



# Homefinder Lettings Policy

**Ashfield District Council  
Mansfield District Council**

**July 2019**

<b>CONTENTS</b>		Page
<b>1.</b>	<b>Ashfield and Mansfield Sub-Regional Partnership</b>	
1.1	Introduction	4
1.2	Governance	5
<b>2.</b>	<b>Statement of Choice</b>	6
<b>3.</b>	<b>Legal Framework</b>	
3.1	Legal Requirements	6
3.2	Equality and Diversity	6
<b>4.</b>	<b>Aims and Objectives</b>	
4.1	Key aims and objectives for the Lettings Policy	7
<b>5.</b>	<b>The Housing Register</b>	
5.1	Eligibility – who can apply for housing	8
5.2	Joining the Housing Register	8
5.3	Joint applications	8
5.4	Qualifying to join the Housing Register	8
5.5	Declaration	12
5.6	Social Housing applicants from outside the Homefinder area	12
5.7	False Information	12
5.8	Housing Register Review	12
5.9	Closed applications	12
5.10	Data Protection	13
5.11	Cross boundary moves	13
5.12	Elected Council Members and involvement in decision making	13
<b>6.</b>	<b>Assessment of housing need</b>	
6.1	Introduction	15
6.2	Assessing applications	15
6.3	Deciding the effective date	16
6.4	Reduced preference	16
6.5	Significant Financial Resources	16
6.6	Behaviour	16
6.7	Reduced preference reviews and exceptions	17
6.8	Deliberately worsening circumstances	17
<b>7.</b>	<b>Banding Scheme</b>	
	Band 1 criteria	18
	Band 2 criteria	19
	Band 3 criteria	19
	Band 4 criteria	20
	Band 5 criteria	20
<b>8.</b>	<b>Housing Priority</b>	
8.1	Deciding who has priority on the register	21
8.2	Applicants owed a statutory homelessness duty	21
8.3	Other homeless applicants	21
8.4	Prevention of homelessness	21

8.5	Applicants in properties subject to Emergency Prohibition Orders	22
8.6	Tenants under occupying social housing	22
8.7	Rights of succession	22
8.8	Relationship breakdown of secure tenancy	23
8.9	Poor housing conditions	23
8.10	No fixed address	23
8.11	An applicant offered employment or apprenticeships	24
8.12	Golden transfer tenants	24
8.13	Overcrowding	25
8.14	Medical grounds	25
8.15	Welfare grounds	27
8.16	Notice to Quit	28
8.17	Owner occupiers	29
8.18	Rough sleepers	29
8.19	Qualifying agricultural workers	29
8.20	Armed forces	30
8.21	Mobile homes or caravans	30
8.22	Young Children	30
<b>9.</b>	<b>Finding a home with Homefinder</b>	
9.1	Advertising properties	31
9.2	Expressing an interest in advertised properties	31
9.3	Multiple properties	32
9.4	Selection process	32
9.5	Refusals	33
9.6	No interest in an advertised property	34
9.7	Feedback	34
9.8	Direct Lets	34
<b>10.</b>	<b>Offers of accommodation</b>	
10.1	Choice of area	35
10.2	Offering a tenancy to an applicant having a housing- related debt	36
10.3	Type of tenancy offered	36
10.4	Bedroom Standard	37
10.5	An Applicant requiring an extra room	37
10.6	Property eligibility table	37
10.7	Sheltered properties	38
10.8	Properties with adaptations	38
<b>11.</b>	<b>Local Letting Policies</b>	39
<b>12.</b>	<b>Reviews</b>	
12.1	Right to request a review	40
12.2	Complaints	40
	<b>Appendix 1 - Local Authority contact details</b>	41
	<b>Appendix 2 - Glossary of Terms</b>	42

# **1. Ashfield and Mansfield Sub-Regional Partnership**

## **1.1 Introduction**

1.1.1 Ashfield District Council and Mansfield District Council have joined to set up **Homefinder**, their sub-regional choice based lettings (CBL) scheme. The scheme delivers greater choice to all those seeking housing in the Ashfield and Mansfield areas. It also enables people to make better-informed decisions about their housing options.

1.1.2 This scheme is known as Homefinder. The partners are:

- **Ashfield District Council**
- **Mansfield District Council**
- **Participating Private Registered Providers (RP's) with properties in the Ashfield and Mansfield areas**

**These partners are known as Homefinder landlords.**

1.1.3 In order to be considered for a social housing tenancy from a Homefinder landlord, households will be required to apply to join the housing register.

1.1.4 When a property owned by a Homefinder landlord in the Homefinder area becomes vacant, the property is advertised in a variety of ways; such as on the internet and in a free property magazine called Letterbox. In exceptional circumstances a property may be let through the Direct Let process.

1.1.5 An eligible applicant will be able to 'bid' for a property if they meet the property's advertised letting criteria. The successful 'bidder' will normally be the applicant in the highest band who has the earliest 'effective date'.

1.1.6 Homefinder recognises that social housing may not meet the needs of all applicants on the housing register. Homefinder provides details of other affordable housing options such as private rented accommodation and mutual exchanges, as well as low cost home ownership and shared ownership properties.

1.1.7 Homefinder landlords advertise and let their vacant properties in accordance with the Homefinder lettings scheme. Under the terms of the scheme, in order to make the best use of their housing stock, Homefinder landlords can advertise their properties in accordance with local lettings plans.

1.1.8 Ashfield District Council and Mansfield District Council will ensure that housing advice and housing options information is available to everyone, free of charge. This includes information on how to apply for housing and where to get help to make an application if the applicant cannot do so without assistance.

## **1.2 Governance**

- 1.2.1 The scheme is subject to a sub-regional agreement. This agreement ensures that the scheme is up-to-date and meets national best practice guidelines. The scheme is managed by a sub-regional Project Group made up of representatives from the Ashfield and Mansfield District Councils, RP's and other stakeholders.
- 1.2.2 The Project Group meets quarterly to review and monitor the scheme. It also monitors the effectiveness of the lettings policy, ensuring it meets the stated objectives and complies with legislative changes.

## **2. Statement of choice**

- 2.1 Homefinder landlords are fully committed to enabling an applicant to play an active role in choosing where they want to live, whilst continuing to house applicants in the greatest housing need.
- 2.2 The scheme enables most eligible applicants the freedom to apply for accommodation in either or both the Ashfield or Mansfield areas.
- 2.3 In addition to giving an applicant the choice of where to live, the applicant will also have access to information and advice on other housing options within the Ashfield and Mansfield areas. Applicants will also receive help in finding the accommodation that best suits their housing needs.

## **3. Legal framework**

### **3.1 Legal requirements**

- 3.1.1 This Policy complies with the legislation and Codes of Guidance relevant to the allocation of social housing.
- 3.1.2 This Policy has been developed with regard to:
  - The Homeless Strategy published by the relevant local authority under Homelessness Act (2002) including any amendments, and
  - The Tenancy Strategy published by the relevant local authority under The Localism Act (2011)

### **3.2 Equality and Diversity**

- 3.2.1 Everyone has their own unique needs, skills, qualities and abilities. The Homefinder landlords consider that this diversity must be valued so that everyone can play a full and active part in life, free from fear, harassment, victimisation and discrimination (both direct and indirect discrimination).
- 3.2.2 Strong communities will thrive and prosper if individuals and groups are treated fairly, with respect, and given access to rights and services. Homefinder landlords aim to create an environment where this is possible and to put equality and diversity at the heart of everything they do. As an example, an applicant who is co-habiting, or in a civil partnership, will be treated in the same way as a married applicant.

## **4. Aims & objectives**

### **4.1 Key Aims & Objectives for the lettings policy**

4.1.1 The overall aim of this policy is to ensure that all social housing within the Ashfield and Mansfield areas is allocated fairly and objectively to those with the greatest housing need. Regard will be taken to any legislative requirements; related case law; local strategies and Codes of Guidance issued by government departments or agencies.

4.1.2 This policy has been developed with a view to meeting the following principles and key objectives:

- Meet the legal requirements for the allocation of social housing;
- Provide an applicant with the ability to be able to make informed choices about where they want to live;
- Improve local, regional and national mobility and to encourage balanced and sustainable communities;
- Ensure that every application is dealt with fairly and consistently irrespective of race (including colour, nationality or ethnic origins), disability, gender, sexual orientation, religious belief, marital status or civil partnership status, age, gender reassignment/gender identity and maternity and paternity or any other characteristics;
- Operate a choice based lettings system that is simple, easy to understand, transparent, open and fair;
- Ensure all Homefinder landlords work within the same framework and objectives;
- Assist vulnerable applicants in accessing the Homefinder scheme.

