





Welcome to **Gateway to Homechoice** which is the way of allocating council and housing association properties for rent in the local authority areas of Babergh, Braintree, Colchester, Ipswich, Maldon, Mid Suffolk, East Suffolk.

How the scheme operates

The 7 local authorities in the Gateway to Homechoice scheme advertise vacancies in rented social housing using the same system that operates as follows:

-  Each week the vacant social housing in the area of operation of the 7 local authorities is advertised on the Gateway to Homechoice website.
-  Applicants who are registered can bid on up to 2 properties they are interested in, either online or by phone.
-  All of the vacancies advertised through the scheme are owned by councils or housing associations.
-  All of the local authorities operate the same allocation policy.

Shortlisting

The principle of the system is that properties are normally let to the household that wants the property, and has been waiting the longest in the highest Band. Available properties are advertised on the Gateway to Homechoice website for a week, starting on Thursday morning and closing on the following Wednesday at midnight. As people place their bids for housing, the system automatically compiles a shortlist of applicants. The order of the applicants is from Band A down to Band E. If 2 or more applicants have the same band, then the system will normally place the applicant with the longest date first.

Who can use this service?

Anyone, over the age of 16, can apply to join the Gateway to Homechoice register, however, to be accepted onto the register you must meet the eligibility criteria.

There are some people who will not be eligible to join the housing register. These are:

- ▶▶ Certain people who are subject to Immigration Control under the 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act
- ▶▶ Certain people from abroad who are not subject to immigration control but who are not habitually resident in the UK, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man or the Republic of Ireland
- ▶▶ People (including members of their household) who have been guilty of unacceptable behaviour that makes them unsuitable to be a tenant

Step 1- Registration

There are two easy ways to register your housing application.

Visit the Gateway to Homechoice Website at www.gatewaytohomechoice.org.uk – it takes about 30 minutes to complete the registration.

If you don't have access to a computer or anyone who can help you make an application online, you can call your local council; contact details are on the back page.



Information required for registering

To register, you will need to supply:

- ▶▶ National Insurance Number for all household members who are 16 and over
- ▶▶ Name and address of all household members (including children)
- ▶▶ Date of birth for all household members (including children)
- ▶▶ Telephone numbers
- ▶▶ Email address
- ▶▶ Full address history for the last 6 years for all household members
- ▶▶ Employment/Income details
- ▶▶ Details of your local connection(s), for example, family links or employment

When you have submitted your online application form we will assess your application according to our allocations policy and will contact you to supply further information or verification. We will then write to you and tell you:

- ▶▶ Your housing application number and details of how to log in to use your Gateway account
- ▶▶ The band that your application has been placed in and your effective date
- ▶▶ The number of bedrooms you are entitled to

If your circumstances change, e.g. you move house or your household changes, you must update your application by logging into your Gateway account.

It is also important to update your contact details if they change, particularly your telephone number.

Once you have registered with Gateway to Homechoice you will be able to apply for properties through the Gateway to Homechoice scheme.

Property Size

You will only be eligible for properties that are suitable for the size of your family.



Step 2 - Choosing a property

Properties are advertised each week; our advertising cycle starts first thing on Thursday mornings and closes at 11.59pm on Wednesday evenings.

They are advertised in the following ways:

- ▶▶ In your Gateway account when you log into it
- ▶▶ Via the property search on the website
- ▶▶ In a newsletter which we can send to people in Bands A or B or those needing sheltered accommodation if you request it. Please contact the local authority where you are registered to request this

The advert will tell you who the landlord of the property is, its location, size, rent and other features of the property to help you decide which properties are suitable for you.

Where available, a photograph of the property or similar house type is provided and you can access information about the local area and facilities.

The advert also tells you if there are any special requirements that the applicant must meet, such as age requirements or local letting criteria.

Bidding on a Property

You can bid for up to 2 social housing properties each week. You can bid in any of the following ways:

- ▶▶ Logging into your Gateway account on the Gateway website – www.gatewaytohomechoice.org.uk
- ▶▶ By telephone. Call our automated bidding line on 0845 2700724, or

If you need any help with bidding or would like someone else to bid on your behalf, please contact your local council and they will be able to explain the options to you.

