

Warwick District Council

HomeChoice

Allocation Scheme



www.warwickdc.gov.uk

What is HomeChoice?

HomeChoice is a scheme which we, at Warwick District Council, operate with several housing associations. We let available homes to those in housing need.

We advertise new and existing council and housing association properties through HomeChoice. This means that you will only have to fill in one form to apply for housing and everybody is assessed in the same way, no matter who the landlord is.

There are many more people applying for housing each year than there are empty properties to let and HomeChoice helps us to decide which applicants are eligible to register, and who will be given priority, for housing.

This booklet gives you the information you need to know about HomeChoice and how to apply for vacant properties. The HomeChoice allocations policy is available on the website at www.warwickdc.gov.uk/HomeChoice.

Who can apply for housing through HomeChoice

To register on HomeChoice, you must:

- ✓ be over 16 years old (we usually only offer tenancies to applicants aged over 18, so if you are under 18, please contact the Housing Advice Team to discuss your options);
- ✓ meet the immigration rules to move into social housing;
- ✓ not be guilty of unacceptable behaviour and
- ✓ have a local connection to Warwick district.

To have a local connection to Warwick district, you must:

- have lived in the district through your own choice for at least six months out of the last 12 months, or at least three years out of the last five years; or

- be employed in Warwick district or can evidence an offer of employment in the district, permanent or temporary paid work, for a period of at least one year; or
- have family associations i.e. mother, father (or other primary care giver), son, daughter, brother or sister who is aged over 18 who has lived in accommodation as their main or only home in Warwick district for at least 5 years before the date of your application ; or
- can evidence a continuing caring responsibility for someone resident within the Council's Local Authority area ;or
- are a person aged 18, 19 or 20 who was looked after, accommodated or fostered by Warwickshire County Council between the ages of 16 and 18; or
- are a former Warwickshire County Council care leaver aged 21 years of age or over, who is not a relevant student and who is vulnerable as a result of having been looked after, accommodated or fostered; or
- are in or evidences that they are due to undertake training or further education within the Council's Local Authority area, which has a duration of at least 6 months

If none of these apply to you, you cannot apply for properties through HomeChoice.

There are some exceptions where you do not need a local connection to apply for HomeChoice. This depends on your circumstances, the reason you are applying for housing and whether special rules apply to you. If you think that any of the following might apply to you, fill in a HomeChoice form, giving as much information as possible. We will let you know if you can join HomeChoice.

- You (or in some cases a spouse or civil partner) are a current or former member of the armed forces.
- You are escaping from domestic violence.
- You are a council or housing association tenant who does not live in the district but has the 'right to move' or a key worker and need to move to Warwick district for work.
- You have been found by a council to be homeless.

- You are living in poor housing conditions such as accommodation that is overcrowded or insanitary.
- You need to move to Warwick district to be near special medical or support services.
- You need to move because of your medical condition, a disability, or for your welfare.

You can find more information and guidance about the local-connection rules in the full policy available to view on our website.

How can I register?

You will need to fill in an application form which you can download from our website at www.warwickdc.gov.uk/housing or you can contact us by phone, 01926 456129 option 2 and we will post or email an application form to you.

You can pick up an application form from:

Brunswick Hub 98-100 Shrubland St, Leamington Spa CV31 3BD

Phone 01926 422123 for their opening times

Please fill in your application form in full, taking care to make sure that the information is correct. It is a criminal offence to knowingly give false information or to withhold information relevant to your application. A court could fine you up to £5,000 if you are found guilty.

You can return your completed application form in person to:

Riverside House, Milverton Hill, Royal Leamington Spa CV32 5HZ

or by Royal Mail to

Warwick District Council, Housing Services, Town Hall, Parade, Leamington Spa, CV32 4AT

When we have received your application form, we will assess your application using our banding scheme (see pages 6 and 7).

We will process your application usually within 21 working days and will

send you a letter confirming:

- your user number;
- your registration date;
- the band we have placed you in;
- the number of bedrooms you need (see page 8); and
- information about how you can view and bid for available properties.