## **5. The Housing Register**

### **5.1 Eligibility – Who can apply for housing**

5.1.1 Homefinder operates an open housing register that, subject to certain exclusions outlined below, will be open to everyone over the age of 16, who are eligible for social housing in the UK.

5.1.2 Applications cannot be accepted from households that include:

- People who are subject to immigration control within the meaning of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996;
- People from outside the United Kingdom who fail the habitual residence test;
- People from outside the United Kingdom who are in breach of or whose residence does not comply with the European Union of Rights of Residence Directive and Statutory Instruments.

### **5.2 Joining the housing register**

5.2.1 To join the housing register, an applicant must complete an application form. These forms are available on-line or at an office of one the Homefinder landlords. Homefinder employees may also complete the application on behalf of the applicant over the telephone.

5.2.2 An applicant is required only to apply once to the housing register to be considered for re-housing anywhere within the Homefinder area for social housing.

5.2.3 An applicant can only be considered on one housing application. Where an applicant appears on two or more housing applications Homefinder will consider their primary application to be where they are the main or joint applicant. The applicant will be removed from housing applications where they appear as a household member.

5.2.4 If a former applicant reapplies to join the housing register they will be encouraged to create a new application by accessing and updating their original application.

### **5.3 Joint applications**

5.3.1 Joint applications will be accepted provided both applicants are eligible, aged 16 or over.



## **5.4 Qualifying to join the Housing Register**

5.4.1 An applicant who is eligible to apply for housing, may not qualify to join the housing register. An applicant will be excluded if they meet one or more of the following criteria:

- i) They have behaved in a manner that makes them unsuitable to be a social housing tenant (see section 5.4.4)
- ii) They do not have a local connection to the Homefinder area (see section 5.4.9)
- iii) They have held their current social housing tenancy less than two years and are assessed by Homefinder as having no housing need (see section 5.4.15).
- iv) They are considered by Homefinder to be unable to sustain a tenancy,
- v) They have knowingly given false information or withheld relevant information relevant to their housing application.

5.4.2 An applicant excluded under 5.4.1 (i), (ii), (iii) or (iv) may make a fresh application if the applicant considers they should be treated as a qualifying person. The applicant is responsible to show that the original reason for their exclusion is no longer relevant.

5.4.3 An applicant excluded under 5.4.1 (v) will be excluded from making a fresh application for a period of two years from the date of the exclusion decision.

### **i) Unacceptable behaviour**

5.4.4 In making this assessment Homefinder will consider an applicant's previous behaviour. Homefinder will consider all behaviour that would adversely affect the ability of other tenants and residents to peacefully enjoy their home and neighbourhood. Homefinder will consider:

- when the incident(s) occurred
- the frequency and seriousness of the incident(s)
- the applicant's circumstances at the time
- the action(s) the applicant has taken to prevent similar incidents reoccurring.

5.4.5 In making this assessment Homefinder will have overall regard to:

- all unspent criminal convictions (excluding minor motoring offences), and/or
- enforcement action taken in respect of anti-social behaviour, and/or

- the conduct of the applicant during any previous social housing tenancy, for example failure to pay their rent and/or other tenancy related charges.

5.4.6 An applicant will normally be excluded from the housing register if they have;

- a relevant unspent conviction(s) or
- a history of anti-social behaviour within the previous three years.

5.4.7 Examples of when an applicant would normally be excluded from the housing register include, where an applicant who has been convicted for the supply of, or the intent to supply illegal or controlled drugs; burglary or theft from a residential or commercial dwelling; arson; violence against a person, including domestic violence.

5.4.8 An applicant will normally be excluded from the housing register if they owe a social housing debt of £1000 or more. A social housing debt includes rent arrears, legal costs, recharges and other tenancy related charges.

## **ii) Local connection to the Homefinder area**

5.4.9 An applicant will be classed as having a local connection to the Homefinder area if they fall into one or more of the following categories:

- They have lived in the Homefinder area for a period of two or more years.
- They previously lived in the Homefinder area for a duration of five or more years.
- They have a close family connection with someone who has lived in the Homefinder area for a period of two years or more. A family connection is normally defined as being with a parent, child, or legal guardian.
- They have been employed within the Homefinder area for a period of 12 months or more.
- They have a connection to the Homefinder area because of other exceptional circumstance(s). This connection may include, but is no limited to the following:
  - They have been placed in accommodation within the Homefinder area by a specialist housing provider (for example, Women's Refuge, or the National Asylum Support Scheme).
  - They need to access specialist medical treatment that is delivered within the Homefinder area.
  - They need to return to the Homefinder area after being placed in accommodation outside of the area on a temporary basis, (for example, care leavers or homeless applicants placed in temporary accommodation).
  - They receive significant support from a carer, who has an established local connection to the Homefinder area.

- They provide significant care to a resident who has an established local connection to the Homefinder area.

5.4.10 For applicants currently in HM Armed Forces, the length of time they have spent in HM Armed Forces accommodation will be disregarded for the purpose of establishing a local connection to the Homefinder area.

5.4.11 Under Section 315 of the Housing and Regeneration Act (2008), applicants serving in HM Armed Forces establish a local connection through residence or employment in the same way as a civilian person

5.4.12 Homefinder will award a local connection to the following applicants:

- Members of the Armed Forces and former service personnel, where the application is made within five years of discharge
- Bereaved spouses and civil partners of members of the Armed Forces leaving services family accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner
- Serving or former members of the Reserve Forces who need to move because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service

5.4.13 For the purposes of determining local connection, living in the Homefinder area means living in permanent accommodation and will not include:

- Occupation of a mobile home, caravan or motor caravan which is not placed on a residential site; or
- Occupation of a holiday letting which includes a permanent building, hotel or bed and breakfast accommodation for the purposes of a holiday.

5.4.14 The following applicants will not be required to establish a local connection;

- Applicants with an urgent housing need due to an imminent risk of violence, where it is not safe for them to remain in their current area / district.
- Applicants who are part of a Witness Protection Scheme, or similar arrangement.
- Social housing tenants from outside the Homefinder area seeking to “downsize” into smaller accommodation. To be eligible, tenants must have held their tenancy for a period of 2 years or more and must not have been under-occupying their home when their tenancy commenced.
- Applicants from outside the Homefinder area who need to move in order to take up an offer of full-time employment, or a full-time apprenticeship.
- Applicants seeking to be rehoused in a flat or studio flat designated for persons aged 60 year of age, or older.

### **iii) Social housing tenant who has held their current tenancy for less than two years**

5.4.15 A social housing tenant who has held their current tenancy for less than two years will qualify to join the housing register if they are assessed as having a housing need and are assessed as being in either Band 1, Band 2 or Band 3. If a social housing tenant is not assessed in these bands they must have held their current tenancy for at least two years to qualify to join the housing register.

## **5.5 Applicant's Declaration**

5.5.1 When an applicant applies to Homefinder for housing, they must confirm that:

- The information they have provided is complete, true and accurate.
- They will notify their administering local authority (Ashfield district council or Mansfield district council) of any change in their housing circumstances.
- They understand that information will be shared with all the Homefinder landlords and with other relevant organisations in order to complete or verify information or to prevent fraud or protect public funds in other ways
- They consent to the Homefinder landlords making enquiries of any relevant persons to confirm the information disclosed within the Application is correct; or to provide the information where this is necessary to complete any assessment of housing need
- They agree to provide any documentation required to establish their eligibility to register for housing.

## **5.6 Social housing applicants from outside the Homefinder area**

5.6.1 Social housing tenants who currently live outside of the Homefinder area and who qualify to join the Housing Register will be treated as “general applicants” and **not** “transfer applicants”.

## **5.7 False Information**

5.7.1 Under The Housing Act (1996) it is a criminal offence for anyone to knowingly give false information or to withhold relevant information if reasonably required to give it, on any matter regarding the allocation of housing (see section 5.4.1).

## **5.8 Housing Register Review**

5.8.1 Homefinder landlords may conduct a periodic review of the housing register. The landlord conducting the review will determine the scope and frequency of the review.

5.8.2 If an applicant does not respond to the housing register review by the prescribed deadline, the applicant's application may be closed.