You will only be able to bid on properties that you are eligible for. Please note – restrictions will apply to accepted homeless applicants.

Step 3 - Offer

All the bids received will be put in priority order to produce a list of eligible applicants for each property advertised. The landlord of the property will carry out any outstanding eligibility checks, (e.g. rent checks, household circumstances checks).

If your name is at the top of the priority list you will normally be invited to view the property unless there are reasons why we are unable to do this, for example, you have rent arrears or the council is taking legal action against you for breaching a tenancy condition or you do not meet the eligibility that was specified in the advert.

If you decide to refuse the property it will be offered to the next person on the priority list. You will not normally be penalised for refusing a property and will continue to be able to bid for properties advertised.

NB homeless applicants are subject to different criteria and refusal of an offer can have serious consequences: please check with your local authority before doing so.

If you are offered a property you will not be shortlisted for other properties until you have decided to either accept or refuse the offer.

If you accept the property you will be advised by the landlord when you can move in.

Step 4 - Feedback

We publish information about homes that have been successfully let. We tell you the number of applicants that bid for the property, the band and priority date of the successful applicants. For information about previous lets you can click on the recent lets button.

This information will give you a better idea of how popular a particular property or area is and how long you would normally have to wait. You can then decide whether to look for other types of property or areas where you may not have to wait as long.

You can also get individual feedback on the position you were for the particular properties on which you bid by logging into your account.

Prioritising Applications

Your priority on the scheme when you bid for properties is determined by your band and registration date.

We find out information about your present housing situation from what you tell us on your application form. We then use this information to place you in the band which best reflects your situation. Your housing circumstances could mean that you qualify to be placed in different bands. If this is the case, you will be placed in the highest of those bands. You will be placed into one of five bands where Band A is the highest and Band E is the lowest.

If you meet more than two assessed needs in Band B (not including the homeless criteria) you will be moved into Band A. If you meet 4 or more assessed needs in Band C (not including the homeless criteria) you will be moved to Band B.

If you are in Band D or E it is unlikely that we will be able to offer you a council or housing association home (unless you require sheltered accommodation). Your council will be able to discuss other housing options with you.

Details of the banding criteria are explained below:

Banding Scheme

Band A

- ▶▶ Critical Medical/Welfare award, including emergency situations.
- ▶▶ Statutory main duty accepted homeless applicants in severe need.
- ▶▶ Tenant Incentive Scheme (TIS) Council or RP tenants who are currently in three, four or five or larger bedroom accommodation, who wish to downsize and will release one or two bedrooms within the Gateway area of operation

- ▶▶ Applicants with multiple needs - if someone has two or more needs in Band B, they will be moved into Band A.
- ▶▶ Nominations - move on from specified agencies – at the discretion of the PO
- ▶▶ Negotiated surrender of a tenancy within the Gateway area of operation
- ▶▶ Retiring Scheme Managers in Council or RP properties where accommodation was a condition of their employment within the Gateway area of operation
- ▶▶ Qualifying Agricultural Workers within the Gateway area of operation
- ▶▶ Relationship breakdowns (Council properties where they are under occupying but have been assessed as having housing need) within the Gateway area of operation
- ▶▶ Successions - Council or RP succession tenants who are under occupying their property in the Gateway
- ▶▶ Releasing a property in need (Council or RP properties) or where it prevents the Council or Registered Provider making expensive alterations to the property within the Gateway area of operation.



