

# **Social Housing Allocations Policy** **Borough Council Kings Lynn and West Norfolk**

## **Guide to West Norfolk HomeChoice**

### **Contents**

1. [Introduction](#)
2. [Who can be accepted onto the Housing Register](#)
  - [Local Connection](#)
  - [Further rules: age, rent arrears, behaviour](#)
3. [How West Norfolk HomeChoice works](#)
  - [Your Circumstances and your HomeChoice Application](#)
  - [Bidding for accommodation](#)
4. [Priority for an Allocation of Social Housing](#)
  - [Emergency Band](#)
  - [High Band](#)
  - [Medium Band](#)
  - [Low Band](#)
  - [No priority](#)
  - [Additional considerations](#)
5. [Size and type of properties](#)
6. [Allocation policies for specific schemes](#)
7. [Applicants' Right to Review / Appeal your West Norfolk HomeChoice Application](#)
8. [Applicants' Consent and Declaration](#)
9. [Housing Register Review of West Norfolk HomeChoice Applications](#)
10. [Cancelling an application](#)
11. [Applications by staff, elected members or their family members](#)
12. [Equal Opportunities and Diversity](#)
13. [Data Protection](#)

### **Appendix**

- A. [HomeChoice Partners](#)
- B. [Legal background](#)

## **1. Introduction**

Every Council which is a housing authority must publish a policy for determining the priorities and procedures to be followed in allocating social housing in their area.

This social housing allocations policy explains the rules West Norfolk HomeChoice will follow in maintaining a Housing Register and the allocating of social housing to housing applicants from the Housing Register.

More detail on the legal background can be found in Appendix B.

West Norfolk HomeChoice is administered by the Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk on behalf of Registered Provider (Housing Associations) partners. If you are successful in bidding for a property, West Norfolk HomeChoice will pass your details to the relevant Housing Association who will consider your circumstances, your income and housing history in accordance with their own housing policies.

Details of all the partners are included at Appendix A.

The Council's Social Housing Allocation policy (West Norfolk HomeChoice policy) is kept under review to ensure it is both lawful and equitable. Necessary amendments have recently been identified to keep this up to date with amendments to statutory guidance and to clarify queries regarding procedures carried out by staff.

## 2. Who can be accepted to the Housing Register?

Not everyone can join the Housing Register. Applicants will only be accepted onto the West Norfolk HomeChoice Housing Register if:

- They are eligible within the meaning of the Asylum and Immigration Act (1996) and
- They have a local connection to the Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk as set out in this Policy and
- Their annual earned income, savings and equity in any property totals less than one third of the average suitable property price in West Norfolk unless there is an overwhelming welfare need.

**The next section explains more about local connection to the Borough of King's Lynn & West Norfolk under West Norfolk HomeChoice policy.**

You will have a local connection if:

- you have been living in the Borough of King's Lynn & West Norfolk for at least 3 out of the last 5 years or,
- you have close family (parents, children, brothers or sisters) who have been living in the Borough for at least 5 years (any priority due will be one band lower than those with their own residential connection).

**You will also be considered as having a local connection as follows:**

### Homeless and in priority need

The Council owes you a duty to secure alternative accommodation because you are homeless, you have a priority need and a local connection in accordance with the Housing Act 1996 (amended), associated legislation and guidance.

### Armed forces personnel

Certain members of the Armed Forces community are exempt from any residency requirements, by virtue of regulations made under section 160ZA(8) which prevent local authorities from applying a local connection test to disqualify such applicants. These are:

1. Those who are currently serving in the Regular Armed Forces or who were serving in the Regular Forces at any time
2. Bereaved spouses or civil partners of those serving in the Regular Forces where:
  - the bereaved spouse or civil partner has recently ceased, or will cease, to be entitled to reside in Ministry of Defence accommodation following the death of their Service spouse or civil partner, and
  - the death was wholly or partly attributable to their service.
3. Serving or former members of the Reserve Armed Forces who are suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is wholly or partly attributable to their service.
4. Divorced, separated spouses or civil partners of Service personnel required to move out of service accommodation where they have previous residence in the borough

These provisions recognise the special position of members of the Armed Forces whose employment requires them to be mobile and who are likely therefore to be particularly disadvantaged by local connection requirements.