## **5.9 Closed Applications**

5.9.1 Applications will normally be closed in the following circumstances, which include, but are not limited to the following:

- A written request to do so has been received from the applicant (or their advocate).
- An applicant does not renew or maintain their application through the review process, or where they move and do not provide a contact address.
- An applicant has been re-housed by any of the Homefinder landlords.
- Notification has been received from an executor or personal representative that the applicant is deceased and they were the sole applicant.
- Homefinder determines that an applicant has given false or misleading information in their application.
- Evidence is obtained that confirms the applicant is no longer eligible.
- Information requested from the applicant remains outstanding after reminders have been sent, or the appropriate time limit for a response has expired.

5.9.2 An applicant will be informed of the reason(s) why their application has been closed and of their right to request a review of the decision (see Section 12 - Reviews).

5.9.3 An applicant whose application has been closed may apply to re-join the housing register. The applicant's effective date will normally be the date the new completed application was received (see section 6.3).

## **5.10 Data Protection**

5.10.1 An applicant's personal information will be held and treated in the strictest confidence and in accordance with current data protection legislation. The Homefinder landlords will not disclose such information to any unauthorised person or body. Where appropriate, Homefinder landlords will only use such information in carrying out its housing functions. Homefinder landlords may also use and/or disclose personal data to an appropriate third party in order to prevent or detect fraud, or any other crime.

## **5.11 Cross boundary moves**

5.11.1 Homefinder landlords will allow for cross boundary moves. This will make it easier for an applicant living in one local authority district to apply for and be allocated accommodation in the district of the other local authority.

5.11.2 Should inward migration significantly exceed outward migration the local authority experiencing significant inward migration may only allow bids to be placed by applicants with a local connection to that local authority area. In such cases, properties will be clearly advertised to show a local connection rule applies. Cross boundary moves will be monitored and reviewed by the Homefinder Project Group.

## **5.12 Elected council members and involvement in decision-making**

5.12.1 Elected council members cannot take part in the assessment and letting process. This does not prevent them seeking, or providing information, on behalf of their constituents, or being involved in future developments of this policy.

## **6. Assessment of housing need**

### **6.1 Introduction**

- 6.1.1 All applications will be initially assessed. They will then be placed in a housing needs Band according to their individual circumstances.
- 6.1.2 Upon receipt of all the required information, the applicant will be notified of which housing needs Band they have been placed in, normally within 10 working days.

### **6.2 Assessing applications**

- 6.2.1 All completed housing applications will be assessed in accordance with the Homefinder lettings policy.
- 6.2.2 An eligible applicant will be placed in one of five housing need bands (Bands 1-5), based upon their individual circumstances and the information they provide.
- 6.2.3 Band 1 is for applicants with severe housing needs and Band 5 is for applicants with no housing need.
- 6.2.4 All Homefinder landlords will operate the five Band system and all applicants will be placed in one of the five bands.
- 6.2.5 Upon completion of the assessment the applicant will receive a registration letter. The letter will:
- identify the Band and the reason why the applicant has been placed in the Band. If the applicant has identified a medical or welfare need they will be advised separately, after the assessment has been made.
  - provide them with their unique reference number.
  - confirm the applicant's effective date.
  - provide details of the Appeal and Review procedures.
  - inform the applicant if they have been temporarily suspended from bidding or have reduced preference, (*see Section 6.7*) and provide the reasons why.
  - detail the local authorities where the applicant has a local connection.
- 6.2.6 If there are any changes to an applicant's circumstances they must notify the assessing local authority, as soon as those changes occur.

### **6.3 Deciding the effective date**

6.3.1 An applicant's effective date will usually be the date on which the application is received, except in such circumstances where;

- They are moved into a higher band, when their effective date will then be the date their circumstances changed.
- They are given priority on medical or welfare grounds, when their effective date will be when they applied for this award.
- They are accepted as homeless, when their effective date will be the date when they applied as homeless, unless they already qualify for Band 1 with an earlier date.

### **6.4 Reduced preference**

6.4.1 Homefinder will reduce preference to the following groups of applicants:

- An applicant with significant financial resources (*see Section 6.5*)
- Where the behaviour of the applicant (or member of their household) affects their suitability to be a tenant, but the behaviour is not to the extent that the applicant would be excluded from the Homefinder scheme.

### **6.5 Significant financial resources**

6.5.1 Where an applicant applies to join the register and they have been assessed as being in housing need (*either Band 1, Band 2 or Band 3*), but the applicant has sufficient financial resources in order to obtain a mortgage, or purchase outright a suitable property within the Homefinder area, their application will be placed in Band 4.

6.5.2 The decision to reduce preference for this reason will be based on a financial assessment. This will take into account the applicant's income, savings, capital and/or interest held (and which could be redeemed) in a current home or other property along with their ability to get a mortgage and the size and type of property needed.

### **6.6 Behaviour**

6.6.1 An applicant who has a housing related debt to any social housing landlord and consistent and regular repayments have not been maintained, and they have a Housing Need they will be placed into Band 4 to reflect the reduced preference. In the absence of a Housing Need they will be placed into Band 5.

6.6.2 Homefinder expects that all repayments have been consistent with the agreement made by the applicant and the relevant social housing landlord. Regular repayments must have been made for a minimum period of 12 months.



- 6.6.3 An applicant who has a housing-related debt with their current private landlord and has a housing need will be placed in Band 4 to reflect their reduced preference. In the absence of a housing need they will be placed into Band 5.
- 6.6.4 Homefinder will normally consider the last five years housing history of the applicant. Homefinder retains the right to look beyond this timescale in exceptional circumstances.
- 6.6.5 Where an applicant (or members of their household) is eligible to join the Housing Register and falls within Bands 2 or 3, they may be demoted to Band 4 if they have:
- committed minor acts of anti-social behaviour; and / or
  - deliberately damaged a property and action has been taken against them; and / or
  - harassed an employee of a Local Authority or RP.

Where an applicant has been assessed as having a Band 1 housing need they will not be demoted to Band 4.

## **6.7 Reduced preference, reviews and exceptions**

- 6.7.1 An applicant will be notified of any reduced preference given and they are entitled to ask for a review of this decision (see Section 12). The applicant will also be informed if there is any action they may take to improve their situation. Decisions will be reviewed on a six-monthly basis, except in the case of an applicant in rent arrears, where the debt has been repaid in full, will be entitled to request a review of the decision.

## **6.8 Deliberately worsening circumstances**

- 6.8.1 Where there is evidence that an applicant has worsened their circumstances by deliberately taking action or failing to take an action in order to qualify for higher housing need Band they will be placed in Band 4. This decision will be reviewed after a period of 12 months.

## 7. Banding Scheme

- 7.1 All applications will be assessed on their individual circumstances and placed into one of five Bands based on the outcome of the assessment. Band 1 has the highest priority and Band 5 the lowest. An applicant is prioritised in each Band based on their 'effective date' (see Section 6.3).

The Bands are outlined below.

### **Band 1**

- **An applicant to whom a local authority within the Homefinder partnership has accepted the main statutory homelessness duty** (*Section 8.2*)
- **An applicant in a property subject to an Emergency Prohibition Order, or Demolition Order** (*Section 8.5*)
- **An applicant who was a social housing joint tenant and has been left in occupation at the end of the tenancy and who is under occupying their current home** (*Section 8.6*)
- **A social housing tenant 'succeeding' to a tenancy where the property is not suitable for their needs** (*Section 8.7*)
- **An applicant who does not have a right to succeed to a social housing tenancy but is left in occupation, but the property is not suitable to their needs and they meet the agreed criteria** (*Section 8.7*)
- **An applicant assessed as having a severe medical need** (*Section 8.14*)
- **An applicant assessed as having a severe welfare need** (*Section 8.15*)
- **An applicant in tied accommodation who qualifies under the Rent Agricultural Act 1976** (*Section 8.19*)
- **Current or former members of the Armed Forces, including Reserve Forces with a service related injury** (*Section 8.20*)
- **Bereaved spouses and civil partners of members of the Armed Forces leaving Services Family Accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner** (*Section 8.20*)
- **An applicant in Band 2 with two or more needs from that Band**

