



The new Choice Based Letting scheme for social housing in Cumbria

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why are things changing?

A number of local authorities and housing associations in the country already operate choice based letting schemes for allocating social housing. Studies have found that it is a more efficient way of letting properties, that it is a more open and transparent system, and that there are higher levels of satisfaction from those using the system.

The government believes that people should have more choice about where they live and want all local authorities to have a choice based letting scheme in place.

2. In what way is it different to the current system?

Currently those on a housing waiting list have to wait until they are contacted by a housing officer with an offer of a property. They cannot choose which property they are offered, they do not know what other properties may be available and they have no notice that they are about to be offered a property.

Under the new system, landlords advertise nearly all their vacancies on the Cumbria Choice website. This means that those who are registered for housing know what properties are available and can decide if they want to apply for any of the properties being advertised. People can apply by bidding for properties.

3. When is it going to happen?

One scheme is being developed for all of Cumbria by the six district councils and eight housing organisations. The plan is for the new scheme to be ready in April 2011.

4. What does one scheme for Cumbria mean?

The following housing organisations are participating in the scheme: Accent Housing; Derwent & Solway; Eden Housing; Home; Impact Housing; Riverside; South Lakes Housing Arms Length Management Organisation, and Two Castles Housing.

All six local authorities in Cumbria have signed up: Allerdale Borough Council; Barrow Borough Council; Carlisle City Council; Copeland Borough Council; Eden District Council, and South Lakeland District Council.

This means that you only need to complete one application form to go on the Cumbria Choice register to access housing from any of the organisations listed.

5. How will properties be advertised?

You will be able to see vacant properties on the Cumbria Choice website. Printed newsletters will be available for you to look at in the housing offices and council offices of those organisations in the scheme.

Newsletters will be sent to other agencies and voluntary organisations. A list of these places will be published once the scheme is ready to start.

6. Are all properties included?

The housing organisations in the scheme will place the majority of their properties for advertising. In certain circumstances an organisation may require a property for a specific reason and in this case it will not be advertised. However the scheme will publish details of any properties let in this way.

7. Where can I get help with new scheme?

If you do not understand any part of the new scheme then you can contact one of the participating housing organisations. One of their officers will be able to help you and answer any questions.

8. What happens if I do not have a computer?

You do not need a computer. You can request and complete a paper version of the form to go on the register. You can look at a newsletter to see all the properties that are available for renting. You can register your interest in a property in a number of ways: phoning a housing office, ringing an automated phone line; sending a text or asking someone to ring on your behalf.

- 9. What are bands and how will I know what band I am in?**
Applicants will be placed in one of six bands, according to their level of housing need. These bands indicate the level of priority each applicant as when housing is being allocated. For example, someone with a serious medical need for ground floor accommodation will be placed in the highest band. Someone who already has a suitable property will be placed in the lowest band.
Once you have sent in your form and accompanying information, you will receive a letter to tell you which band you are in.
- 10. What if I am in the same band as someone else, how will you decide who gets the property?**
When people are in the same band then the property is offered to the person who has been waiting longest.
- 11. What is bidding?**
Once you have a registration number you can start to bid for a property. This means that you can tell us which properties you are interested in renting. You can make a bid by going into one of the housing offices, by phone, through an automated phone number, by text, or on the website.
- 12. How will I know if I have been successful?**
Only the person who is to be offered the property will be contacted. If you are not contacted then you have not been successful with that particular bid.
- 13. Will local housing go to people from all over Cumbria?**
No. Priority will be given to people who have a local connection to the area. Some properties (10%) will be available for people who need to move across local authority boundaries.
- 14. The Website**
The Cumbria Choice scheme operates through a website. Though the scheme can be used perfectly well without going online, there are advantages to using the Cumbria Choice website to register and apply for housing:
- You can complete your application form online
 - You can tell us about changes in your circumstances online
 - You can look at all the properties online
 - You can ask the system to list just the properties you are able to bid for
 - You can bid for vacant properties online
 - You can see where you are on the shortlist (and therefore your chances of your 'bid' being successful)

- You can decide to remove a bid and place a bid on another property
- It is quicker to use, and there is more information available to you about other housing options.

This leaflet can be made available in large print and other languages on request.