

A Central Lincolnshire Partnership:

- City of Lincoln Council
- North Kesteven District Council,
- West Lindsey District Council and
- Acis Group Limited.



www.lincshomefinder.co.uk

INTRODUCTION

This is a summary of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme, known as Lincs Homefinder.

It sets out the key points of the Scheme and the main priorities and procedures that the above Partners will follow when letting properties to applicants on their common housing register.

This is not a comprehensive guide to the policy, further detail can be found in the full Lincs Homefinder Choice Based Letting Scheme. Each partner organisation will have a copy of this Letting Policy available at its head office for inspection. A copy of this Letting Policy will be available free of charge from any of the Partners, or available to download from any of the Partners websites.

AIMS OF LINCS HOMEFINDER

The Partnership is fully committed to:

- Enabling applicants to play a more active role in choosing where they live;
- Providing assistance to applicants who are unable for whatever reason, to participate fully in the Scheme;
- Providing a fair, open and accountable framework in which everyone has equality of access when seeking an affordable home;
- Making best use of limited housing resources;
- Assisting customers in the highest housing need;
- Providing a full Housing Options service;
- Preventing homelessness and reducing the use of temporary accommodation.

The Scheme has been designed to be easy to use, provide the highest level of customer service and enable people to make the best choice for their needs from the full range of housing options available to them.

It is important to realise that the demand for accommodation is higher in some areas than in others. In making a decision about the choices available, applicants need to consider their housing need priority against the availability of properties in any given area.

GENERAL OUTLINE OF HOW LINCS HOMEFINDER WORKS

Lincs Homefinder provides a new way of letting social housing and promoting a range of housing options. Partners will no longer use the traditional method e.g. 'matching' an applicant to a property, instead applicants will choose the tenure, property and area in which they wish to live.

People who apply to join or are registered with Lincs Homefinder are known as applicants. Applicants are assessed and awarded a banding according to their need. Landlords advertise their vacant properties and invite bids (or expressions of interest) on each property from applicants.

Adverts will contain details of the property and state which applicants are able to bid; including any local connection criteria. Applicants can then bid for the property of their choice as long as they are registered and meet the qualifying criteria.

The successful applicant will be selected from those who have bid for (or told us they are interested in) the property and who meet the qualifying criteria. Selection will be based on the band, followed by applicable date where there is more than one applicant from the same band. The landlord then offers the property to the successful applicant.

Applicants will be advised of the outcome of a vacancy with feedback on the level of demand, banding and length of time waiting for a property. This will help applicants to make more informed choices including other housing options being promoted.

HOUSING OPTIONS

Due to the high demand on social housing some applicants may have to wait a considerable time before appropriate accommodation is made available to them, particularly in areas of high demand for social housing and/or where the partners has low priority. In some cases, applicants may have little prospect of ever being offered accommodation.

In order to give such applicants a wider choice the Partnership aims to provide information about other appropriate housing options which might be available to them. This might include:

- private rented accommodation
- shared ownership schemes
- mutual exchanges
- mobility schemes
- home improvement schemes or provision of aids and adaptations

This service is available for all applicants, regardless of tenure.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

The Partnership is committed to the promotion of equality of opportunity for all existing and potential applicants wishing to access Lincs Homefinder. No one will be treated unfairly because of gender, race, colour, ethnic or national origin, religion, disability, marital status, age, sexuality, health or other reason. This list is not exclusive, but indicative of the Partnerships intention and commitment to ensuring equality.

WHO CAN APPLY

Anyone has the right to make an application to join Lincs Homefinder, as follows:

- Applicants aged 18 or over (or at least one of the joint applicants)
- Persons not subject to immigration control, taking account of nationality and immigration.
- Persons subject to immigration control who have been granted or have achieved relevant status
- Applications from 16/17 year olds may also be accepted in certain circumstances (special provisions apply).