## **Band 2**

- **An applicant threatened with homelessness within 3 months or who is homeless and is actively working with the Housing Options Team to prevent or relieve their homelessness. Applicant must be considered to be in priority need and losing their accommodation through no fault of their own. (Section 8.4)**
- **A social housing tenant within the Homefinder area who is under occupying by one or more bedrooms. (Section 8.6)**
- **An applicant or member(s) of their household who need to relocate as they have been offered, or they have recently taken up an offer of full time employment or apprenticeship in the Homefinder area. (Section 8.11)**
- **A social housing tenant requiring to transfer for work-related reasons. (Section 8.11)**
- **An applicant whose household is overcrowded by two or more bedrooms. (Section 8.13)**
- **An applicant assessed as having a moderate medical need. (Section 8.14)**
- **An applicant assessed as having a moderate welfare need. (Section 8.15)**
- **An applicant who has been rough sleeping for 4 weeks or more. (Section 8.18)**
- **An applicant in Band 3 with three or more needs**

## **Band 3**

- **An applicant who is threatened with homelessness or who is homeless and is receiving assistance to prevent or relieve their homelessness (not considered to be in priority need or is intentionally homeless). (Section 8.4)**
- **An applicant living in poor housing conditions. (Section 8.9)**
- **An applicant who has No Fixed Address. (Section 8.10)**
- **A 'Golden Transfer' tenant who has been a tenant of their current home for two years, has a clear rent account for 12 months, no record of any breach of their tenancy and no anti-social behaviour record. (Section 8.12)**

- **An applicant whose households are overcrowded by one bedroom.** (*Section 8.13*)
- **An applicant assessed as having a low medical need.** (*Section 8.14*)
- **An applicant assessed as having a low welfare need.** (*Section 8.15*)
- **An applicant served with valid Notice to Quit.** (*Section 8.16*)
- **An applicant with young children living in a flat above ground floor and/or lacking access to a garden.** (*Section 8.22*)

#### **Band 4**

- **An applicant assessed a having a Band 1, 2 or 3 need but with significant financial resources.** (*Section 6.5*)
- **An applicant who has deliberately worsened their circumstances.** (*Section 6.8*)
- **An applicant whose behaviour, or the behaviour of a member of their household, affects their suitability to be a tenant.** (*Section 6.10*)

#### **Band 5**

- **An applicant in a property requiring repairs that are able to be carried out.**
- **An applicant who is in accommodation that meets their needs.**
- **Owner occupiers.** (*Section 8.17*)
- **An applicant with significant financial resources who is financially able to purchase accommodation suitable for their housing needs.** (*Section 6.5*)
- **An applicant who resides in a caravan or boat.** (*Section 8.21*)
- **An applicant who is currently in prison.** (*Section 8.10*)
- **An applicant who does not have a local connection to the district and is seeking to be rehoused in a flat designated for person's age 60+.**

## **8. Housing Priority**

### **8.1 Deciding who has priority on the housing register**

8.1.1 Each applicant will be placed in one of the five Bands following an assessment of their household's circumstances.

### **8.2 Applicants owed a statutory homelessness duty**

8.2.1 An applicant who is owed the main statutory homelessness duty by a Homefinder Local Authority will be placed in Band 1. The applicant will normally be restricted to bidding for properties in the local authority area that accepted the homelessness duty. An exception to this rule will be applicants fleeing violence and it is not safe for them to remain in the local authority area.

8.2.2 If an applicant fails to bid for suitable properties, or has bid for unsuitable properties, the local authority which accepted the statutory homeless duty will review the application. Following this review, the local authority may place suitable bids on the applicant's behalf.

8.2.3 If an applicant is bidding for suitable properties but has been unsuccessful, the applicant will continue to be able to participate in bidding for properties after their application has been reviewed.

8.2.4 In exceptional circumstances, a direct let of accommodation may be made to an applicant in order to discharge a statutory homelessness duty. (See Section 9.8)

8.2.5 Homefinder landlords will have regard to the statutory homelessness duties placed upon local authorities; for example, with regard to suitability of a qualifying offer of accommodation.

### **8.3 Other homeless households**

8.3.1 A homeless applicant, who is found not to be statutorily homeless, will be placed in Band 3.

### **8.4 Prevention of homelessness**

8.4.1 An applicant threatened with homelessness within 3 months or who is homeless and is actively working with the Housing Options Team to prevent or relieve their homelessness will be placed in Band 2 provided that the applicant meets the following conditions. The applicant:

- i) has or is likely to lose their accommodation through no fault of their own, for which there is no legal redress;
- ii) is likely to be in priority need.

8.4.2 An applicant who is homeless or threatened with homelessness but who fails to meet i) or ii) will be placed in Band 3.

8.4.3 An applicant placed in Band 2 as a prevention of homelessness priority will normally be restricted to bidding for properties in the local authority area that is helping prevent their homelessness.

## **8.5 Applicants in properties subject to Emergency Prohibition Orders**

An applicant in a property subject to an Emergency Prohibition Order under the Housing Act (2004), or Demolition Order with written confirmation from a Homefinder Landlord within the Homefinder area, will be placed in Band 1.

## **8.6 Homefinder tenants under occupying social housing**

8.6.1 A current social housing tenant in the Homefinder area who is under occupying their home by one or more bedrooms will be placed into Band 2.

## **8.7 Rights of succession**

8.7.1 Rights of succession apply if an applicant qualifies to 'succeed' to a tenancy when the tenant dies, but the property is bigger than the applicant needs. As a result, they may be asked to move to more suitable accommodation.

8.7.2 To succeed to a tenancy an applicant has to meet certain rules. Usually they must be related to the tenant, or be their partner, and have lived in the property for a certain time. The rules for this are in the tenancy conditions for the property.

8.7.3 An applicant qualifying to succeed to a tenancy will be placed in Band 1.

8.7.4 When an applicant does not have a Right To Succeed to a tenancy, but is left in occupation on the death of the tenant, Homefinder will assess whether the applicant meets Band 1 criteria. Band 1 will normally be awarded if an applicant meets one of the following;

- They are the spouse/civil partner of the tenant or they were living together as if they were the spouse/civil partner, or;
- They had been providing care to the tenant for a period of 12 months or more prior to their death or;
- They have accepted responsibility for the tenant's dependants or;
- The tenancy began before 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012 and they were a close family member and had been living with the tenant for 12 months before their death.

8.7.5 A review of the applicant's Band 1 status will be conducted after six weeks. If the applicant has not expressed an interest in suitable accommodation and/or they

have failed to fully engage with the partner landlord, the landlord may place a bid for suitable properties on the applicant's behalf. Following the review, if two offers of a new home are refused, the landlord may review the applicant's situation and may commence action to recover possession of the property.

## **8.8 Relationship breakdown of secure tenancy**

- 8.8.1 A social housing tenant, who was a joint tenant and suffers a relationship breakdown and their former partner moves out, would be placed in Band 1 if they qualify to move to a smaller property. This would be time-limited to six weeks and then be subject to review if they have not expressed an interest during this time (see Section 8.7.5).
- 8.8.2 If the applicant qualifies to be offered their current home, consideration will be given to granting them the tenancy. This letting would not be classed as part of the Homefinder Scheme.

## **8.9 Poor housing conditions**

- 8.9.1 An applicant who is currently occupying accommodation that is lacking in cooking, washing, toilet or heating facilities will be placed in Band 3.
- 8.9.2 An applicant who is sharing cooking, washing, toilet or living room facilities with people who are not members of their household will be placed into Band 3.
- 8.9.3 Where an applicant is occupying a property that is in significant disrepair and where the condition of the property is due to neglect, the property must be inspected by the relevant local authority's Private Sector Housing Team.
- 8.9.4 Priority will only be awarded under Section 8.9 after the property has been assessed by the relevant local authority's Private Sector Housing Team and enforcement action has commenced to rectify the defects; specifically where an Improvement Notice has been served and the landlord has failed to comply with the Notice. Priority will be removed when the Private Sector Housing Team have confirmed that all matters have been resolved satisfactorily.

## **8.10 No fixed address**

- 8.10.1 Where an applicant has no fixed address, they will be placed into Band 3. For example, an applicant is living with friends.
- 8.10.2 An applicant living with their family will be awarded Band 3 in the following circumstances:
- Where an applicant has previously established independent accommodation away from the family home, but has subsequently returned to the family home, or
  - Where an applicant has been asked to leave the family home and this request is confirmed in writing from the head of the family household.

8.10.3 Where an applicant has always lived in the family home, or the applicant has returned to the family home and is including the family members within their housing application, the applicant will be placed in Band 5.

