



South Staffordshire Council

Homefinder

Choice Based Lettings Scheme



Updated April 2010

SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE COUNCIL
HOMEFINDER CHOICE BASED LETTINGS

What is Choice Based Lettings?

This scheme has been designed to improve access to rented homes owned by housing associations within the South Staffordshire area. The system works by advertising available homes and allowing customers to express an interest in them by email at homes@sstaffs.gov.uk, by post or by telephone.

The scheme aims to simplify the way in which you can rent a home and takes into account the date you registered with the scheme. Your individual circumstances will be assessed and you will be advised which of the priority bands you fall within.

Can anyone access the scheme?

The Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 states that the following persons are eligible to be considered for social housing.

- Existing tenants - all secure, assured, and introductory tenants of a housing authority.
- British nationals who are habitually resident in the Common Travel Area, (CTA)
- European Economic Area (EEA) nationals - Any person, who is a national of any of the countries in the EEA and is habitually resident in the CTA, or is a worker, or has the right to reside in the United Kingdom.
- Persons not subject to immigration control.

Anyone over the age of 18 can apply. If you are aged between 16 or 17 years of age, you will need a suitable guarantor before a tenancy can be offered to you as legally a minor cannot hold an interest in a tenancy. The guarantor will need to be willing to be responsible for the tenancy until you reach the age of 18.

To join the scheme, you will need to complete an application registration form.

Is there any reason that I might not be accepted onto the scheme?

Yes. If you or a member of your household has been guilty of unacceptable behaviour and it is considered that it is serious enough to make you unsuitable to be a tenant of a housing association.

Unacceptable behaviour is defined as being "***behaviour of the person concerned which would, (if he were a secure tenant of the authority), entitle the authority to a possession order under section 84 of the Housing Act 1985 on any ground mentioned in Part I of Schedule 2 to that Act (other than Ground 8)***" or "***behaviour of a member of his household which would (if he were a person residing with a secure tenant of the authority) entitle the authority with such a possession order)***"

The facts in each case will be examined carefully before a decision is made, as to whether or not you are to be excluded. Other agencies such as the police, social

services, the probation service, registered social landlords, local authorities and other statutory agencies will be consulted prior to a decision being reached.

If I am excluded from the scheme and disagree with the decision, what can I do?

On completion of investigations, if you are refused access to the Choice Based Lettings scheme, you will be notified of the decision and the reasons for it in writing. If you disagree with the decision, or the reasons given, you will have the right to have the decision reviewed through the Council's Review process, further details of which will be enclosed with the decision letter.

How can I apply to join the scheme?

You can register an application by completing an application for housing form available from the address on the back of this booklet or by downloading it from the Council's website at www.sstaffs.gov.uk.

Can I choose where I live?

Yes. South Staffordshire Council wishes to offer all applicants on its Housing Register a choice as to the area within which they wish to live. This choice can be exercised by "expressing an interest" for properties in areas in which you are interested. Generally you will not be penalised for refusing an offer of a property, but will continue to be considered for future vacancies in which you express an interest.

If you have been accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need by this Council, you will be expected to express an interest in properties for which you are eligible and which are considered suitable for your needs. If you do not, a bid may be made on your behalf by South Staffordshire Council. Should you refuse an offer of accommodation which is considered suitable, subject to the Council's Homelessness Review Procedure, a copy of which is available on request, the Council may have fulfilled its duty toward you and any additional priority awarded to you because of your homelessness may be withdrawn.

How will my application be prioritised?

Based on the information that you provide on your application registration form, you will be placed into one of three bands, Gold, Silver or Bronze with Gold being the highest priority and Bronze being the lowest. Those in the most acute housing need will also be awarded a priority card.

Your applicable date of application will be the date you are placed into an individual band.

What if I disagree with the priority I have been awarded?

In the first instance you should contact the Housing Options Team to discuss the matter and ensure that all relevant information has been considered.

If you remain dissatisfied, you have the right to request a review of that decision by the Council's Housing Appeals and Review Panel. Further information can be found on

the Council's website at www.sstaffs.gov.uk or by contacting the Council's Housing Options Team on 01902 696000.

What if my circumstances change?

You will need to let us know as soon as possible so that your application can be updated.

What priorities are within which band?

Gold (previously Gold Plus) Band – High Housing Need

Property subject to a closing order or deemed unfit to live in.

Confirmation will be required from South Staffordshire Council's Environmental Health Department that an individual property does not meet current fitness standards.

Homelessness duty

Where a household has been determined to be unintentionally homeless and in priority need by South Staffordshire Council.

Lack of facilities

If your current accommodation does not have access to a hot water supply, a bathroom, or inside WC. A visit will be made to your property to confirm this.

High Medical priority

This will only be awarded where your current home is totally unsuitable to meet your current medical needs. For example, where a wheelchair user occupies a home where bathing and toilet facilities are upstairs and therefore inaccessible. Documentation will be required from appropriate professional agencies before any additional priority can be awarded.

Statutory overcrowding

A report will be required from the Council's Environmental Health section that the property is statutorily overcrowded within current Environmental Health legislation.

Victims of Domestic Violence and/or Abuse

If you are a victim of physical or mental abuse from a partner, relative, carer, housekeeper or other associated person with whom you currently live or have previously lived, and for whom the use of an injunction, other legal action or other remedy is inappropriate, you may be awarded additional priority. Prior to any additional priority being awarded, an interview will be arranged with the Council's Housing Options Team to assess your situation and to offer appropriate advice and assistance.