	The provisions extend to bereaved spouses and civil partners of Service personnel recognising that they are likely to experience similar issues. Reservists are included, recognising, for example, that those who have been seriously injured because of their service may need to move to another local authority district to access treatment, care or support.
<b>Separated Spouses / Civil Partners of Armed Forces Personnel</b>	This includes separated spouses or civil partners of a member of the Armed forces who have had to leave service accommodation due to relationship breakdown within the last five years. Evidence will need to be provided.
<b>Care leavers</b>	<p>In line with <a href="#">government guidance</a>, the following people will be considered as having a local connection:</p> <p>(a) eligible children as set out in paragraph 19B of Schedule 2 to the Children Act 1989. These are child who are: (a) currently being looked-after; (b) aged 16 or 17; and (c) have been looked after by a local authority in England or Wales for a period of 13 weeks, or periods amounting in total to 13 weeks, since the age of 14, at least one day of which must have been since attaining age 16</p> <p>(b) relevant children as set out by section 23A(2) of the Children Act 1989. These are children who are: (a) no longer a looked-after-child; (b) aged 16 or 17; and (c) a former eligible child</p> <p>(c) former relevant children aged under 25 as set out by section 23C(1) of the Children Act 1989. These are children who are: (a) aged 18 to 24; and (b) either a former relevant child or a former eligible child.</p>
<b>Domestic Abuse</b>	In line with <a href="#">government guidance</a> , this policy commits to providing victim-survivors of domestic abuse (as defined in section 1 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021) “as much support and assistance as possible so that they are able to re-build their lives away from abuse and harm”. Therefore, where there is evidence that a victim needs to move because of domestic abuse, then they will be considered to have a local connection.
<b>Other circumstances</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If there are special circumstances (for example severe social or medical needs) why you need to live in the area. Evidence that extreme hardship would otherwise occur must be provided.</li> <li>• You are an existing social housing tenant in another local authority district, and you have a need to move to West Norfolk because you already have genuine and effective work in the district or wish to take up an approved offer of such work here and failing to secure housing in West Norfolk would cause hardship. (Right to Move)</li> </ul>

## Those in prison

People currently in prison will not be active on the Housing Register. Anyone leaving prison can contact the Housing Options Team for more advice a minimum of 8 weeks prior to release. Applicants will also be considered to have a local connection with King’s Lynn and West Norfolk if they had a local connection prior to their sentence.

## **Further rules: age, rent arrears, behaviour**

### **Age limits: 16- and 17-year-olds**

Applicants should be aged 18 years or over. Anyone aged 16 or over can apply for housing if they are eligible. However, this does not guarantee housing under the scheme and until the applicant reaches 18 years old.

Any offer of accommodation will be subject to appropriate trustee arrangements being in place and show that they will be supported in the tenancy and that the level of support is appropriate for their needs. The trustee could be a family member, adult friend, or a professional body e.g. Norfolk County Council's Leaving Care Services.

Applicants under 18 years old will be referred to the council's Housing Needs Service for advice regarding their housing rights and options and may be offered semi-independent accommodation with support. If you are homeless or if safeguarding concerns are raised, then you will be referred to Children's Services for an assessment.

### **Rent arrears**

If you have a housing debt to your current or former landlord, you must make an affordable arrangement to make payments against the debt. Without evidence of an established record of payments and / or a significantly reduced debt your application will not be made active, and you will not be able to bid for properties.

Tenants of partner Housing Associations accruing rent arrears due to a reduction in their Housing Benefit arising from the 'room rate' will still be considered for a move to smaller, more affordable accommodation. If your property is deemed to be unaffordable following a housing assessment you may be allowed to bid and be nominated for a property.

If rent arrears have accrued either in the private or social sector as a direct result of circumstances outside of your control, further assessment of these will be made and you may be allowed to bid and be nominated for a property.

### **Unacceptable or inappropriate behaviour**

A record of unacceptable behaviour by you or members of your household may result in you being ineligible to join or remain on the Housing Register.

The council has the power to determine whether, in its opinion, applicants or members of their household have been guilty of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to determine that they should be disqualified from West Norfolk HomeChoice.

Some examples of the type of behaviour that could mean that an applicant does not qualify for inclusion on West Norfolk HomeChoice are:

- Serious rent arrears which, in the council's view, would entitle the landlord to a possession order.
- Causing deliberate damage to a property.
- Causing anti-social behaviour such as nuisance to neighbours, discriminatory behaviour or harassment, violence or intimidation to the community or to council staff.

- Providing false information to the council or contriving circumstances to improve banding.
- Conviction for using or allowing a property to be used for illegal or immoral purposes, including offences involving illegal drugs.
- Perpetrating domestic abuse.
- Conviction for an offence in the property or near the property.
- Eviction from hostel or temporary accommodation.

