

Frequently Asked Questions **Gateway to Homechoice**

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1. Registration

Q - Can anyone register on Gateway to Homechoice?

A - Anyone over the age of 16 can apply to Gateway to Homechoice. However, to be accepted onto the housing register you must meet the eligibility criteria.

Q - Which areas are covered by Gateway to Homechoice?

A - Gateway to Homechoice covers the Babergh/Mid Suffolk, Braintree, Colchester, Ipswich, Maldon, and East Suffolk local authority areas. If you wish to be re-housed in an area outside of this, please contact the local authority responsible for that area.

Q - If I don't want a council house, can I still register with Gateway to Homechoice?

A - Yes, housing association properties are also advertised through the scheme.

Q - Does Gateway to Homechoice advertise sheltered accommodation?

A - Yes, sheltered housing is advertised along with all other available properties. If you are interested in sheltered housing, please let us know when you apply.

Q – How do I register an application?

A – Please visit www.gatewaytohomechoice.org.uk

Q – What information do you need to register an application?

A – You will need to provide: -

- National Insurance Number (for all household members who are 16 years and over).
- Name and address of all household members (including children).
- Date of birth for all household members (including children).
- Telephone contact numbers.
- Email address (if applicable)
- Full address history for the last 6 years for all household members
- Employment/Income details
- Details of your connection to the local authority areas (for example family or employment)
- Share code (if applicable)

Q – How do I know that my personal information is kept securely?

A – The Gateway to Homechoice website is subject to a secure certificate. For more information about how Ipswich Borough Council manages your personal information, please go to <https://www.ipswich.gov.uk/content/privacy-policy>

Q - If I join Gateway to Homechoice am I guaranteed to be offered a property?

A – No applicant is guaranteed to be offered a property. This is because the demand for housing is greater than the supply of housing in Ipswich.

2. Login

Q – How do I login to my Gateway to Homechoice account?

A – You need to enter your login reference (given to you once you have registered), your “memorable date” (this is your date of birth for example 01 01 2000 unless you have changed it to something else) and your password.

Q – I have forgotten my login reference, how can I find out what it is?

A – Please check any correspondence we have sent you, as your login reference is likely to have been stated. You can use the “I have forgotten my login reference” link on the “login” page of the gateway website. You will be asked to enter the email address that is associated with your account. You will then be sent an email containing your login reference. If you require any assistance, please contact our customer services team on 01473 432000.

Q – I have forgotten my “password” or other login details, what do I need to do?

A – If you have forgotten your login details, please use the “I have forgotten my password” link on the “login” page of the gateway website. You will need to state your login reference, the email address associated with your account and enter at least two of the following “postcode”, “date of birth”, family name or National Insurance (NI) number to request new login details. If you do not have an email address, please contact our customer services team on 01473 432000 for further assistance.

Q – When I try and login, it states that I do not have an active application, what does this mean?

A – This means that your application has either been suspended or closed. Please contact our customer services team on 01473 432000 for further information on what you need to do to get your application activated. Alternatively, please send us an enquiry via our website at: <https://www.ipswich.gov.uk/contactus>

3. Requests for information (verification)

Q – I have been told that information has been sent to me via email, but I have not received anything. How can I find it?

A – Please check your email providers “spam” or “junk” folder. Our email may be there for you to action.

Q – I have been told that you require more information from me. What information do you require?

A – If we need more information from you, we will usually request this via email, in writing, or via telephone. The request you receive from us should make it clear exactly what documents or information we require to progress your application. We may send you a form(s) to

complete and return to us. Further information is available on our website at:
<https://www.ipswich.gov.uk/content/choice-based-lettings>

Q – How can I provide the documents you have requested?

A – Please upload documents to your application at any time from the “My Account” screen once you have logged onto your Gateway to Homechoice account at www.gatewaytohomechoice.org.uk . Instructions on uploading documents will be placed on this website, or the “useful links” section at <https://www.ipswich.gov.uk/content/choice-based-lettings>

Q – Why do I need to provide you with further information after my application?

A – This is so we can verify your identity and ensure that your application has been assessed correctly.