8.10.4 Where an applicant is currently in prison, they will be placed in Band 5.

## **8.11 An applicant offered employment or apprenticeships**

8.11.1 If an applicant has a specific need to relocate as they have been offered, or they have recently taken up an offer of full time employment or apprenticeship in the Homefinder area, their needs will be assessed by the Homefinder Assessment Panel. An applicant will be required to provide written confirmation from the employer.

8.11.2 An applicant assessed as having a specific need for these reasons will be placed in Band 2.

8.11.3 Should an applicant lose their job before they have been able to move, or the job offer be withdrawn, the Band 2 priority will be removed.

8.11.4 Social housing tenants who need to move into the Homefinder area, or across the local authority boundary within the Homefinder area, in order to take up employment or work-related training will be placed in Band 2.

8.11.5 Homefinder will set an annual quota of 1% of properties to be let, or prioritised for social housing tenants requiring to move for work-related activities. This quota is to be reviewed annually by the Homefinder Board. Where a property is prioritised for social housing tenants transferring for work-related reasons, but no match is able to be made to a prioritised tenant, the property is to be let as per normal procedures. The property letting will be counted towards the quota.

## **8.12 'Golden Transfer' tenants**

8.12.1 Current Social Housing tenants living within the Homefinder area who want to move to another property will be placed in Band 3 when the following tenancy conditions are met;

- They have held a tenancy of their current home for two years or more, **and**
- They have no current rent arrears and have kept a clear rent account for 12 consecutive months, **and**
- They have no record of any other breaches of their tenancy and no anti-social behaviour record.

8.12.2 Should an applicant breach any of these conditions, after being assessed as a "Golden Transfer" tenant, then the priority band will be removed. The applicant will then be placed in the band appropriate to their new circumstances.



## **8.13 Overcrowding**

- 8.13.1 An applicant will be placed in Band 2 if they are overcrowded by two or more bedrooms. An applicant will be placed in Band 3 if they are overcrowded by one bedroom.
- 8.13.2 Overcrowding priority will not be given if a person has moved into the applicant's household making them overcrowded. The priority will not normally be given if the applicant moved into accommodation knowing that by doing so they would become overcrowded.
- 8.13.3 Overcrowding priority will only be awarded if an applicant is the main carer for a child. The property must also be the child's main residence.
- 8.13.4 Homefinder will use the Property Eligibility Table (section 10.6) to assess the number of bedrooms that an applicant needs. Homefinder will also take into account the bedroom standard criteria (section 10.4) to assess if an applicant is considered to be overcrowded.
- 8.13.5 When assessing an applicant's eligibility for priority on grounds of overcrowding, Homefinder will have regard to the action(s) taken by the applicant to find suitable alternative accommodation to remedy their overcrowding. Homefinder will take account of the applicant's ability to access accommodation in the private rented sector.

## **8.14 Medical grounds**

- 8.14.1 An applicant may be awarded priority on medical grounds. If an applicant indicates a move will benefit their health or a member of their household's health, their circumstances will be assessed. Evidence will be required to support the applicant's case.
- 8.14.2 In deciding the level of medical need an applicant has, Homefinder will consider if the provision of adaptations to their current property will assist with improving their housing circumstances.
- 8.14.3 An applicant requiring a move on medical grounds will have their circumstances assessed. Priority will then be awarded at one of the three appropriate levels as shown below:

### **Severe**

An applicant cannot continue to live, or return to live in their current accommodation, and they have a need for rehousing into accommodation suitable for their immediate needs. For example, an applicant who is unable to be discharged from hospital into their current accommodation (See table 8.15.6).

### **Moderate**

An applicant can continue to live in their current accommodation but has an urgent need for suitable alternative accommodation. This is because their medical condition and/or disability is having a substantial negative effect on their ability to live in their present accommodation. (See table 8.15.6)

**Low**

An applicant can continue to live in their current accommodation but has a need for suitable alternative accommodation. This is because their medical condition and/or disability is having a significant negative effect on their ability to live in their present accommodation. (See table 8.15.6)

8.14.4 An applicant seeking rehousing on medical grounds will initially have their circumstances assessed by their administering Local Authority. If, following the initial assessment, the applicant is assessed as having a severe or potentially severe medical need their application will be considered by the Homefinder Assessment Panel.

8.14.5 The effect that an applicant’s housing has on their medical condition will determine which Band they are placed in.

8.14.6 The table below is used as a guide to determine priority:

	<b>Medical condition</b>		
<b>Effect on housing</b>	Severe	Moderate	Low
Severe	Band 1	Band 2	Band 2
Moderate	Band 2	Band 2	Band 3
Low	Band 3	Band 3	Band 3

8.14.7 Where an applicant has been awarded Band 1 medical priority, the applicant will normally be restricted to bidding within the local authority area to which the applicant current resides. If the applicant resides outside of the Homefinder area then the applicant will be restricted to bidding within the area to which they have established a local connection. Bidding restrictions will be considered by the Homefinder Assessment Panel.

**8.15 Welfare grounds**

8.15.1 An applicant with care or support needs, or other serious and enduring social needs may be awarded priority on welfare grounds.

8.15.2 Priority will be awarded at one of the three appropriate levels as shown below:

**Severe**

There is a critical and immediate risk to the welfare of a member of the household.

Examples include:

- Where an applicant needs to provide essential support to carry out day to day activities such as washing, dressing and cooking and the support is not available by any other means.

- Where there is a need to protect a vulnerable person and there is a firm recommendation for rehousing from a statutory agency.
- Where there is a protocol for rehousing Care Leavers. In these circumstances the applicant will normally be restricted to rehousing in the Local Authority area where the Band 1 decision was made.

### **Moderate**

There is a significant risk to the welfare of a member of the household.

Examples include:

- A social housing tenant referred by a Homefinder landlord who is under-occupying their current accommodation by one bedroom and is at risk of losing their tenancy because of financial hardship.
- An applicant who is experiencing serious financial hardship and is unable to sustain their current accommodation through no fault of their own.
- Victims of harassment and abuse who remain in their current accommodation, but where the situation is having a serious detrimental effect on their well-being.
- Where an applicant needs to provide necessary support to carry out day-to-day activities such as washing, dressing and cooking and the support is not available by any other means.

### **Low**

There is an identified concern to the welfare of a member of the household where there is clear supporting evidence to show that the welfare concern can be alleviated through their rehousing.

Examples include:

- An applicant who is socially isolated and a move to access identified support network would improve their emotional well-being.

8.15.3 An applicant seeking rehousing on welfare grounds will initially have their circumstances assessed by their administering Local Authority. If, following the initial assessment, the applicant is assessed as having a severe or potentially severe welfare need their application will be considered by the Homefinder Assessment Panel.

8.15.4 If an applicant or member of their household has a severe welfare issue then they will be placed into Band 1. If an applicant or member of their household has a moderate welfare issue, they will be placed into Band 2 and those with a low welfare issue assessment will be placed into Band 3.

8.15.5 The Homefinder choice based lettings teams are not able to offer immediate emergency accommodation. Where it is unreasonable for an applicant to remain within their current accommodation, for example they are experiencing

domestic violence, Homefinder will refer the applicant to the appropriate local authority's homelessness service. Homefinder will not carry out a welfare or medical assessment for applicants who have been awarded a statutory homeless duty.

- 8.15.6 As part of the welfare assessment Homefinder will consider where it is safe and suitable for the applicant to be rehoused. The Banding award will only apply to these locations. For example, if an applicant is experiencing violence or harassment the welfare award may only apply to properties that are in a suitably safe location.
- 8.15.7 Where an applicant has been awarded welfare priority, the applicant will normally be restricted to bidding within the local authority in which the applicant currently resides. If the applicant resides outside of the Homefinder area then the applicant will be restricted to bidding within the area to which they have a clear welfare need for rehousing.

## **8.16 Notice to Quit**

- 8.16.1 An applicant in tied accommodation or in an assured shorthold tenancy who have received a legal 'Notice to Quit' from their landlord will be placed in Band 3 if there is less than two months before the notice expires.

## **8.17 Owner occupiers**

- 8.17.1 An owner-occupier will be placed in Band 5 unless they have been assessed as having an exceptional housing need.
- 8.17.2 Homefinder considers an owner occupier to be in exceptional housing need only if they meet any of the following circumstances:
- Where they fall within any of the Band 1 criteria, then Band 1 will be awarded, or
  - Where they have been assessed as meeting the prevention of homelessness criteria (see Section 8.4), then Band 2 will be awarded, or
  - Where they have been served with a Notice of Eviction from the Court which confirms that a date for the repossession of the property has been set, then Band 3 will be awarded from the date that the Notice of Eviction was granted.
- 8.17.3 For owner-occupiers with an exceptional housing need, Homefinder will undertake a financial assessment to determine whether they have sufficient resources in order to obtain a mortgage, or purchase outright a suitable property within the Homefinder area. This assessment will include any potential equity released through the sale of a property and any equity received during

the last five years. If the financial assessment determines the owner-occupier is able to access alternative suitable accommodation they will remain in Band 5.

