

Summary Policy

Please be aware that this is a summary version of the draft Home Choice Lincs policy only. For a copy of the full draft policy – with comprehensive details - please visit the website of any of the partner organisations detailed in your letter.

Our Vision:

“To help create sustainable mixed communities where people choose to live by providing increased choice for the residents of northern Lincolnshire”

An Introduction

What is Choice Based Lettings?

Choice Based Lettings (CBL) is a national initiative that brings local councils and housing associations together to jointly advertise homes available for rent.

It is a requirement of the Government that all local authorities will provide a choice based lettings scheme by 2010. The purpose of the scheme is:

- To provide a system that offers realistic, informed choice for all home seekers while continuing to meet housing need, including homelessness
- To involve applicants in the process rather than just waiting for a property to be allocated to them
- To achieve settled communities where people live because they have chosen to do so
- To reduce the number of occasions where home seekers refuse a property which they have been offered
- To make sure that all home seekers can participate in the process and to make sure that they can exercise choice
- To reduce turn around times of vacant properties

What is Home Choice Lincs and who is involved?

Home Choice Lincs is the name given to the choice based lettings scheme due to be launched across North and North East Lincolnshire in October 2010.

The partnership is made up of two local authorities and three housing associations who, in some cases, manage the housing register on behalf of the local authorities. The following partners have all signed up to Home Choice Lincs. All of the partners below have agreed to participate in the scheme in accordance with its policy.

North East Lincolnshire Council
North Lincolnshire Council
Longhurst and Havelok Homes
Shoreline Housing Partnership Ltd
North Lincolnshire Homes Ltd

Home Choice Lincs is similar to the way an estate agent works allowing home seekers to see a range of homes available for rent in North and North East Lincolnshire in one place – accessed on a brand new website.

How does it work?

There are several steps to applying for a home with Home Choice Lincs:

- You apply online to join the housing register – you only need to apply once to be considered for homes across North and North East Lincolnshire
- Your housing and support needs are assessed
- If accepted onto the register you become a home seeker
- You are allocated a priority band which tells you what properties you are able to bid for
- You can view properties online and choose a home from a list of available properties in your allocated band in the area you want to live
- You make a bid - online, by telephone or by sending a text message
- You will be able to make up to three bids a week for homes you are able to bid for
- If you are successful the landlord of that property will contact you to arrange a viewing
- You decide if the home is right for you before accepting the tenancy

Why have you changed the old way of applying for a house?

We believe this policy will have a positive impact in the creation of thriving, mixed, stable and sustainable communities across North and North East Lincolnshire because:

- It gives people more choice about where they want to live by choosing the right home from a list of available properties they are eligible for.
- People are likely to stay in their home longer because they have been involved in selecting it.

- It provides a more efficient single access route for housing home seekers in North and North East Lincolnshire.
- It aims to ensure consistency and transparency in the way home seekers are treated by all partner housing providers.
- It will help to tackle homelessness and provide community stability.
- It will also help people who need to move within the area, whether it is with the same landlord, to another landlord or from one local authority area to another.
- It is a consistent, co-ordinated and joined-up approach to delivering a high quality lettings service.

A Summary of the Home Choice Lincs Policy

Who can apply?

Anyone over the age of 16 years can apply to register for housing through Home Choice Lincs. You do not have to have an existing connection with North or North East Lincolnshire although in most cases priority for lettings will be given to local home seekers.

For home seekers aged 16 and 17 years you will have your housing and support needs assessed jointly with other agencies to make sure you are suitable to be tenants and have the right support networks in place.

Is there any reason why I wouldn't be accepted onto the housing register?

You may be refused onto the housing register if:

- You or a member of your household is guilty of unacceptable or anti-social behaviour
- You have significant rent arrears
- You provide false or misleading information in connection with your application.

I am currently a housing applicant on a waiting list with one of the partners. Will I have to re-apply when Home Choice Lincs is introduced?

If you are currently on a waiting list with one of the partners you will have to re-apply to the new scheme through the Home Choice Lincs website.

This is because at present the partners currently operate different priority banding systems. It would not be possible to transfer you without you completing a new application form as different information may be required and your circumstances may have changed. However, the earliest date you registered for housing with one of the partner organisations will be transferred over to your new application.

I am already a tenant of one of the partner organisations and am currently on their transfer list. How will Home Choice Lincs affect my transfer application?

If you are currently on the transfer list for one of the partner organisations then you will have to re-apply for the Home Choice Lincs scheme. The date of your transfer application will be transferred over to the new scheme.

How will I use Home Choice Lincs?

The Home Choice Lincs scheme is being finalised at the moment but a web address will be launched at www.homechoicelincs.org.uk. There will be links to the Home Choice Lincs website from the websites of the local authorities and housing associations involved in the scheme.

You will be able to join the register simply and easily by completing just one application form which will allow you to select homes from all the partner landlords.