If you do not agree with the band you are allocated or have been told you are not eligible to register, you can ask us to review your application. You must do this in writing within 21 days of the date on the decision letter. We will review your case and tell you the outcome in writing. Once you have received this decision, there is no further right of appeal to this Council.

We place applicants into bands based on their housing need. There are four bands in total and we will place you in the band which reflects your current circumstances. The following tables give you an indication of what band you may be placed in. However you should refer to the full policy document on our website for more detailed information.

How does the banding system work?

Along with our housing association partners we want to make sure that applicants with the highest priority band (the most urgent need to be rehoused) have the best opportunity to be rehoused. A property will be advertised with a preferred band, decided randomly by the computer system according to the following quotas:

- 60% for Band 2
- 40% for Band 3

Applicants in Band 1 can bid on every property that is advertised through HomeChoice to reflect the urgency of their housing need unless a property has specific restrictions applied to it such as an age limit (these would be clearly set out in the advert). Any bid from a Band 1 applicant will receive preference above bids from applicants in any other band.

Band 1 You will have priority for all advertised properties

1	Homeless applicants where we have accepted a full duty under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 as amended.
2	People with medical priority in exceptional circumstances.
3	Council approved clearance and demolition, lease expiry (6 months).
4	Acute overcrowding (lacking 3 bedrooms).
5	Releasing significantly adapted social housing.
6	Private rented sector properties identified as having insanitary or unfit conditions by Council's Private Sector Housing Team.
7	Special-agency referral from organisations, such as Warwickshire County Council Adult Health and Community Services; Children, Young People and Families Services; and Probation. We will assess these referrals on a case-by case-basis.
8	Care-Leaver referred by Warwickshire County Council as placement will end at age 18. Band 1 preference will only apply to applicants with an established local connection to Warwick district through employment, residency or family associations
9	Exceptional need to move as decided by Housing Head of Service where the only way to resolve the housing need is using discretion.
10	Foster Carers and adopters following a referral from Warwickshire County Council.
11	Under-occupation of a 4-bed property or larger.
12	Serious threat to a child under the age of 18. Additional preference will be awarded in conjunction with Warwickshire County Council's assessment.
12	Armed-forces cases promoted from Band 2, due to additional preference being awarded.

Band 2

1	Move-on from Warwick District Council accredited supported accommodation for those who are assessed as vulnerable.
2	People with severe medical conditions or disabilities whose current housing is unsuitable, and the issues cannot be resolved.
3	Care and support for those who need to move to give or receive ongoing substantial support as assessed by Warwickshire County Council.
4	Financial or economic hardship.
5	Applicants who need to move due to threat of domestic abuse, violence or harassment but who are not in immediate danger, as determined by an appropriate approved risk assessment by the referral agency.
6	Council approved clearance and demolition, lease expiry (12 months).
7	Overcrowded by 2 bedrooms in line with the bedroom requirement (see page 8).
8	Move-on from Care referred by Warwickshire County Council. Band 2 preference will only apply to applicants aged between 18 and 21 with an established local connection to Warwick district through employment, residency or family associations.
9	Private rented sector properties where a Prohibition Order has been served.
10	Two-for-One Moves where two social housing tenants want to move in together and will free up two properties.
11	Inheriting a tenancy you cannot stay in because it would lead to under-occupation or overcrowding.
12	Homelessness - where applicants are owed the Prevention or Relief Duty or are found to not be in priority need of accommodation or intentionally homeless.

Band 2 continued

13	Under-occupation where tenants of social housing are occupying a house and are willing to move to a smaller property.
14	'Child in need' where rehousing is recommended for the welfare of the child.
15	Armed-forces cases promoted from Band 3, due to additional preference being awarded.

Band 3

1	Homeless households who have been classed as 'homeless intentionally' in line with homelessness law when the relief duty has been ended or where no housing duties are owed.
2	People who are neither an owner nor a tenant.
3	Families with one or more children younger than 10 living above the ground floor.
4	Applicants permanently sharing more than one facility, for example a bath, toilet or kitchen, with another household.
5	Applicants under-occupying a flat, maisonette or bungalow who are willing to move to a smaller sized property.
6	Households who are overcrowded by 1 bedroom in line with the bedroom requirement (see page 8).