INELIGIBLE AND NON-QUALIFYING APPLICANTS

Those who **CANNOT** join Lincs Homefinder are:

- Persons who are ineligible to reside in the United Kingdom
- Persons granted exceptional leave to enter or remain, but no recourse to public funds
- Applicants with a history of unacceptable/anti-social behaviour (including significant rent arrears serious enough to make them an unsuitable tenant

Also The following will be considered as non-qualifying persons and therefore unable to join the scheme:

- existing social housing tenants who have not been in their current home for 12months
- applicants with a household member who is considered to demonstrated serious unacceptable behaviour, including significant rent arrears

If an applicant is found to be ineligible or non-qualifying for the Housing Register they may make a fresh application when the grounds for ineligibility no longer apply.

HOW TO APPLY

By making an initial enquiry:

- In person at one of the Partner's offices
- Via the Schemes website www.lincshomefinder.co.uk
- By post to one of the Partner's offices

You will then be given a range of information and advice of the options available to you, housing availability, demand and turnover and likely assessment, to help you decide whether to not to complete a full application to join the scheme

PROVIDING INFORMATION AND DOCUMENTATION

Applicants are required to provide proof of their identity e.g. their National Insurance Number(s) and proof of residency for themselves and anyone they wish to be housed with. There is a list of approved documents and an application will not be accepted without this information, failure to provide this information within 28days of the request may change your application date. You may be asked to provide other supporting information so that your application can be processed and assessed correctly.

ASSESSMENT OF HOUSING NEEDS AND BANDINGS

The Partnership has adopted a Banding Scheme to prioritise the current housing needs of applicants. These include the applicant's current accommodation, physical and mental health, mobility, affordability, access and social wellbeing. There are 4 Bands:

- Band 1 (highest priority), Band 2, Band 3 and Band 4 (lowest priority)

LOCAL CONNECTION

To ensure that local housing needs are met, adverts will detail local connection criteria. Applicants can be assessed as having no local connection to any Partner area within the Scheme or a local connection to one or more of the Partner areas. To be considered as having a local connection, one of the following must apply:

- Applicant(s) have been permanently resident in Partner district for the last 6 months
- Applicants have immediate family members who are currently and have been continuously resident for the last FIVE yrs in a partner district. Family members are defined as parents/guardians, adult children or brothers or sisters.
- Have previously lived in any partner district area for a continuous period of TWELVE months (whilst aged 18 or over) in the last FIVE YEARS.
- An applicant's main place of work is in a partner's district for a continuous period of TWELVE months.

REASONABLE PREFERENCE

The law states that certain groups of people have 'reasonable preference' within any allocation scheme operated by a local Housing Authority. These groups are:

- People who are homeless (in accordance with relevant legislation)
- People occupying unsanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions
- People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds
- People who need to move to a particular locality in the area, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or to others)
- Those leaving the Armed Forces who are in housing need.

FINANCIAL CAPACITY

Applicants applying to Lincs Homefinder may be assessed on their ability to resolve their own housing difficulties, for example: by buying a suitable property within the area, carry out improvements or adaptations to their own home to meet their needs. The assessment takes into account your household income, savings and any equity you have.

CHANGE OF CIRCUMSTANCES

Applicants are required to inform the relevant Partner if their personal circumstances change and it may reasonably be expected to have an effect on their Housing Register application. This includes any change in their address or household members.

ASSISTED PERSONS LIST

Some vulnerable applicants may require help to ensure that they have the same opportunity to access Lincs Homefinder. The Partnership offers an "Assisted List" to allow those who cannot participate fully without assistance, easy access to the scheme. This list will also extend to those who require help with applications to apply, see our "Assisted Persons List" leaflet for more details of what help is available. Examples of those who may require this help include:

- Those with communication difficulties i.e. language / literacy
- Those with access to transport difficulties
- Those with Learning Disabilities
- Those at risk of Domestic Abuse
- Those with a support worker
- Those with sensory / physical disability

ADVERTISING OF VACANT PROPERTIES

Properties will be advertised weekly, starting midnight on Wednesdays and closing noon on Monday. Adverts will include, but not limited to:

- Property address,
- Property type (e.g. house, flat, bungalow) & number of bedrooms
- Rent and service charges
- Heating type
- Local connection criteria, age restrictions, whether or not pets allowed
- Tenure type and landlord (e.g. social rented, shared ownership,)
- Amenities in the area & at property (e.g. parking, local schooling), if available
- Any additional facilities (e.g. adaptations/disabled facilities), if available

Properties will be advertised in the following ways:

- Vacancy List (for vulnerable or assisted persons otherwise a charge may apply)
- Website
- Partners area offices and reception areas

BIDDING FOR A PROPERTY

Where an applicant meets the criteria they may make up to 2 bids (or expressions of interest) in any cycle which will open for 5 days ie: from 00:01 on Wednesday ending 12noon Monday the following week.

Applicants may use any of the following methods to make a bid:

- Via the website
- By phone or text (texting may not be available immediately)
- By post, but must be received by Partner office before the end of cycle
- In person at any of the Partners' reception areas
- Through the assisted persons process

Where a property has been advertised and no bids have been received, the property may then be included in another advertising cycle or allocated on a first come first served basis providing that the applicant meets the eligibility criteria.

SELECTION OF SUCCESSFUL BIDS

The successful applicant will be selected from those who have bid for the property and who meet the qualifying criteria. Selection will be based on eligibility, the relevant needs band, followed by the application or banding date where there is more than one applicant from the same band. The landlord then offers the property to the successful applicant. Applicants may be "passed over", and not offered a tenancy, if any of the following apply:

- Benefited from a disabled facilities or renovation grant within last 5 years
- Benefited from a Right to Buy within the last 3 years
- Has rent arrears and has not maintained regular re-payment for min 13wks, and/or debt remains significant

MAKING AN OFFER

Applicants will usually be contacted within 3 working days of close of the bid cycle. They will then have up to 2 working days to make a decision to accept the offer. If no response is received, the next shortlisted applicant will be offered the property. It is the applicants responsibility to ensure they provide up to date contact details.

REFUSAL OF OFFERS

If an applicant refuses 3 offers they will be asked to attend an interview to discuss their housing requirements. If it is decided that the reasons for refusal are unreasonable their application date may be changed to the date of the last unreasonable refusal

NON BIDDING

All applications within Band 1 will be monitored and additional support will be provided if these applicants fail to make bids for suitable properties advertised. Other applicants who are not making any bids may also be contacted to find out why.

DIRECT LETS & PROPERTIES EXCLUDED FROM THE SCHEME

There will be circumstances where a property may be let outside the scheme by a direct letting, examples include but not limited to:

- Households accepted as homeless who have failed to bid for available properties.
- Existing tenants who need to be re-housed due to redevelopment or major works
- Existing tenants need to move because of a violent incident or the threat of violence that is likely to be carried out.
- Highly supported accommodation are needed or are no longer needed, such as extra care schemes

REVIEW OF DECISIONS ON APPLICATIONS OR OFFERS

All applicants have the right to ask for a review of a decision, if they consider they have been unfairly or unreasonably treated having regard to the provisions of this Lettings Policy. For example, a decision about:

- Refusal or removal from the Scheme
- Type of property applicant is eligible for
- Suitability of accommodation offered
- The Priority Band awarded
- Information that has been taken into account when assessing their application
- Any decision taken in relation to their application

MONITORING AND REVIEW OF POLICY

In order to ensure that Lincs Homefinder is achieving its aims of being as open and accessible as possible to all members of the community, the Partnership will undertake regular monitoring and publish the outcomes

The Scheme will also be reviewed annually to ensure that every application is dealt with fairly and consistently e.g.

- Priority is given to those in the most need
- Adequate priority is given to homeless people and others in need
- To ensure performance meets local and national performance indicators

FURTHER INFORMATION AND ENQUIRIES

If you would like more information or have any queries about how Lincs Homefinder works please contact the Partner covering either the area you live now or the area you want to live.