Band B

- ▶▶ Statutory homeless applicants accepted as being owed the main housing duty
- ▶▶ Applicants with a serious medical/welfare award
- ▶▶ TIS council or RP tenants who are currently in one or two bedroom accommodation and who wish to downsize and will release one bedroom within the Gateway area of operation
- ▶▶ Nominations - move on from specified agencies – at the discretion of the PO
- ▶▶ Options advice - POs have discretion to award Band B to applicants who are under either the Prevention or Relief duty (HRA 2017), who are likely to lose/have lost their accommodation through no fault of their own, for which there is no legal redress, who are assessed by the particular scheme PO as likely to be in priority need, who are receiving housing advice from the particular scheme Council to prevent/relieve homelessness and for whom social housing is assessed by the PO as being the only/most appropriate solution
- ▶▶ Applicants who are overcrowded in social or private rented housing within the Gateway area of operation (this does not apply to applicants who are residing in temporary accommodation and overcrowded).
- ▶▶ Applicants who are required to leave their property as a result of an emergency prohibition order served in relation to the premises under the Housing Act 2004 within the Gateway area of operation
- ▶▶ A prohibition order or demolition order has been served, or is about to be served in relation to the applicants dwelling by the Private Sector Team of the particular scheme Council. This indicates that the property contains one or more Category 1 Hazards that probably cannot be remedied.

- ▶▶ An improvement notice has been, or is about to be served in relation to the applicant's dwelling by the Private Sector Housing Team of the particular scheme Council and:
 1. The remedies that are needed to reduce the hazard will require the property to be vacated for a significant period of time;
 2. The cost of the remedies is beyond the means of the applicant (where applicable); or
 3. The remedies will make the property unsuitable for occupation by the applicant.
- ▶▶ Applicants assessed as meeting Band A criteria, but with no local connection to the Gateway area
- ▶▶ Multiple needs – applicants with four or more needs in Band C will be moved into Band B
- ▶▶ Right to Move applicants

Band C

- ▶▶ Applicants who are threatened with homelessness within 56 days and are owed the Prevention duty (HRA 2017) by one of the POs
- ▶▶ Applicants who are homeless and owed the Relief duty (HRA 2017) by one of the POs
- ▶▶ Applicants who are homeless but who are assessed by the PO as not being in priority need
- ▶▶ Applicants with a valid notice to quit – which has not been instigated by any breach of tenancy
- ▶▶ Applicants who, following a homelessness application, have been deemed by the particular scheme PO to be in priority need, but intentionally homeless.
- ▶▶ Overcrowded in social or private rented housing outside of the Gateway area of operation but with a local connection to the Gateway area
- ▶▶ No fixed abode/sharing facilities/lacking facilities

- ▶▶ Fixed term licensees – this applies to applicants living in supported accommodation
- ▶▶ A hazard awareness notice has been served by the Private Sector Housing Team of the particular scheme Council, in relation to a Category 1 or 2 hazard at the applicant’s dwelling and:
 1. The remedies that are needed to reduce the hazard will require the property to be vacated for a significant period of time; or
 2. The cost of the remedies are beyond the means of the applicant (where applicable); or
 3. The remedies will make the property unsuitable for occupation by the applicant
- ▶▶ A suspended improvement notice or prohibition order exists but a foreseeable change in the applicants circumstances will cause it to become active and result in a high priority situation.
- ▶▶ Applicants assessed as meeting Band B criteria, but with no local connection to the Gateway area of operation

Band D

- ▶▶ Applicants assessed as meeting Band C criteria but with no local connection to the sub-region
- ▶▶ Reduced preference – a local authority might give reduced preference to someone who would have been assessed as being in higher need in the following circumstances:
 1. Applicants who would otherwise be in a higher Band but have significant financial resources which are sufficient to secure alternative accommodation, for example, private rented accommodation
 2. Where the behaviour of the applicant or a member of their household affects their suitability to be a tenant

Band E

- ▶▶ Applicants who live in a property that is adequate to meet their needs in terms of property type, size and facilities
- ▶▶ Owner-occupiers
- ▶▶ Applicants in prison
- ▶▶ A suspended prohibition order or improvement notice has been or will be served by the Private Sector Housing Team of the particular scheme Council, in relation to the applicants dwelling, but the criteria leading to it becoming active are not met by the applicant.
- ▶▶ A hazard awareness notice or improvement notice has been or will be served by the Private Sector Housing Team of the particular scheme Council, in relation to the applicants dwelling, but the specified remedies are low cost and straightforward to achieve.
- ▶▶ Applicants living in a caravan, mobile home or boat but who don't have a housing need
- ▶▶ Applicants in tied accommodation, but no housing need.

