

HOW TO APPLY FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DO

Overview

There are about 8000 **affordable homes** in the Harrogate district. These have cheaper rents than properties you'd find from private landlords and have special longer-term, more secure tenancies. Half of them are owned and managed by Harrogate Borough Council and the others are looked after by Registered Providers of Social Housing (more commonly called housing associations).

Most new affordable housing tenants are selected from the district-wide **Housing Waiting List** held by the Council, but some housing associations hold their own lists and choose some of their new tenants from these. All tenants for newly built properties are selected from the Council's Housing Waiting List.

This sheet explains how to join the Housing Waiting List, how people are selected from it to be offered tenancies, what happens when an offer is made, and how and when you'd move into your new home.

How to apply for affordable housing

To join our Housing Waiting List, you need to apply on **HBC Homes Online** and send us some documents.

Find Homes Online by visiting www.harrogate.gov.uk and searching for 'apply for affordable housing'. We'll need proof of your identity and NI number, and that can be uploaded online too

During your application, you'll be asked about which **areas of the district** you'd like to live in. Applicants are encouraged to make the widest selection they can, but also, because some areas of the district are quite rural, to check what transport links and other facilities are available in an area before choosing it.

Applicants may find it useful to check our **In My Area** service at www.harrogate.gov.uk or to visit www.nidderdaleplus.org.uk or www.visitmasham.com. If applicants have specific questions about an area, they're invited to contact the local Parish Clerk, whose contact details can be found by visiting www.harrogate.gov.uk and searching for 'parish contact'.

Within 28 days of you applying, you'll get a letter or email confirming that we've processed your application and giving you your unique **Application Reference**.

In this first contact, we may ask for some more information or to arrange a home visit before we can add you to the Housing Waiting List, so please look out for this. As soon as we have everything we need, we'll write to you to confirm that you've joined the Housing Waiting List and to tell you your point award.

Your **point award** represents the priority you will be given for new tenancies; you'll have a higher point award if you have a more urgent need to be offered affordable housing. Depending on your circumstances, your point award may change over time, but we'll let you know how to keep track of it.

More detailed information about who can join the Housing Waiting List and what points they'll get is available in our **Allocations Policy**, which you'll find by visiting www.harrogate.gov.uk and searching for 'allocations scheme'. There's also an **Allocations Policy Summary** online; just visit www.harrogate.gov.uk and search for 'allocations scheme summary'.

Because applicants are assessed on their individual circumstances and we don't know in advance what properties will become available to let, we're never able to estimate how long you will be waiting. However, you'll be able to check your point award and your positions on the Housing Waiting List by signing up for a **My Harrogate account** by clicking 'Sign in/Register' on www.harrogate.gov.uk.

You can see what HBC properties we've let recently by visiting www.harrogate.gov.uk and searching for 'stock turnover'. This will be helpful to give you a sense of what kind of properties have come up lately and how quickly you're likely to be offered an affordable home.

If your circumstances change at any time (for example, you move, you have a child, someone moves out, your health deteriorates/improves, or your financial situation changes), you will need to keep us updated. You can do this through the 'My housing application' section of **HBC Homes Online**. If you don't keep us informed of changes, you may miss out on homes that would be ideal for you.

How we decide whom to offer affordable homes to

All affordable homes are let according to **housing need**, which means that applicants will only be offered homes which are of the right size and the right type for them and that those with the highest need for a home will be offered a new home quicker than others. Having a high point award doesn't guarantee that you'll get housed within a certain timeframe, but it does mean that you will have priority over others who want similar properties. Some applicants get offered housing (in low-demand areas or for low-demand property types) on zero points, while others (in high-demand areas or for high-demand property types) can go a long time without being offered anything despite having very high point awards.

As soon as a home becomes vacant, we draw up a list of people from the Housing Waiting List whom that home is suitable would be for and we put their applications in order of their housing need. We then contact each applicant in turn by telephone to talk to them about the home, making sure that it would be appropriate for them and that the information we have for them is correct. If the home is right for them and they want to be considered for it, we make a few checks (including getting previous landlord references and sometimes arranging to visit their current home) and, if these are all fine, we write to them to make a **formal offer** or, if the property is managed by one of the housing associations, to advise them that we have put them forward as a **nominee** to the housing association who will contact them soon.

Being offered a tenancy

Applicants are only contacted for properties that are suitable for them so we don't expect anyone to decline offers, but, if this does occur, it will be noted as a **refusal**. Except those who are under a homeless duty, who have to take the first suitable home that is found for them, most applicants are allowed to refuse their first offer but, if they refuse a second, they are removed from the Housing Waiting List and can only reapply after a year. This is to make sure that we're able to focus on those in the greatest housing need.

After the formal offer has been made in writing and any necessary repairs have been carried out on the property (which may take a few weeks), a Housing Officer will invite the applicant to meet them for a **viewing**. At this viewing, applicants are provided with further information about the property and about being a Council or housing association tenant. They're encouraged to read and sign their new **Tenancy Agreement** and set a move-in date. If they would like to think about it a little more, the home can be held for up to two days but no longer.

New tenancies are normally arranged around four weeks in advance of when the property will be ready, giving applicants enough time to **give notice** on any existing tenancy, but sometimes timescales are tighter. We encourage people who rent their homes to give notice as soon as they receive a formal offer for a new affordable home so that they're not liable for two rents at once. New tenants are expected to move in and start using their new home as their main and permanent residence as soon as their tenancy starts; if someone is not occupying their home for enough of the time, they can find themselves being served with eviction orders.

Finally, note that most affordable homes don't come with floor coverings (carpets), curtains, or white goods, and new tenants are expected to provide these themselves, although we are able to recommend places that may be able to help you find them.

Here to help

If you have any questions about anything on this information sheet, please feel free to contact us by visiting www.harrogate.gov.uk and clicking 'Contact us' or by calling us on 01423 500600.