Victims of crime, racial harassment or threats of violence from outside the home.

If you are a victim of crime, racial harassment or threats of violence from outside the home, (excluding domestic abuse/violence) i.e. from a neighbour, and for whom the use of injunctions or other legal remedies is inappropriate and where you are unable to remain in your current home in safety you may be awarded additional priority. Prior to any additional priority being awarded, an interview will be arranged with the Council's Housing Options Team to assess your situation and offer appropriate advice and assistance.

Vulnerability due to special circumstances.

If you are considered to be vulnerable and your current housing situation is having a detrimental effect on your way of life you may be awarded additional priority. Prior to any additional priority being awarded, an interview will be arranged with the Council's Housing Options Team to assess your situation.

Under occupation – South Staffordshire Housing Association tenants only

If you are currently a tenant of South Staffordshire Housing Association and you are willing to transfer from a 2, 3 or 4 bedroom house to smaller accommodation which will release family accommodation.

Management Moves – South Staffordshire Housing Association tenants only

If you are currently a tenant of South Staffordshire Housing Association (SSHA and you need to urgently move from your existing home as determined by the Association, to another SSHA property.

Overcrowding for existing tenants of South Staffordshire Housing Association.

If you are a tenant of South Staffordshire Housing Association and wish to move to other South Staffordshire Housing Association properties and you wish to move to a larger property, and there is evidence of overcrowding. Overcrowding is based on the standard that a separate bedroom is required for each of the following:-

- *Applicant and spouse/partner*
- *Where children of the same sex share a bedroom and one is 10 years of age or above.*
- *Children of different sexes share a room and one is 5 years of age or above.*
- *3 or more persons share a bedroom*
- *Where each person requires a separate bedroom on health grounds*

For expectant mothers, the unborn child is counted in any measure for overcrowding.

Applicants with three or more of the criteria within the Silver Band.

Silver Band (Previously Gold Band) – Medium Housing Need

Homeless Households – no statutory duty

If you have been found to be unintentionally homeless and in no priority need by this Council.

Overcrowding and shared facilities for applicants who are not existing tenants of South Staffordshire Housing Association.

If you are not a tenant of SSHA and you have to share a kitchen, living room, WC and bathroom with other occupants who are not family members.

If you live in a property that is not owned by SSHA and where there is evidence of overcrowding. Overcrowding is based on the standard that a separate bedroom is required for each of the following:-

- *Applicant and spouse/partner*
- *Where children of the same sex share a bedroom and one is 10 years of age or above.*
- *Children of different sexes share a room and one is 5 years of age or above.*
- *3 or more persons share a bedroom*
- *Where each person requires a separate bedroom on health grounds*

For expectant mothers, the unborn child is counted in any measure for overcrowding.

Medium medical priority

Where it has been determined by South Staffordshire Council that you or a member of your household has a medical condition that is worsened by your current housing situation.

To receive or provide support

If you need to move to give support or receive support from or to a close family member. Supporting evidence of this will be required.

To move closer to work

If you need to move closer to work. Supporting evidence of this will be required.

Expectant Mothers/Households with Children

This will include any member of the household requesting accommodation who is pregnant and/or households who have dependent children.

Bronze Band - (previously Silver Band) Low housing Need

Low medical need

Where you or a member of your household is awarded low medical priority.

No need to move

If you have none of the priorities included in the Gold or Silver Bands.

Intentionally Homeless Households

If you have been found to be homeless and in priority need, but intentionally so by South Staffordshire Council

Priority Cards

Priority cards will be awarded to applicants in the following situations:-

1. Where you have been accepted as being unintentionally homeless and in priority need by South Staffordshire Council.
2. Where you are in specialist accommodation and it is no longer suitable for your needs, and by vacating that property it is being made available for occupation for a household for whom it is suitable.
3. Where you have three or more of the priorities within the Gold Band.
4. Where a tenant of South Staffordshire Housing Association is determined by the Assistant Director of Housing (SSHA) as requiring a management move.

Priority cards will be valid for 3 months, at which time your case will be reviewed.

USEFUL CONTACTS

South Staffordshire Housing Association

Telephone: 0800 096 8690
01785 312000

Web site: www.ssha.co.uk
E mail: enquiries@ssha.co.uk

Shelter

Telephone: 0808 800 444 (8 am – midnights, 7 days a week)
Website: www.shelter.org.uk

Staffordshire Women's Aid

Providing confidential help and advice to victims of domestic violence.

Telephone: 0870 2700 013

Citizen's Advice Bureau within South Staffordshire

The Citizens Advice service helps people resolve their legal, money and other problems by providing free, independent and confidential advice at the following surgeries.

Monday	9.30am-12.30pm Civic Centre, Gravel Hill, Wombourne Tel: 01902 897757 9.30am-12.30pm The Health Centre, High Street, Kinver Tel: 01384 872999
Wednesday	10.00am-4.00pm The Village Hall, Pinfold Lane, Cheslyn Hay Tel: 01922 413338 9.30am-12.30pm & 1.00pm-4.00pm Community Centre, Church Road, Perton Tel: 01902 745667
Thursday	9.30am-12.30pm The Haling Dene Centre, Penkridge Tel: 01785 716767 10.00am-1.00pm Codsall Village Hall, Wolverhampton Rd, Codsall Tel: 01902 843412
Friday	9.30am-12.30pm The Civic Centre, Gravel Hill, Wombourne Tel: 01902 897757

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