Band 4

1	All applicants without a housing need, with a local connection.
2	Existing social housing tenants who are adequately housed.
3	Applicants without a local connection (and not exempt from the local- connection criteria as set out on page 3) but who are in a reasonable preference category.

What can affect my banding?

If we think that you have acted unreasonably to make your housing circumstances deliberately worse without good reason or with the aim of qualifying for a higher banding, we will not give you any extra priority. You will stay in the banding you were in and have the priority you held before making your circumstances worse.

If you owe money to any local authority or housing association, you can apply to go on HomeChoice, but we may not allow you to bid for properties. We may allow you to bid if you have agreed a repayment plan for any housing related debt which you have kept to however, we or the housing association may not offer you a property.

If you do not place bids on suitable vacancies your banding may be reviewed, and you may be placed in a lower banding.

Failure to bid for any properties over a period of 12 months will result in disqualification from the Housing Register for a period of 12 months unless there are extenuating circumstance for your failure to bid.

What type and size property am I able to bid for?

We consider that each of the following will need one bedroom.

- An adult couple (an adult couple in a bedsit is classed as lacking a bedroom)
- Any other person aged 16 or over (including a live-in carer where the need for a bedroom would be accepted under Housing Benefit regulations)
- Two children of the same sex under the age of 16
- Two children under the age of 10, no matter what their sex
- Any other child

We only take account of children if they live with you permanently and it is their main home.

We take account of unborn children from 25 weeks into the pregnancy. We will assume their sex is the one that will minimize the number of bedrooms needed.

As a rule, you cannot bid for properties with more bedrooms than you need. There are two exceptions to this which are:

- you need to be a certain age (normally 55 or more) to live in the property; or
- you would be considered as needing an extra bedroom under the rules used for assessing claims for Housing Benefit.

Due to the shortage of four- and five-bedroom properties in the district, if you have this need, we will allow you to bid for three-bedroom properties, but we may not offer you a three-bedroom property if it means your household will be overcrowded.

As well as the number of bedrooms that you need there are rules about the type of property that you can bid for:

Bedsits will only be offered to single people;

Some, but not all, bungalows, and flats, are only available to people in a certain age range, for example aged 60 or more (where this applies it will be shown on the advert for the property);

Houses with two or more bedrooms are generally only available to people with children younger than 16. Exceptions will be considered to those with medical needs that cannot be catered for in other housing stock available and for those downsizing from 4 and 5 bedroom houses.

Further information on how the HomeChoice system works

All applicants, regardless of band will be able to bid for any property of the right size and type (including age-designated properties, subject to being of the required age). Applicants in Band 1 will be considered first for any property they are eligible to bid on. Preference will then be given to the applicant in the specific band designated to that property.

Band 4 applicants can bid for properties, but it is likely that they will only be successful if no applicants from the higher bands place a bid or accept the property.

Applicants within the same band will be prioritised in date order.

If there is subsequently a change of circumstances the application will be re-assessed, and the applicant may:

- Be placed in a higher band
- Be placed in a lower band
- Remain in the same band
- Be removed from the Housing Register

If you do not agree with the band you are in or have been told you are not eligible to register, you can ask us to review your application. You must do this in writing within 21 days of the date on the decision letter

The relevant date of the change in your circumstances will be used to prioritise between applicants within the same band.

Assisted bids

The Council reserves the right to place a bid on behalf of the applicant (assisted bidding) or to allocate a property through a 'direct offer'. A direct offer means that an applicant will not bid on properties but will receive one offer of suitable accommodation. Direct offers are made by the housing service outside of HomeChoice.

Number of offers

Applicants can receive up to two suitable offers of accommodation except for certain households awarded a priority due to homelessness.

Applicants that are homeless will receive one suitable offer.