Unacceptable behaviour may relate to any former or current tenancies. Checks are made with all previous landlords to determine whether any unacceptable behaviour occurred during a tenancy.

When making any decision we will consider when the unacceptable behaviour took place and whether there is any evidence that your behaviour has changed.

If you make an application and a decision is made not to include you on the Housing Register, then you will be informed of the reasons and you will be advised of your right to have the decision reviewed.

### 3. How West Norfolk HomeChoice Works

The West Norfolk HomeChoice allocations scheme is the way for eligible applicants to be included on the housing register and their housing circumstances prioritised according to the allocations policy. They are then able to choose to place 'bids' on suitable social housing properties advertised by our partner landlords across the borough that would meet their needs.

**However, being accepted onto the Housing Register does not guarantee an offer of accommodation.**

To apply you will need to complete an online application form and provide supporting documents as proof of residence in the last 6 years (e.g. council tax or utility bills) for all members of your household. You can provide any other information you feel may support your application which will be taken into consideration. However, if more information is needed to assess your eligibility for the register West Norfolk HomeChoice will advise you.

**However, please note that your application will not be assessed if you have not provided ID, income details and evidence of 6 years' address history for everyone on your application.**

#### Your Circumstances and your HomeChoice Application

**If you are, or have been a tenant**

Your landlord(s) will be asked to complete a tenancy check about any breaches of your tenancy agreement. This will include any rent arrears, breaches of tenancy or anti-social behaviour.

**If you are pregnant**

Your priority will not be re-assessed until we receive a copy of the birth certificate.

**If you have a disability, health and a housing need**

If you have provided information on your medical circumstances that are affected by your current home, a housing assessment panel will then look at your application. Its decision will be based on your condition, the effect of your current home on your health and how your condition would be helped or improved if you moved to another home.

**If you have staying contact with children**

A child or children living between parents at separate addresses will only be considered as having one main home. Due to the high demand for accommodation, if a child's main home is not with you then they cannot be included when determining if you are overcrowded or be considered when determining the size of property that you are eligible to bid for.

**Notice to leave or harassment**

If you have already been given written notice to leave your home or where harassment is given as the reason for needing to move, then you may be referred for an assessment with the council's Housing Needs Service or asked to complete an online housing advice request form. Your circumstances will be assessed, and advice / assistance will be offered to you.

### **Lacking facilities or disrepair**

If you are lacking a kitchen, bathroom / shower, toilet or your home is in serious disrepair you may be referred for an assessment of your home by the council's Housing Standards team.

West Norfolk HomeChoice will then consider your application and the information that you have supplied to see whether you qualify to be included on the Housing Register. If you are registered, you will receive confirmation of

- The priority band you are in,
- The relevant date you are placed in that band,
- Your registration number.

### **Important: If your circumstances change**

You will need to go online to update your application and provide more information as requested. **Your application will not be reassessed until you update your application form.**

### **Bidding for accommodation**

All available properties are advertised on the [HomeChoice website](#). Properties are advertised weekly on a Wednesday and bids must be placed by noon on the following Monday.

You can bid for available properties online. Your bid will not be considered if your circumstances do not match that given for the property. Some properties may be advertised giving preference for households with special circumstances e.g. applicants with medical needs or local connection to a particular Parish.

You will be unable to make a bid for a particular property if your circumstances do not meet those advertised, for example if a flat is advertised for those aged over 60 and you are 25. You will not be able to bid for a bungalow if you are aged under 60 and have no proven medical need for ground floor accommodation.

You may bid for all properties whose descriptions or criteria you meet. Each partner landlord will provide the descriptions and photos of the properties that are available each week. If you have made a successful bid, you will be unable to make any new bids until West Norfolk HomeChoice has been informed by the landlord that you wish to refuse the property.

**If you are successful in bidding for a property but do not respond when the landlord contacts you regarding the offer then, it is likely to be assumed that you are no longer interested in housing and your application will be cancelled.**

Minimum family sizes rather than maximum family sizes may also apply to advertised properties.

West Norfolk HomeChoice will undertake regular reviews of applicants who are not accessing their applications. Your application will be cancelled if you do not log in using your User ID and PIN / Password to view or bid for properties within a period of 6 months.



## 4. Priority For an Allocation of Social Housing

West Norfolk HomeChoice uses a banding system – High, Medium, Low and No Priority on the Housing Register to identify need and award priority. In extreme circumstances an 'Emergency Band' may be awarded.

### Emergency Band

Sometimes applicants find themselves in such severe living conditions that they have no option but to move straight away. Examples of extreme circumstances are

- witness protection cases
- some hospital discharges or
- a combination of factors from the High Band.