You will be able to apply:

- Online at www.homechoicelincs.org.uk
- At any customer access point across North and North East Lincolnshire
- At local libraries and tourist information offices
- By telephoning any of the partner organisations

Advice and support to complete the application will be provided on request, particularly if you have difficulty in completing the form. A member of staff will work through the questions on the application form with you and, if necessary, fill in the form on your behalf.

Following the application process, if you are eligible and accepted onto the register you will be allocated a priority band.

The Priority Bands

Home seekers will be assessed and given a priority band in accordance with the following categories of housing need:

Band 1: Urgent

- A) People losing their home due to a recognised regeneration scheme within any one of the local authorities or housing association within the scheme
- B) People assessed as statutorily homeless and in priority need
- C) People who need to move on urgent medical grounds
- D) People who need to move on welfare grounds

Band 2: High

- A) People living in overcrowded conditions and are three or more bed spaces short of requirements
- B) People assessed as intentionally homeless or non-priority homeless
- C) People who need to move due to a high medical need
- D) Social housing tenants of the partner landlords that are under-occupying a house by two or more bedrooms
- E) People with a child or children under the age of 10 or women who are 28+ weeks pregnant, occupying accommodation above ground floor level

Band 3: Medium

- A) People who need to move on hardship grounds
- B) People eligible to succeed/assign to a tenancy and who have a need or expressed wish to move to alternative accommodation
- C) Relationship breakdown or divorced partners with shared child care
- D) People who are one or two bed spaces short of requirements

Band 4: Low

- A) Those with no or low level housing need

How do I find a home using Home Choice Lincs?

Home Choice Lincs works by allowing you to express interest in up to three available properties that are advertised each week. The partnership will advertise the majority of their vacant properties as part of the scheme, including properties that have been designed or adapted to meet the needs of disabled or older people.

Advertisements will give you details of the property's location, number of rooms, heating systems, gardens etc. The advertisements will also tell you the weekly rent and any other charges.

You will be informed at registration what types of property you will be able to bid for. There will sometimes be other restrictions in the advert – for example sheltered accommodation only for elderly or disabled people over a certain age. Your bid will only be accepted if it can match the requirements in the advert.

If I don't have a computer how will I be able access Home Choice Lincs

The Home Choice Lincs website will be available to use at the following locations:

- Customer Access Points at Grimsby, Cleethorpes, Immingham and Local Links offices in North Lincolnshire
- Local libraries and tourist information offices

Can anyone bid for a property?

As long as you are registered on the Housing or Transfer registers you can bid. Just look out for advertised properties and express your interest. You can bid for up to three properties at any one time.

Can I choose any home I like?

You can express an interest in any home that you are eligible for and you will only be considered for homes that are suitable for your needs.

What if I bid for a property and I don't hear anything?

If you haven't heard anything from us within five days of the closing date please assume another home seeker has been offered that home. Details of the successful home seekers band level will be available on the website, so you can see the band level and date of application likely to be needed to successfully bid for a similar property in that area in the future. This will help you to see if you need to widen your choices next time you bid. Remember you can bid for up to three properties at any one time.

Will I have to bid for a property every week?

You do not have to bid for a property every week but the more you view available properties and the more bids you make (remember, you can make up to three bids a week) the greater chance you have of finding a suitable home.

If you do not bid for a property within a 12 month period we will contact you to make sure you still want to remain on the Register. Home seekers in Bands 1 and 2 will be reviewed on a more regular basis.

Will I stay on the Housing Register once I have my new home?

No, your application will be removed from the Housing Register once you have your new home.

How can I view properties and make an offer?

When you have been selected for an offer, the landlord will arrange a meeting with you so you can view the property. In some circumstances, more than one home seeker may be invited to view, particularly in areas of low demand or in the case of properties that are frequently refused by home seekers. However, if a home seeker has refused a direct offer of accommodation, they will only be given a second offer in exceptional circumstances.

Where can I view the full Home Choice Lincs policy?

You can view the full policy for North and North East Lincolnshire by following the link from any of the partner organisation's websites.

Alternatively, you can contact Simon Allcock on 01472 572036 for a copy to be mailed to you.

Meeting our obligations

This policy has been developed with regards to the codes of guidance issued to local housing authorities in England, in exercising the functions under 167(1A) and 167 (2E) of the Housing Act 1996. The partnership will make sure that the policy is compatible with obligations imposed by other existing legislation, in addition to Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 as detailed below. This list is not exhaustive.

The Race Relation (Amendment) Act 2000
The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended 2006)
The Human Rights Act 1998
The Freedom of Information Act 2000
Children Act 1989
Data Protection Act 1998
Crime & Disorder Act 1998
Homelessness Act 2002
The Equality Act 2006

So what do you think?

We welcome your comments on the proposed Home Choice Lincs scheme. Please give us your views by completing our online questionnaire available on any of the partner organisation's websites. If you don't have access to a computer please complete the enclosed questionnaire and return it in the pre-paid envelope provided.

Alternatively you can send comments by email to info@homechoicelincs.org.uk or telephone 01472 572036.