
Hampshire, SO43 7PA

If you need help in completing the form, please telephone Homesearch on 02380285234

You must make sure you answer all of the questions on the form and provide all of the information we request. Failure to provide information may result in a delay in your application being dealt with.

It is an offence to provide false information or withhold information and we prosecute applicants who do so. All details provided are checked by the Council when the applicant is close to being offered a vacancy.

What happens after I have sent the completed form to the Homesearch Team?

The information you have provided on the form will be assessed and, provided you are eligible, you will be placed on the waiting list. We will write to you (normally within four weeks) to confirm that you have been placed on the list. When we write to you, we will also 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'.

If there are any problems with your form, we will contact you to ask for further information.

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 (eg 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. 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 (eg 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 (eg 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 (eg 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 can my application be put into the High Priority Category?

There is a severe shortage of affordable housing in the New Forest district and many applicants consider their housing circumstances should place them in the High Priority category. However, in order to ensure that applicants with High Priority can move quickly and that applicants in the Priority category have a chance of being re-housed, the number of applications awarded High Priority is very few.

The Council will decide which category to place you in from the information you provide on the application form. If we need more information to help us assess your application we will contact you.

The Council has set up a Homeseach Panel with its partner housing associations and other agencies to provide advice on applications which need to be considered for a higher priority category. The Homeseach Panel considers applications where there may be medical or other problems being caused or worsened by the housing situation.

Normally, we can tell from the details on your application form whether or not your application should be considered by the Homeseach Panel. However, if you think your housing circumstances have worsened after you have joined the list and your application needs to be looked at by the Panel, you can write to the Homeseach team with supporting evidence to tell us about your changes.

We will tell you if your application has been considered by the Panel and we will advise you of the outcome.

Many applicants ask for their cases to be looked at by the Homeseach Panel, but only a small number of cases are actually put forward to be considered by the Panel and, of these, a very small number are placed in the High Priority category. Applicants and their families often face very common problems because of their housing difficulties (eg stress, depression, asthma, ADHD or other behavioural problems, poor conditions in a property etc.) and these common problems are unlikely to be given consideration by the Homeseach Panel.

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 12 months immediately prior to their application or for 10 years or longer in the past.
- Applicants who have their workbase in the district and have done so for 5 years or longer.
- Keyworkers (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 account of 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 02380285234. 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 person with one child	Two bedrooms
Adult couple, or single person with two children of the same sex	Two bedrooms
Adult couple, or single person with two children of opposite sexes	Three bedrooms
Adult couple, or single person with three or four children	Three or Four bedrooms
Adult couple, or single person with four or more children	Three or 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.

Applicants should always read the full detail of each advertised vacancy to check whether they are eligible to 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.

Because of the serious shortage of four bedroom properties in the district, three bedroom vacancies are often advertised for applicants with a three or four bedroom requirement.

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:

Address:
Buckland Gardens,
Southampton Road, Lymington

Landlord:
Swaythling Housing Society

Type of Property:
3 Bed House

Households Eligible to Apply:
This property is for families with a 3 bedroom need (maximum 5 people). Preference will be given to applicants with a local connection to the New Forest.

This is a typical advert for a family-sized property:

The advert states that this house is for people with a three 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.

Address:
Bannister Court, Totton

Landlord:
New Forest District Council

Type of Property:
1 Bedroom Flat for older people

Households Eligible to Apply:
This property is for applicants 60 years old and over. Preference will be given to applicants with a local connection to the New Forest.

This is a typical advert for a property for elderly people:

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.

Address:
Meyrick Close, Bransgore

Landlord:
Western Challenge
Housing Association

Type of Property:
1 Bed First Floor Flat

Households Eligible to Apply:
This property is for single applicants and couples. Applicants MUST have a local connection to Bransgore and the strength of each applicant's connection with the parish will be taken into account when allocating the vacancy.

This is a typical advert for a vacancy in a village area:

The advert states that this flat is for applicants with a local connection to the village of Bransgore who have a one bedroom need Applicants who do not have a local connection with Bransgore or who need a larger property would not meet these requirements and would not be eligible to apply. Other restrictions may apply depending on the property.

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 apply by text message: text the property reference number, your Homesearch application number and your surname to: **07774 100245**.

If you do not have access to the internet or a mobile phone, you can send a Property Request Form to the Council (or take one into a Council office.)

Remember, properties are advertised from Tuesday 12noon and you will need to apply for a vacancy by the end of the day on the following Monday. 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 Property Request Forms 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 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.

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. We may also occasionally make direct contact with applicants to prompt them to apply for vacancies for which they may be successful.

If your circumstances change and you think you need help, please telephone Homesearch on 02380285234

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:

T409	Meacher Close, Totton, SO40 8XA	04 Feb 08
123 Applicants	Successful Applicant Registered - 18 Feb 03	Band - PRIORITY

This vacancy was for a two bedroom housing association house in Totton.

As you can see, 123 applicants applied for the property and the successful applicant was in the priority category and was registered on the list in February 2003. 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 2003 are unlikely to be successful.

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

NM550	Somerville Court, New Milton, BH25 5JB	24 Mar 08
49 Applicants	Successful Applicant Registered - 09 Jun 05	Band - PRIORITY

Demand is still high for this property, with 49 applicants, although less high than for the two bedroom house. The successful applicant was in the Priority category and had been registered since June 2005, so the waiting time for this type of property in this area is not as long.

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 effect 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:

homesearch@nfdc.gov.uk or by telephoning the Homesearch team on **02380 285234**. 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 in 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)
- and 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 02380285234
- 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 text your application to 07774 100245 (including the property reference number, your application number and your surname in the text message)
- 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 shortlist 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, then your application on the Homesearch list may be suspended for one year.