In these extreme circumstances an Emergency Band may be awarded.

The decision as to whether an Emergency Band will be awarded will be taken by the West Norfolk HomeChoice Panel. The panel consists of representatives of the Borough Council and of partner Housing Associations.

If Emergency Band is granted, this will give you priority over all other banded applicants of similar household size for a period of three months. You may bid for any property suitable for your family size and circumstances. If you do not bid during this time, then your application will be reassessed, and a decision will be taken as to whether to allow you more time to bid or whether the Emergency Band is to be withdrawn.

If the Emergency Band is withdrawn, then your application would be allocated the priority band that your housing need dictates.

### High Band

**To be included in this band an applicant must meet at least one of the following conditions:**

#### **Homeless and owed a 'main' duty**

The council consider that you are in priority need, homeless through no fault of your own and are owed the main homelessness duty (s.193 Housing Act 1996 part 7 as amended).

#### **Overcrowding (2+ bedrooms)**

Your family needs at least 2 or more bedrooms than it has now, or you are sharing a bedroom with your child aged 6 months or over and West Norfolk HomeChoice considers that you have no alternative but to share that room.

#### **Under-occupation (2+ bedrooms)**

You're already a tenant of a Housing Association within West Norfolk and live in a property that has 2 bedrooms or more than you need. You must wish to move to a smaller more suitable home.

<b>Combination of factors of housing need</b>	You have been awarded medium medical priority and medium priority for overcrowding.
<b>Medical/ Welfare/ Support/ Hardship</b>	<p>Your current accommodation is totally unsuitable, and a move is essential to give you some quality of life. High medical priority may be given where:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A medical condition is terminal, and rehousing will give some quality of life.</li> <li>2. A medical condition is life threatening, and the existing accommodation is making the condition worse.</li> <li>3. Your current housing is so severely affecting their health that it could become life threatening.</li> <li>4. Your accommodation is so unsuitable that it cannot be adapted or otherwise used in such a way to meet their needs.</li> <li>5. You have a proven need to move to suitable accommodation within a particular locality of the Borough. Evidence that extreme hardship would otherwise occur must be provided.</li> </ol>
<b>Severe disrepair or insanitary conditions</b>	You have been living for more than 12 months in a private sector property in West Norfolk where continued occupation is due to be prohibited by the Council or where the property is due to be demolished.
<b>Supported Housing</b>	<p>If you have a local connection to King's Lynn and West Norfolk and have been living in one of our partner Supported Housing Schemes for more than 3 months, then you may be awarded a high band. You will need to demonstrate that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You are ready to move to independent accommodation (evidenced by written confirmation from the Supported Scheme Manager)</li> <li>• You are unable to move on from the Scheme through any other way than the housing register – in other words, you are unable to find and sustain privately rented or other suitable accommodation.</li> </ul> <p>An application form will be available from the council's Housing Options Team and from Supported Housing Schemes.</p> <p>If you do not make a successful bid for suitable accommodation within 3 months or refuse a suitable offer, your housing need band may be reassessed.</p>

### High band: right to move for work

West Norfolk HomeChoice would need to be satisfied that you need to move to a particular locality in King's Lynn & West Norfolk for work and if you were unable to do so, it would cause you or another member of your household hardship. This category does not apply to short-term or marginal work in nature, nor ancillary to work in another district. Voluntary work is also excluded.

West Norfolk HomeChoice must be satisfied that you need, rather than wish, to move for work related reasons.

The factors that we would consider in determining whether your need to move to be closer to

work or to take up a job offer include:

- the distance and/or time taken to travel between work and home.
- the availability and affordability of transport, considering level of earnings.
- the nature of the work and whether similar opportunities are available closer to home.
- other personal factors, such as medical conditions and childcare, which would be affected if the tenant could not move.
- the length of the work contract.
- whether failure to move would result in the loss of an opportunity to improve their employment circumstances or prospects, for example, by taking up a better job, a promotion, or an apprenticeship.

Where you have been offered a job and need to move to take it up, you must be able to demonstrate to our satisfaction that you have a genuine intention to take up the offer. We may wish to ask to see a letter of acceptance and may wish to contact your employer to verify the position. We may also seek clarification from you by interviewing you over the telephone or in person. Appropriate evidence could include:

- a contract of employment.
- wage/salary slips covering a certain period, or bank statements (this is particularly relevant in the case of zero-hours contracts).
- tax and benefits information
- a formal offer letter.