## **8.18 Rough Sleepers**

8.18.1 An applicant who has been rough sleeping for a period of four weeks or more within the Homefinder area, who have previously received and followed housing options advice, and for whom confirmation of rough sleeping has been received, will be placed in Band 2.

## **8.19 Qualifying Agricultural Workers (Protection under the Rent Agricultural Act (1976))**

8.19.1 Agricultural workers who are provided with accommodation as a condition of their employment may be protected against eviction even if their employment comes to an end.

8.19.2 A qualifying agricultural worker can only be asked to leave their accommodation following a decision by an Agricultural Dwelling House Advisory Committee (ADHAC).

8.19.3 If an ADHAC decides that a worker must leave their accommodation, the local authority must use their best endeavours to offer housing to the worker. In such cases, the applicant will be placed in Band 1.

## **8.20 Armed Forces**

8.20.1 An applicant who has been assessed as having a Band 2 or Band 3 housing need and who meets one of the following criteria will be placed into Band 1.

- Serving members of the regular forces who are suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is wholly or partly attributable to their service
- Former members of the regular forces. Bereaved spouses or civil partners of those serving in the regular forces where (i) the bereaved spouse or civil partner has recently ceased, or will cease to be entitled, to reside in Ministry of Defence accommodation following the death of their service spouse or civil partner, and (ii) the death was wholly or partly attributable to their service
- Existing or former members of the reserve forces who are suffering from a serious injury, illness, or disability which is wholly or partly attributable to their service

8.20.2 If an applicant is not successful in bidding for properties prior to being discharged, they will then be required to be assessed under homelessness provisions in Part VII of The Housing Act 1996.

## **8.21 Mobile Homes, Houseboats or Caravans**

8.21.1 An applicant living in a caravan, mobile home or houseboat will be placed in Band 5 if there is no other housing need.

## **8.22 Young children**

8.22.1 An applicant with a dependent child under the age of five who is living in a flat above ground floor, or where the property lacks access to a garden will be placed in Band 3. In making this assessment Homefinder will consider whether an applicant has deliberately worsened their circumstances (see Section 6.12).

## **9. Finding a home with Homefinder**

### **9.1 Advertising Properties**

9.1.1 All Homefinder landlords will advertise their properties as widely as possible.

9.1.2 Properties within the Scheme will be advertised using the following methods:

- The Homefinder website: [www.amhomefinder.co.uk](http://www.amhomefinder.co.uk)
- Local Council Offices
- A property newsletter, called "Letterbox"

9.1.3 Property adverts should contain as much information as possible in order to help the applicant decide if the property is likely to be suitable for their needs. For example:

- Location
- Property type (house, flat, bungalow, maisonette)
- Number of bedrooms
- Rent payable
- Details of any property adaptations

### **9.2 Expressing an interest in advertised properties**

9.2.1 If an applicant meets the eligibility criteria of an advert they may apply for an available property at any time within the bidding cycle. The bidding cycle will run from 00:01 hours Wednesday to 23:59 hours the following Monday.

9.2.2 An applicant will be able to express an interest in up to two eligible properties per bidding cycle.

9.2.3 An applicant who is unable to participate in bidding or has an identified support need may be offered assistance to use the Scheme.

9.2.4 If an applicant who is placed in housing need Band 1 or 2 fails to bid for suitable properties the administering local authority may review the applicant's housing application. Normally the review will take place six weeks after the priority band was awarded. The purpose of the review is to provide appropriate advice and support, to ensure the applicant is placing bids so that they are rehoused in a timely manner. The review will consider the following points

- Suitability of the applicant's current accommodation
- The availability of suitable accommodation within the Homefinder area
- Any change in the applicant's circumstances, for example, medical or support needs.

9.2.5 The review outcome may recommend additional actions to find suitable accommodation. This may include the following

- Provision of tenancy support or referral to appropriate support agency
- Bids for suitable properties being placed on behalf of the applicant

### **9.3 Multiple property adverts**

- 9.3.1 Where there are multiple properties available within a new development, they may be advertised within one advert, rather than individual property adverts. In such circumstances, the multiple advert will clearly state the number of properties available.
- 9.3.2 Where a bid is placed for a multiple property advert, this bid will be counted as one of the two available bids.

### **9.4 Selection process**

- 9.4.1 At the end of the bidding cycle a shortlist of applicants will be produced. The shortlist will normally be ordered according to the housing need Band . Band 1 being the highest and Band 5 being the lowest priority Band . If there is more than one applicant within a housing need Band, the applicant with the earliest effective date will be placed above applicants within that Band with a later effective date. For example, an applicant in Band 3 with an effective date of 1<sup>st</sup> March 2010 will be placed above an applicant in Band 3 with an effective date of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010.

In some circumstances other criteria may take precedence in the ordering of bids. For example, if a property is advertised with preference to applicants in employment, applicants who have stated on their housing application that they are employed will be prioritised above those who are not. The banding will be the secondary consideration.

- 9.4.2 The Homefinder landlord will review the applicant at the top of the shortlist to ensure their housing application is up to date and their band and effective date is correct. If the information is correct the applicant will be contacted by the landlord. If the information is incorrect the housing application will be re-assessed and the applicant's position on the shortlist will be reviewed as necessary.
- 9.4.3 An applicant may not be considered for the tenancy if;
- They have made false declarations or failed to disclose relevant information (see Section 5.4.1);
  - There has been a change in their circumstance which adversely affects their eligibility for the property;
  - There is an issue identified that makes them unsuitable to be a tenant ;
  - They are an existing social housing tenant and they have failed a property transfer inspection. In such circumstances, the applicant will not be considered for a further offer of accommodation for a minimum period of three months, or until the property is in a satisfactory condition, whichever is the longer period.
  - The property has been assessed by the landlord as being unsuitable for the applicant's needs. Examples where a property may be unsuitable include



- The property is unaffordable for the applicant. This will be determined by a financial assessment of the applicant's income and expenditure as conducted by the landlord
- The location of the property is unsafe or inappropriate and will not address the applicant's housing needs. For example where an applicant is experiencing violence or harassment and the location of the property may lead to a continuation of the problems.
- The property is not suitable for adaptation to meet the needs of the applicant.

In such circumstances the applicant's housing application will be updated with the reasons why they are ineligible to be considered for the tenancy.

9.4.4 When the Homefinder landlord has identified an applicant eligible to be considered for the tenancy the applicant will be made a provisional offer of the tenancy. The applicant will be provided with a reasonable amount of time to decide whether to accept the provisional offer, this will normally be three working days, from the date of the letter.

9.4.5 If the applicant fails to respond to the provisional offer of the tenancy the Homefinder landlord will consider this to be a refusal of the offer and the landlord will contact the next eligible applicant.

## **9.5 Refusals**

9.5.1 Where a provisional or formal offer of a tenancy is refused by an applicant, the next applicant on the shortlist will be considered for the tenancy.

9.5.2 If an applicant refuses a suitable provisional or formal offer of a tenancy the administering local authority may review the applicant's housing application. The purpose of the review is to provide appropriate advice and support, to ensure the applicant is managing their bids effectively so that they are rehoused in a timely manner.

The review will consider the following points:

- the suitability of the applicant's current accommodation
- the reason for refusing offer(s) of suitable alternative accommodation
- any change in the applicant's circumstances, for example, medical or support needs.
- The applicant's bidding history

9.5.3 The review outcome may recommend additional actions to find suitable accommodation. This may include the following:

- provision of tenancy support or referral to appropriate support agency
- bids for suitable properties being placed on behalf of the applicant.

9.5.4 Following the review, if the applicant refuses a further provisional or formal offer of suitable accommodation Homefinder may demote the applicant to Band 4 for a minimum period of six months. At the end of the period, or if there is a significant change in the applicant's circumstances, the applicant may ask for their housing application to be reassessed.

9.5.5 If a statutory homeless applicant refuses a final qualifying offer of suitable accommodation there will be no further duty owed to them. The refusal will be regarded as discharging the Local Authority's homelessness duty. In these circumstances an applicant's housing need band will be reassessed.