Special rules applying to preference bands;

If you are in Band 1, you will have this priority for up to 12 weeks. The 12-week period will begin from the date you are registered in Band 1. During this period, we will only make one reasonable and suitable offer of accommodation. The Housing Advice Team will be able to make bids on behalf of applicants for any suitable properties that become available. If your bid is successful, we will not make you any further offers.

If you have not been housed, or received an offer of suitable accommodation, within the 12-week period we will review your case. In these circumstances we will either extend the time period or make one final direct offer of suitable and reasonable accommodation.

If you are a homeless applicant in Band 1 you will have 4 weeks in which to place a bid. After this time your allocated Housing Options officer will place bids on your behalf.

Homeless applicants in Band 2 with a Prevention or Relief duty owed to them who do not actively bid for properties on HomeChoice will have bids placed for them by their allocated Housing Options Officer. You will be expected to bid in the first available bidding cycle.

For all other applicants in Band 2 who have not reasonably bid for a suitable property within 6 months of their Band 2 award, the local authority reserves the right to place bids on the applicant's behalf.

The Council will not normally consider non-essential preferences concerning the location or type of re-housing requested by the applicant.

Failure to bid for any properties over a period of 12 months will result in disqualification from the Housing Register for a period of 12 months unless there are extenuating circumstance.

How can I view and bid for properties?

You can view and bid for all available properties on our website at www.warwickdc.gov.uk/homechoice.

We place adverts every week starting at 00.01hrs every Thursday and closing at 24.00hrs the following Tuesday. This gives you six days to place bids. You can place up to five bids on each advert. You should place bids in your order of preference. This is because if you are at the top for more than one property, we will only consider you for the one you bid for first.

To view and bid for properties you should follow the instructions below.

Step 1	Under 'Do It Online' click on HomeChoice for housing applicants.
Step 2	Click on 'Login'.
Step 3	Enter your User Number, this was on the letter we sent you when you first applied for housing, and set a password. If you have lost or misplaced this important information, please email: housing.advice@warwickdc.gov.uk
Step 4	You can then choose to view the current property list which will show all Council and housing association properties which are available for the current week.
Step 5	Click on 'bid' next to the property you are interested in. If you want to see more information about an individual property, double-click on the address. To continue bidding, click on 'return to property list'.

Computers are available at all Warwickshire Libraries and you can use these to view and bid for properties.

If you are not able to access a computer at your local library and do not have any family or friends who can place a bid for you, please contact Housing Advice on **01926 456129 option 2**.

How will I know if my bid has been successful?

If you are successful, the landlord of the property will contact you by phone or sometimes by email, it's important that you tell us if you change your phone number, or email address otherwise you might miss out on the property. You will be offered the opportunity to view the property and we will check your application to make sure you are entitled to the property. You will be required to pay one month's rent in advance if the provisional offer of accommodation can proceed.

If you have not heard anything within one week, it means that your bid has not been successful, and you should continue to place bids for other available properties.

We will publish details of the successful applicant's band and their application date on the website. This information can help you decide where you have the best chance of being rehoused and to consider other housing options available to you.

What if my circumstances change?

If your circumstances change, you will need to tell the Housing Advice Team. This includes telling us about the following changes.

- A confirmed pregnancy
- Any member of the family or any other person on the application who has left your household
- A change of name
- An addition to the family (we will need proof of residence and identity)
- Any change in income or savings
- Changes in status of accommodation (for example, you have received a notice to quit)

To tell us about any changes, you will need to fill in a change of circumstances form, which you can download from our website at www.warwickdc.gov.uk/housing or ask us to post or email a form to you.

If you have changed address, you need to fill in a new application form. We may change your housing priority as a result.

After we have received your completed change of circumstances form, we will write to you and let you know if your HomeChoice application has changed as a result.

Contact Information

Warwick District Council
Housing Advice and Allocations
Town Hall
Parade
Leamington Spa
CV32 4AT
Phone: 01926 456129 option 2
www.warwickdc.gov.uk

Where possible, information can be made available in other formats,
including large print, CD and other languages if required.

Tel. 01926 456129 option 2