If we accept that you have a valid reason to move for work, then you will be awarded High Band for a period of 6 weeks. If you have not made a successful bid for accommodation, then you will be made one direct offer of suitable accommodation. If the direct offer is refused without good reason, then your application may be cancelled.

### **High band: Care leavers**

Where an applicant is leaving local authority care and is assessed as needing to move on (as determined by a Housing Options senior officer or Housing Needs manager following the required evidence and risk assessment being submitted from Children's Services), where the applicant has completed a tenancy awareness course, support plan outcomes have been met and there is a suitable support package in place so that the council is satisfied that the applicant is able to successfully manage their own tenancy.

Referrals can be accepted a minimum of eight weeks before the applicant leaves care. Applicants will have completed and kept to a personalised housing plan made with a housing options officer, will place bids with the guidance of their housing options officer and / or leaving care worker and will be entitled to one suitable offer of accommodation.

Refusal of the offer will mean that your banding will be removed.

### **Medium Band**

**To be included in this band, you must meet at least one of the following conditions:**

<b>Duty to relieve homelessness</b>	The council has accepted a 'relief' duty to assist you to relieve your homelessness and you have a local connection to King's Lynn and West Norfolk in accordance with HomeChoice policy (s.189 b (2) Housing Act 1996 part 7 as amended).
<b>Overcrowding</b>	Your family needs one more bedroom than it has now.
<b>Under-occupation</b>	You are already a tenant of a Housing Association within West Norfolk and live in a property that has one more bedroom than you need. You must wish to move to a smaller more suitable home.
<b>Medical/ welfare, support or hardship</b>	<p>This may include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your current accommodation affects your medical condition to some degree and there is a demonstrable link between your housing, medical condition. The need for re-housing is significant but not overriding.</li> <li>• You are generally coping with your current situation but with some degree of difficulty and have no alternative ways to improve your situation.</li> <li>• There are special circumstances (for example severe social or medical needs) why you need to move to suitable accommodation in the Borough or, you (or member of your household) are being seriously and adversely affected by your current accommodation and there is a significant need to move for welfare reasons. Evidence that hardship would otherwise occur must be provided to West Norfolk HomeChoice.</li> <li>• You are a carer / young carer who needs to move to facilitate your independence, or to provide support to a relative.</li> </ul>
<b>Sharing facilities</b>	You are living in a property where you share facilities (bathroom, kitchen or toilet) with people you're not related to. This includes people living in Supporting Housing Schemes who would not otherwise qualify for a high band. This does not apply to joint tenants.

## Low Band

**You will be in this band if one of the following circumstances applies:**

<b>Duty to prevent homelessness</b>	The council has accepted a 'prevention' duty to assist you to prevent your homelessness and you have a local connection to King's Lynn and West Norfolk in accordance with HomeChoice policy (s.195 Housing Act 1996 part 7 as amended).
<b>Homeless with financial ability to secure own accommodation</b>	The Council owes or will owe you a 'main' duty as homeless, but you have the financial means to purchase or privately rent accommodation in accordance with HomeChoice policy.
<b>Lacking a garden</b>	You have a child or children under the age of 12 living in a property with no garden / yard.

<b>Children in flats / maisonettes</b>	You have a child or children under the age of 12 living in a first-floor dwelling or above.
<b>Intentionally homeless</b>	You have been found intentionally homeless by the Council's Housing Options Service. You will remain in Low band for a period of 12 months.
<b>Medical/Welfare/ support/hardship</b>	You have some medical or welfare needs but there is no significant impact from living in your current home. A move to a more suitable property or location would be of some benefit but there is no overwhelming need.

## No Priority on Housing Register

You be in this band if one of the following circumstances applies:

<b>Adequately housed</b>	You live in a property which is adequate for your needs. This applies if you are a tenant of a Housing Association, private landlord or if you own a property. You are adequately housed in the home of a family member.
<b>Voluntarily worsened circumstances</b>	Your housing circumstances have worsened because of your own actions. You will remain in this band for a period of 12 months.

## Additional priority considerations

### Existing tenants of partner landlords

Existing tenants of partner landlords will be given additional priority for some vacancies advertised via West Norfolk HomeChoice. Tenants of partner landlords in High, Medium or Low Bands will be given preference over other applicants for each landlord's tenth advertised vacancy. These will be marked as TEN in the advert.

### Grouped homes or sheltered schemes

Existing tenants of a Grouped Home or Sheltered Schemes will be given preference over other applicants for every fourth vacancy arising within that scheme. These will be marked as FOUR in the advert.