## **9.6 No interest in an advertised property**

9.6.1 If there are no successful bids for an advertised property the property should be re-advertised and the criteria for selection will be reviewed.

9.6.2 If the property is re-advertised, the landlord reserves the right to remove the property from the advertising cycle and allocate the property on a direct let basis if a suitable applicant can be found.

## **9.7 Feedback**

9.7.1 Feedback on recent lets will be displayed on the Homefinder website. Information will include:

- property size and type;
- location;
- the number of applicants that bid on each property;
- the band of the successful applicant; and
- the effective date of the successful applicant.

9.7.2 The feedback will cover all properties let through Homefinder, including direct lets. (see Section 9.8).

## **9.8 Direct Lets**

9.8.1 Homefinder landlords have the flexibility to not advertise all properties through the Homefinder scheme. The number of direct lets made by each landlord will not exceed the quota agreed by the Homefinder Project Board. A property will not be advertised and will be offered through a 'direct let' process, for example where it is required to:

- rehouse an applicant in an emergency situation
- provide temporary accommodation to fulfil a Local Authority's duty under the homelessness legislation
- discharge a statutory homelessness duty

- let to an applicant who has been left in occupation of a social housing property
- let to an applicant who requires specific adaptations and the property is potentially suitable for their needs
- let to an applicant who qualifies to succeed to a social housing tenancy but is not eligible to succeed (as there has already been one succession) and the property is suitable for their needs.
- let to an applicant who has successfully appealed against a decision where the applicant was previously skipped for a property.
- let a property that attracted no successful bids during its first advertising cycle.

9.8.2 Direct let properties will be advertised for information purposes only. Applicants will not be eligible to bid for the property.

## **10. Offers of accommodation**

### **10.1 Choice of area**

- 10.1.1 An applicant is able to bid on properties across the Homefinder area. This is subject to certain restrictions.
- 10.1.2 An applicant may be restricted on bidding on some properties unless they have a local connection to a village or local area. These properties will be clearly shown in the labelling criteria.
- 10.1.3 A statutory homeless applicant will be limited to bidding for properties in the local authority area where they have been accepted as homeless. However, in cases where an applicant has been accepted as homeless due to violence, such a restriction may be removed to allow bidding on properties in both the Ashfield and Mansfield areas.
- 10.1.4 An applicant awarded welfare priority or Band 1 medical priority will normally be restricted to rehousing in the district that they currently reside unless they can demonstrate a need for rehousing in the neighbouring local authority area.

### **10.2 Offering a tenancy to an applicant with a housing-related debt**

- 10.2.1 An applicant who has a current housing debt to a private rented landlord or a social housing landlord will not normally be offered a tenancy until the debt is cleared in full.
- 10.2.2 An applicant with a housing-related debt from a previous social housing tenancy will not normally be offered a tenancy until the debt is cleared in full.
- 10.2.3 Exceptions to the above rules will be homeless applicants to whom a Homefinder local authority landlord has accepted a statutory duty. Homefinder will also consider other cases where an applicant has an urgent need for suitable alternative accommodation and is currently taking action to clear the debt.

### **10.3 Type of Tenancy offered**

- 10.3.1 An applicant who is under 18 years of age will not normally be offered accommodation, except in circumstances where there is a statutory homeless duty; they are care leavers or are moving on from supported accommodation.
- 10.3.2 Where a property is offered to an applicant who is under 18 years of age it will be under an equitable tenancy.
- 10.3.3 Homefinder landlords will have regard to the Tenancy Strategy for the relevant local authority when deciding the appropriate tenancy to offer an applicant.

## **10.4 Bedroom Standard**

- 10.4.1 An applicant requires a separate bedroom for each of the following:
- a married or cohabiting couple
  - an adult aged 16 years or more
  - two children under 16 years of age of the same gender
  - two children aged under 10 years regardless of gender
- 10.4.2 The bedroom standard will be used to assess an applicant's housing needs band on the basis of their under-occupancy or overcrowding.
- 10.4.3 Homefinder will not use the bedroom standard to determine the size of property that the applicant is eligible to bid for. Homefinder's Property Eligibility Table (see Section 10.6) gives the applicant greater choice in deciding which properties are suitable for their household's needs, in terms of size and affordability.

## **10.5 An applicant requiring an extra room**

- 10.5.1 An applicant can request the need for an extra bedroom because of medical or social needs. Supporting evidence will be required for an assessment to be made.

## **10.6 Property eligibility table**

- 10.6.1 The size and type of property that Homefinder normally offers an applicant will depend on the size of the applicant's household.
- 10.6.2 An applicant aged under 60 years of age may be considered for accommodation designated for persons aged over 60 years of age, which includes ground floor flat or bungalow, only if they have been assessed as requiring a specific need for this type of accommodation and for any specific support service which is associated with the property. Eligibility is dependent upon a housing needs / medical assessment.
- 10.6.3 For the purpose of the following eligibility table an applicant, joint applicant or household member who is pregnant will be considered as having a dependent child.
- 10.6.4 Homefinder aims to make the best use of the social housing in the sub-region, for example, an applicant who only has overnight access rights to a dependent child will only be considered as a 'single person' or 'couple'.

**This table is to be used as a general guide only**

	Older Persons Studio Flat	General Needs Studio Flat	1 Bedroom Flat	1 Bedroom Bungalow	1 Bedroom House	2 Bedroom Flat	2 Bedroom Bungalow	2 Bedroom House	3 Bedroom Flat	3 Bedroom House	4 or 4+ Bedroom House
An adult aged under 60 years		x	x		x	x					
An adult aged over 60 years	x		x	x	x	x	x				
A co-habiting couple aged under 60 years			x		x	x					
A co-habiting couple aged over 60 years			x	x	x	x	x				
Two non-cohabiting adults both aged under 60						x					
Two non-cohabiting adults with one aged over 60 years						x	x				
A household with one child						x		x			
A household with two children						x		x	x	x	
A household with three children									x	x	x
A household with four or more children										x	x

## 10.7 Sheltered properties

- 10.7.1 An applicant's suitability for sheltered properties will be dependent upon an assessment of need. An applicant will be informed if they are considered suitable for such properties.
- 10.7.2 Homefinder landlords have different age restrictions for sheltered housing. The minimum age for an applicant for sheltered housing, will be clearly stated when each property is advertised.

## 10.8 Properties with adaptations

- 10.8.1 Adapted properties will clearly be labelled on the adverts. Where a property has been adapted, an applicant who has a specific requirement for the adaptation will normally be prioritised over an applicant who does not require the adaptation.

## **11. Local lettings policies**

- 11.1.1 A Homefinder landlord may, for specific management reasons advertise a property, or group of properties under a Local Lettings Policy. For example, a Local Lettings policy may be introduced to address issues such as child density, anti-social behaviour or community cohesion.
- 11.1.2 When a local lettings policy is to be implemented it will be made public on the Homefinder website. All local lettings policies will take into account local factors such as, the size and composition of the housing register, the stock profile, and the supply and demand of vacant properties.
- 11.1.3 The Homefinder Project Group will be notified of all local lettings policies.

## **12. Reviews and complaints**

### **12.1 Right to request a review**

- 12.1.1 An applicant has the right to request a review of decisions made about their application for housing. These include decisions to exclude them from the housing register; the level of priority awarded; or the way in which their application has been dealt with.
- 12.1.2 A request for a review should be made in writing by an applicant to either Ashfield District Council or Mansfield district council within 21 calendar days of the date of the decision.
- 12.1.3 Where an applicant requests a review of a decision of a Homefinder landlord to skip them for an offer of accommodation on grounds of eligibility or suitability, the Homefinder landlord is not obliged to hold the property pending the outcome of the review. If the review is upheld, and therefore the applicant was eligible for the offer of accommodation, the applicant may be considered for a direct let of accommodation.
- 12.1.4 Reviews will be carried out by an Homefinder officer who is more senior in authority to the officer who made the original decision. The officer carrying out the review will be employed by any of the Homefinder landlords, the decision being made in agreement with the Local Authority that administers the applicant's application.