PROPERTY ELIGIBILITY

Type and size of property usually allocated to applicants on the Housing Register

When letting properties, consideration is given to making the best use of the housing stock, general availability of the property type, local conditions and the applicant(s) urgency for re-housing. It is important that applicants check each property advert for household eligibility before making a bid, as there may be variations between Partners. The Partnership will not allow any offer of tenancy to applicant(s) that will lead to statutory overcrowding upon the creation of a tenancy

PROPERTY SIZE	HOUSEHOLD COMBINATION CONSIDER FOR AN OFFER
Bed-sitter	Single person
1 bed flat	Single person or couple
2 bed flat 2 bed maisonette	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant(s) who are pregnant or with one child, or 2 children of same sex, or children of opposite sex under the age of 7yrs. • Applicant(s) with a proven medical need for a carer to sleep over on regular basis. • Applicant(s) with proven (letter from main carer) regular overnight access to child(ren) • Couple • Single persons (though priority may be given to those with a need for 2 bedrooms)
3 bed flat 3 bed maisonette	Applicant(s) with up to 4 children.
1 bed house	Single person or couple
2 bed house	Applicant(s) who are pregnant or with one child, or 2 children of the same sex, or 2 children of opposite sex under the age of 7yrs.
3 bed house	Applicant(s) with 2 or more children. Some Partners may consider those with 1 child
4 bed house	Applicant(s) with 3 or more children
1 bed bungalow	Single Person or Couple aged 60+ yrs (age restriction may vary between Partners) or with a permanent medical need for ground floor accommodation. (For designated sheltered schemes applicants must require supported accommodation).
2 bed bungalow	Applicant(s) over 60+yrs (age restriction may vary between Partners) or with a permanent medical need for ground floor accommodation. Eg: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A medical need for a carer to sleep over on a regular basis. • Applicant or couple, with another resident family member residing with them - E.g. son, daughter, brother, sister, parent. • Couple. • Single persons (though priority may be given to those with a need for 2 bedrooms) <i>(for designated, sheltered schemes applicants must require supported accommodation and normally over 60yrs of age)</i>
3 bed bungalow	Applicants with a permanent medical need for ground floor accommodation and require 3 bedrooms.
Specially adapted properties	E.g. dwelling with a stair lift, level floor showers, wheelchair access. Households with a proven need for the particular adaptation, having regard to the usual household letting criteria.

SUMMARY OF FINAL POLICY

SUMMARY OF BANDINGS

BAND 1 – Highest Priority	BAND 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homeless Households – Priority need & unintentional • Enduring Rough Sleepers • Urgent Medical Need – unable to remain in current home • Urgent Welfare Need – unable to remain in current home • Approved ADHAC cases • Successor Tenant but in unsuitable property • Statutory Overcrowding • Lacking 2+ Bedrooms for permanently resident members • High Level of disrepair • Adapted property where adaptation no longer needed • 2 or more “Band 2” Housing Needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homeless households – non-priority need & unintentional • Threatened with homeless within 12 wks – likely to be priority need and unintentional • Those leaving the Armed Forces in housing need • Medical Need • Applicants WITH dependant children sharing/lacking facilities • Under-occupying council/RSL property by 2+ bedrooms • Supported accommodation tenants who no longer need support • Applicants lacking 1 bedroom – for permanent household • Established family living apart • Financial Difficulties • 3 or more “Band 3” Housing Needs • “Band 1” applicants but deliberately worsened circumstances • “Band 1” applicants who (or member of their household) have demonstrated unacceptable behaviour
BAND 3	BAND 4 – lowest priority
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homeless households – homeless but intentionally • Threatened Homeless in 12 wks – likely to be non-priority need and unintentional • Medical Need • Welfare Need • Applicants WITHOUT dependant children sharing/lacking facilities • Applicants lacking 1 bedroom – regular overnight access • Under-occupying council/RSL property by 1 bedrooms • Employment – improve access to proven permanent job • Level of Disrepair • “Band 2” applicants but deliberately worsened circumstances • “Band 2” applicants who (or member of their household) have demonstrated unacceptable behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicants adequately housed • Applicants with financial capacity to resolve housing needs • “Band 3” applicants but deliberately worsened circumstances • “Band 3” applicants who (or member of their household) have demonstrated unacceptable behaviour