### Right to move for work

An annual quota of 1% of lettings is available for those qualifying under the Right to Move in line with the statutory guidance.

### Reduced priority

If your local connection is solely through family residence, the band awarded will be one band less than that which would be awarded to applicants with similar housing needs meeting any of the other local connection criteria.

Although all applications will be considered on their own merits, those in breach of their tenancy agreement may be placed in the band lower than would normally be appropriate, until West Norfolk HomeChoice is satisfied that the tenant is meeting the conditions of their tenancy and evidence is provided.

Applicants with a history of inappropriate behaviour that is not serious enough to justify exclusion from the housing register may be placed in a lower band than which they would normally be entitled. For instance, a history of rent arrears may result in an applicant being placed in a lower band even if payments are being made.

If you bid successfully for three properties and turn down all three offers of accommodation, then this may trigger a review of your priority band. If it is considered that three refusals of accommodation have been made without good cause, your housing need band may be reduced to 'No Priority' for a period of 12 months.

If you are already in the 'No Priority' band your relevant date of application will be changed to the date you refused your last offer of accommodation.

### **Prospective Adopters and Foster Carers**

If a prospective foster carer or adopter needs an extra bedroom to accommodate a foster or adoptive child, the Operations Manager for Adoptions and Fostering Services of Norfolk County Council may request that the Housing Needs Manager for West Norfolk HomeChoice consider awarding additional priority to the housing application. Those families considered to be lacking one bedroom will be eligible for the Medium band and those lacking two bedrooms, for the High band.

### **Split Families**

Applicants who are unable to live with partners due to inappropriate accommodation to meet their needs (for instance, due to size or accessibility) will be assessed for priority taking both properties they live in into consideration.

### **Staying Contact with Children**

A child, or children, living between parents at separate addresses will only be considered as having one main home unless there are exceptional circumstances that mean that both parents should provide a home. A Court Order allowing access to children or confirming residence between separated parents does not mean that the council must consider that the child is part of an applicant's household for the purposes of a housing register application.

The receipt of Child Benefit and other allowances will be used when making an assessment on this ground.

### **Direct Lets**

Most properties will be advertised through West Norfolk HomeChoice. However, in certain circumstances some properties may be let directly to applicants and these properties will be let outside of the allocation scheme.

Where you are identified as requiring a direct let, the case will be referred to a senior officer for

approval or referred to the West Norfolk HomeChoice panel for consideration. The list below gives some examples of where this may happen:

- Where the council has accepted a Homelessness duty towards you, but you have not found suitable accommodation during a period of choice through the West Norfolk HomeChoice scheme.
- Where you and your household require a specific size, type or adapted property and you have not been able to find suitable accommodation through the West Norfolk HomeChoice scheme.
- Where an existing social housing tenant is required to move to make the best use of stock, including where their home is to be demolished, and they have not been successful in finding a suitable property through the West Norfolk HomeChoice scheme.
- Where a property is needed urgently to deal with an emergency or to provide temporary accommodation for a homeless family.
- Where a property is required for a tenant of the West Norfolk Housing First Project.
- Where an allocation is required to ensure protection of the public, for example, following a decision made by a Multi-Agency Public Protection Panel meeting or to fulfil agreements made with offender management services, or where a customer has been referred as part of the witness protection scheme.
- Where you have been accepted onto the register under the Right to move for work criteria but have not placed any successful bids within 6 weeks of acceptance onto the register in High band.

### **West Norfolk HomeChoice Panel**

The West Norfolk HomeChoice partnership agreement has a panel of representatives of the Borough Council and partner Housing Associations. The panel has the authority to make certain decisions on cases with extraordinary housing need which fall outside normal HomeChoice policy, for example awarding Emergency Priority, and withholding properties from the advert.

### **Selection of successful applicants**

If there is more than one applicant for an advertised home, we select the one in the highest band, who has the earliest 'relevant date'.

The 'relevant date' is normally the date of your first application to join the housing register. In cases where your circumstances alter and you are placed in a higher band, the 'relevant date' will be the date from which you entered that higher band (unless the Council has accepted a full homeless duty to a priority need homeless applicant, when the relevant date will remain the date the relief duty was accepted).

In cases where a change of circumstances leads to you being placed in a lower band, the 'relevant date' will be the date when you first joined the housing register.

Following successful selection within the HomeChoice policy, your details will be referred to the relevant Housing Association who will check to ensure that

- your circumstances are the same as those you have declared on your application
- the property you have been chosen is not inappropriate in any way



- there are no problems with a current or former rent account
- you can afford to pay the rent of the property

Each housing association will decide whether to offer a property based on their own policies.