### **12.2 Complaints**

- 12.2.1 If an applicant is unhappy with the way their housing application has been dealt with an applicant should raise this as early as possible with whichever Homefinder landlord has been dealing with their application
- 12.2.2 Each Homefinder landlord will have their own formal complaints procedure. If an applicant continues to feel dissatisfied, the applicant should request a formal Complaint Form from the relevant Homefinder landlord.
- 12.2.3 If an applicant is not satisfied with the process or outcome having exhausted the review or complaints procedure, the applicant may send a written complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service.
- 12.2.4 The Housing Ombudsman Service can be contacted at:

The Housing Ombudsman Service  
21-24 Millbank,  
London SW1P 4HQ  
**Tel:** 0300 111 300  
**Email:** [www.info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:www.info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)



## **Appendix 1**

### **Local authority contact details**

Ashfield District Council  
Urban Road  
Kirkby-in-Ashfield  
Nottinghamshire  
NG17 8DA  
Telephone: 01623 450000  
Website: [www.ashfield.gov.uk](http://www.ashfield.gov.uk)

Mansfield District Council  
Civic Centre  
Chesterfield Road South  
Mansfield  
Nottinghamshire  
NG19 7BH  
Telephone: 01623 463463  
Website: [www.mansfield.gov.uk](http://www.mansfield.gov.uk)

## **Appendix 2 - Glossary of Terms**

### **Adapted property**

This is a property that has been adapted for a person with disabilities.

### **Age criteria**

This will describe a property that is restricted to being let to people of a certain age.

### **Applicant**

The term “applicant” within this policy refers to all Main applicants, Joint applicants and all members of an applicant’s household.

### **Armed forces**

“Regular Forces” includes members of the Royal Navy, the Royal Marines, the regular Army or the Royal Air Force.

“Reserve Forces” means the Royal Fleet Reserve, The Royal Navy Reserve, the Royal Marines Reserve, the Army Reserve, the Territorial Army, the Royal Air Force Reserve or the Royal Auxiliary Air Force.

### **Assessment panel**

The Panel consists of representatives from Homefinder landlords. The role of the Panel is to assess applicants who have potential high priority on medical or welfare grounds. The Panel also consider possible exclusions from the Housing Register.

### **Assignments**

This is where a tenant has the right to pass on their tenancy to a member of their family who would be entitled to succeed to the tenancy of their home in the event of their death. A tenant will need the landlord’s permission to do this.

A court order might also be made in certain circumstances transferring a tenancy from one partner to another in the event of a relationship breakdown

### **Bands**

An applicant will be placed into one of the five housing need Bands dependant on their housing needs priority

### **Bedroom standard**

Homefinder has regard to the Bedroom standard in the Code of Guidance for Allocations (2012) as the minimum standard. The property eligibility and overcrowding priority awards are based on this minimum standard.

### **Bids / Bidding**

When a vacant property is advertised, an applicant will submit an expression of interest called a bid. The process will be called bidding.

### **Bidding cycle**

This is the length of time vacant properties are advertised for. This will be from 00:01 hours on a Wednesday to 23:59 hours on the following Monday.

## **Care Leaver**

A Care Leaver is a person who has been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who was in care on their 16th birthday.

A young person's status as a care leaver can be divided into the following:

**Eligible Child** - a young person who is 16 or 17 and who has been looked after by the local authority/Health and Social Care Trust for at least a period of 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who is still looked after.

**Relevant Child** - a young person who is 16 or 17 who has left care after their 16th birthday and before leaving care was an eligible child.

**Former Relevant Child** - a young person who is aged between 18 and 21 (or beyond if being helped with education or training) who, before turning 18 was either an eligible or a relevant child, or both.

## **Carer**

A carer is a person who is unpaid and looks after or supports someone else who needs help with their day-to-day life, because of:

- their age
- a long-term illness
- disability
- mental health problems
- substance misuse

The term 'carer' does not include any carer who:

- gets payment either in cash or in another way for the care they provide
- works as a volunteer on behalf of a voluntary organisation

## **Choice based lettings (CBL)**

CBL is the process of letting social housing. It allows applicants for social housing (and existing tenants seeking a move) to apply for available vacancies which are advertised widely (e.g. in the local newspaper or on a website). Applicants can see the full range of available properties and can bid (i.e. apply) for any home to which they are eligible (e.g. a single person would not be eligible for a three-bedroom house).

## **Decant**

Where a tenant has to move out of their home during major improvements or repairs, and they have been offered temporary or permanent re-housing

## **Dependent child**

A dependent child is aged under the age of 16 years, or under the age of 18 years whilst in full-time education or full-time training. A household member aged over the age of 18 may be treated as a dependant if they are unable to live independently.

## **Direct let**

This is when a property is offered to a household without it having been advertised.

**Effective date**

The date that Homefinder has accepted that an applicant's participation within a specific Housing Need Band commences.

**Eligibility**

The term used to describe factors that match an applicant to a property. For example, the size of an applicant's household and the number of bedrooms in a property.

**Employment**

An applicant is classed as being in employment if they meet the "Minimum Earnings Threshold" which determines that the current work is genuine and effective. The M.E.T. is set at the level at which workers start to pay National Insurance Contributions. The applicant will need to provide confirmation that they have been in suitable employment for a minimum period of three months.

An applicant will be classed as being in full-time work if they have an employment contract, for at least a minimum period of 12 months, to work at least 35 hours per week.

**Financial assessment**

A financial assessment will determine whether an applicant can afford the housing costs without being deprived of basic essentials, such as food, clothing, heating, transport and other essentials.

**Homefinder area**

The geographical area within the political administrative boundaries of both Ashfield District Council and Mansfield District Council.

**Homefinder landlords**

These include, Ashfield district council, using Ashfield Homes Ltd to manage its homes, Mansfield district council, and participating Private Registered Providers of Social Housing with properties in the Homefinder areas

**Labelling criteria**

The phrase used to refer to the information about properties advertised through the Scheme.

**Lettings policy**

This explains the rules that determine how the Councils and the Registered Providers let their properties within this scheme. The policy also outlines other housing options.

**Local authority area**

The local authority area is the geographic area within the boundary covered by either Mansfield District Council or the Ashfield District Council; but not both areas.

**Low cost home ownership**

Low cost home ownership (LCHO), which is sometimes referred to as shared ownership (part-rent, part-buy) or share equity, offer those eligible the opportunity to purchase part of their home and begin building their own equity.

There are a number of schemes designed to help people buy an affordable home:

- New Build HomeBuy (shared ownership)

- Social HomeBuy
- Rent to HomeBuy
- HomeBuy Direct

These schemes are to help first time buyers, key workers and social tenants who would otherwise be unable to buy a home. Each region in England has a designated HomeBuy Agent who will assess an application and advise applicants of the options for which they are eligible.

### **Mutual exchange**

An exchange of accommodation between two social housing tenants that relies on each tenant moving permanently into the other tenants home, subject to the landlords prior agreement.

### **Nomination**

The term is used when a Local Authority provides the name and details of an applicant to a PRP landlord for an offer of housing.

### **Owner occupier**

An applicant who owns their property outright (jointly or solely) or who has a financial interest in a property that is currently subject to a mortgage.

### **Private Registered Providers (RP's)**

Private Registered Provider of Social Housing (RP's) are government-funded not-for-profit organisations that provide affordable housing. They include housing associations, trusts and cooperatives. They work with Local Authorities to provide homes for people meeting the affordable homes criteria. As well as developing land and building homes, PRP's undertake a landlord function by maintaining properties and collecting rent.

### **Reduced preference**

This is where an applicant's priority is reduced as a result of either their financial resources; outstanding rent arrears, or committed acts of anti-social behaviour.

### **Shortlist**

A list of applicants that have expressed an interest in a particular property advertised through Choice Based Lettings.

### **Social housing**

The term used for affordable rental accommodation owned by a Local Authority or a Private Registered Provider (RP).

### **Statutorily homeless**

Statutory homeless applicants are those who have been assessed under Part VII of The Housing Act 1996, as amended by The Homelessness Act 2002. To be statutorily homeless a Local Authority has to be satisfied the applicant is homeless, eligible for assistance and has a priority need, and did not become homeless intentionally.

### **Sub-region**

The term "sub-region" in this policy refers to the Ashfield district council and the Mansfield district council administrative areas.

### **Succession of tenancy**

When a tenant dies, providing there has not been a previous succession, the tenancy may pass to a spouse or partner, including civil partners. If the tenancy commenced before 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012, a close member of the tenant's family who has been living with them for at least one year may also be eligible to succeed to the tenancy.

**Sustainable communities**

The Department for Communities and Local Government says a sustainable community is a place where people want to live and work now and in the future.