#### **IMPORTANT: OFFERS OF ACCOMMODATION**

**If you are offered a property, you should think carefully if you wish to refuse it as it could affect your ability to bid for other properties and / or your priority.**

**This is especially true for homeless people who should contact their Housing Options case worker if they are considering refusing a property, so that they are aware of the potential consequences.**



## 5. Size and type of properties

When properties are advertised, they indicate what type of household may register a bid. Examples of properties and the household types that will normally be eligible for them are as follows (please note that these examples are not exhaustive, and we will assess each application individually):

<b>Studio flat/bedsit</b>	Single people - usually under 60
<b>1-bed flats</b>	Childless couples and single people - usually under 60 (including those with access to children)
<b>2-bed flats and maisonettes</b>	Families with 1 or 2 children
<b>3-bed maisonettes</b>	Families with a minimum of 2 children
<b>2-bed houses</b>	Families with 1 or 2 children
<b>3-bed houses</b>	Families with a minimum of 2 children
<b>4 and 5 bed houses</b>	Families with 4 or more children
<b>1-bed bungalows</b>	Single people and couples over 60 or those with a proven medical need for ground floor accommodation. If the dwelling has a level access shower, preference is normally given to those needing it in high and medium bands.
<b>2-bed bungalows</b>	Single people, families and couples over 60 or with a proven medical need for ground floor accommodation. Preference is normally given to families then couples. If the dwelling has a level access shower, preference is given to those needing it in high and medium bands.
<b>3-bed bungalows</b>	Families with 2 or more children with a proven medical need for ground floor accommodation
<b>1 and 2 bed flats and bungalows in sheltered schemes</b>	Single people and couples over 60, those aged over 55 with a medical need for sheltered accommodation accepted by the landlord of the scheme. Preference for 2 beds is normally given to couples.
<b>Specially adapted properties (dwellings with stair climbers, level access showers etc)</b>	Those applicants with a proven need for the adaptation.

## 6. Allocation policies for specific schemes

### Local connection to a village within the district of West Norfolk

To be considered for preference for vacancies that arise in some housing schemes in villages you must first meet the local connection criteria for the Borough as shown above. You may have a local connection to a village if you live there now, you previously lived there, your family live there or you work there. A full description of the connection criteria applicable to village schemes can be seen on the West Norfolk HomeChoice page of the Council's website [www.west-norfolk.gov.uk](http://www.west-norfolk.gov.uk) under 'Village Homes'.

### Lettings Plans

West Norfolk HomeChoice panel will also agree lettings plans for certain schemes, where a need has been identified by the landlord, to resolve specific housing management issues. Lettings plans will be agreed for a limited period only and are subject to review.

### Housing with care – specific schemes

Homes at Lisbon Court, Kings Lynn and Oakes Court, Downham Market are not advertised by HomeChoice as applicants will have been formally assessed as having care needs. Please see [www.norfolk.gov.uk](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk) for further information on criteria and how to apply for these properties.

### Returning from abroad

Applicants whose immigration status makes them ineligible for the housing register will be notified in writing of the decision and the reason for the decision.

### 'Safe Surrender' for Offenders in Custody and Care Leavers

If a prisoner or care leaver who is a partner Housing Association tenant and ineligible for housing benefit due to their time in custody or, agrees to voluntarily surrender their tenancy, they will be awarded High band on their release from prison or, if a care leaver when they are ready for independent accommodation.

In respect of offenders, their banding will be subject to their offence **not having been connected** to their previous home and there being no other concerns regarding the conduct of their tenancy.

## 7. Your Right to Review / Appeal

If you are not accepted onto the Housing Register or disagree with the banding, you are given you will be advised of your right to a review of the decision.

Your request for a review should be made within 21 days of the decision.

Reviews will be undertaken by a senior officer who was not involved in the original decision and who is senior to the decision-making officer. The review should be undertaken within 12 weeks of it being made.

If you are dissatisfied with the management of their application, other than where a review can be made, you should follow the council's corporate complaints procedure, which can be found on the council's website.

## **8. Consent and Declaration**

When you complete an online application form, you will sign an electronic declaration to confirm that:

- a. The information you have provided is true, accurate and complete.
- b. You will promptly inform the Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk of any change in circumstances.
- c. You understand that information will be shared with other agencies.
- d. You consent to the Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk making enquiries of any relevant persons to confirm the information on the application form is correct including previous or current landlords and other local authorities.
- e. You consent to the release of any relevant information either to the Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk held by third parties, or by the Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk to third parties.
- f. The information provided may be used to help in the detection and prevention of fraud.

The Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk may take legal action against applicants who withhold or provide false information regarding their housing application. Where an applicant has been let a property because of providing false information, their landlord may take court action to obtain possession of the property.

## **9. Housing Register Review of West Norfolk HomeChoice Applications**

Applicants are expected to log into their bidding account at least once every six months to demonstrate that they are still actively wishing to remain on the register. HomeChoice will review applications where there has been no activity for 6 months and these applications will be cancelled. If an applicant reappplies once this has been done their application will be considered as new and their priority and relevant date of application will start again.

## **10. Cancelling an application**

An application will be cancelled from the housing register in the following circumstances:

- a. At the applicant's request.
- b. If the applicant becomes ineligible for housing by way of their immigration status.
- c. When the applicant has accepted an offer of accommodation
- d. Where an applicant does not maintain their application through the review process.
- e. When an applicant fails to bid in a 6-month period and provides no justifiable reason for not bidding
- f. Where the applicant is longer resident at the address provided on their application.

Where an applicant wishes to re-join the housing register later their new date of registration will be the date they re-apply.

## **11. Applications by staff, elected members or their family members**

Members of staff and elected members or members of their family may apply for housing. This must be declared on the declaration page of the online application form. However, any application or allocation of accommodation must be approved by the Housing Needs Manager (or an equivalent or higher manager in their absence).

## **12. Equal Opportunities and Diversity**

The allocations policy will be responsive, accessible and sensitive to the needs of all, having regard to the protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010. The Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and will ensure that all applicants are treated fairly and without unlawful discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

In addition, the Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk is committed to the aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty (2011):

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

The Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk also has due regard to the commitments made in Article 14 of the Human Rights Act (1998) as it relates to the service provided.

### **The Welfare of Children**

The Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk will ensure that decisions made under this allocations policy will have regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, considering Section 11 of The Children's Act and the Public Sector Equality Duty.

The Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk will also have regard to the Children & Social Work Act 2017 as relates to the local arrangements for safeguarding and promoting welfare of children.

### **The Welfare of Adults**

The Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk will also have regard to the Care Act 2014, which includes provisions for adults at risk of abuse or neglect.

### **Monitoring and Reviewing the Allocations Policy**

The Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk will monitor the operation of the allocations policy by regularly reviewing the policy to ensure that the policy meets its stated objectives and complies with legislative changes.

### **13. Data Protection**

When an applicant applies for housing, the Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk will only seek information that they require to assess the application and the applicant's housing needs. Information supplied by the applicant may be shared amongst participating officers, landlords and support agencies. The applicant will confirm their consent to this via the declaration when registering on the scheme.

The Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk's policy on Data Protection is available on request and can be found on [the relevant page of the council's website](#).

## **Appendix A – West Norfolk HomeChoice Partners**

- Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk
- Broadland Housing Association
- Cotman Housing Association
- Flagship Housing Group Ltd
- Freebridge Community Housing
- Hastoe Housing Association
- Housing 21
- Amplus
- Metropolitan Housing Trust Ltd
- Orbit Housing Association
- Sanctuary Housing Association
- Victory Housing Trust

## **Appendix B – Legal Background**

Housing authorities are required by the Housing Act 1996 s166A (as amended by the Homelessness Act (1996) and the Localism Act (2011)) to have an allocation scheme for determining the priorities and defining the procedures to be followed in allocating affordable housing accommodation.

The Allocation Policy must set out who can access the housing register and how accommodation is allocated in the Borough, considering reasonable preference criteria laid out in legislation.

Further information on this can be found at [www.gov.uk/guidance/allocation-of-accommodation-guidance-for-local-authorities/chapter-4-framing-an-allocation-scheme](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/allocation-of-accommodation-guidance-for-local-authorities/chapter-4-framing-an-allocation-scheme)

This policy has also had regard to the following (this list is not exclusive):

- Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England
- The Public Sector Equalities Duty
- Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act
- Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk's Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy.

### **Assessment of applications and allocations**

Decisions in relation to acceptance onto the Register, priority to be awarded, bidding and selection are undertaken only by the West Norfolk HomeChoice team of officers within the Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk.

Members of Parliament cannot influence any assessment or allocation and can only seek information where appropriate on behalf of an applicant.

Councillors are not allowed to take part in any decisions on accommodation in their ward or where the resident has a residence in their ward. Councillors approve the West Norfolk Allocation Policy which officers must follow in considering individual cases. Councillors can seek and obtain information on behalf of their constituents if they have been authorised to do so by the individual involved.