Q - What happens if I don't provide you with all my information?

A - If we have asked you to provide documents or information to support your request for housing, you are usually given 14 days to submit this information to us. If you fail to provide all the information we require, this may result in the closure or suspension of your application without further notice.

4. Bidding

Q – What does placing a bid mean?

A – Placing a bid means registering an interest in a property.

Q – When can I place a bid?

A – You can place bids when your application is active, you are eligible for that property and you have not already exceeded your bidding limit for that cycle. Active applicants can place up to two bids within each cycle, which starts at midnight on a Wednesday through to midnight the following Wednesday.

Q – How do I place a bid?

A – You can place a bid once you have logged in to your Gateway to Homechoice account, and you have an active application. Further information can be found at www.gatewaytohomechoice.org.uk / Information / How to use the service

Q – How many bids can I place?

A – You can place up to two bids each bidding cycle (from midnight Wednesday to midnight the following Wednesday).

Q – Do I have to use my two bids every week?

A – Most applicants are not required to place two bids every week. However, if you do not use your bids effectively, it may take much longer for you to be rehoused. There are some applicants who are expected to bid on all suitable accommodation advertised. If this relates to you, you should have been advised of this in writing.

Q – When I log in, it states that there are no eligible properties for me to bid on, what does this mean?

A – This means that there are currently no properties available for you to bid on that bidding cycle.

Q – I am shown eligible properties in areas that I do not want to live, why is this?

A – The “eligible properties” link within your Gateway to Homechoice account will show you all eligible properties across all the local authority areas within the scheme area. If you only want to see properties in a specific area, you need to use the search and filter options to select your chosen area(s).

Q – Can I change a bid if I decide I want to bid on a different property?

A – Yes. It is possible to withdraw one or both of your bids that cycle by logging in to your Gateway to Homechoice account. You can withdraw and replace bids as many times as you wish to during the bidding cycle. You should leave your 2 bids on the properties you are coming closest to the 1st position to give yourself the best chance of securing a property. It is likely that leaving your bidding until nearly the end of the bidding cycle may give you the best idea of where your bids are likely to finish at the end of the cycle, as most people would have already placed their bids.

Q – I do not have access to a computer. How can I bid?

A – If you (or someone on your behalf) cannot place a bid, you can contact our customer service team on 01473 432000 and ask for assistance.

Q – What properties will I be allowed to bid on?

A – You will usually only be permitted to bid on properties that match the number of bedrooms you are entitled to. For example, if you have been given a two bed roomed entitlement, you will not be able to bid on three bed roomed properties. You are advised to also read the marketing information about a property that you are interested in. Some properties are restricted, which means that not everyone will be considered. If there are any restrictions, this should be stated on the advert.

Q – I have been assessed as requiring a specific type of housing/adapted property due to my medical needs. Do I have to bid on only that type of accommodation?

A – It is recommended that you do. If you have been assessed as requiring specialist accommodation, then you should bid on that type of accommodation as it is more likely to meet your housing need. If you bid on properties that do not meet your assessed need, you may be bypassed on the shortlist if the property is considered unsuitable or that it is not thought suitable to be adapted to meet your needs.

Q – Does it matter when I place my bid during the bidding cycle?

A – No. It does not matter whether you are the first person to bid during the bidding cycle or the last. Your final position on the shortlist is usually determined by your band and effective date, not when you placed your bid.

Q – How will I know if my bid has been successful or not?

A – A landlord may contact you if you finish in the top three on a shortlist, or further down if those above you are not suitable for an offer of accommodation. You will usually be telephoned, emailed, sent a text or web message via your Gateway to Homechoice account to discuss your application/bids further.

If you placed in the top three and are not put forward for a viewing, you will be advised of the reason why. If you fail to respond to our attempts to contact you within a reasonable amount of time, you may be bypassed for that property. Please therefore ensure that you make yourself available, that we have your up to date contact information and respond quickly to any messages we may leave.

5. Timescales

Q – How long will it take to process my application?

A – We aim to conclude our assessment of all applications within 20 days from when they are received. Many applications will be processed before this, but some might take longer if we require specific information from you or other involved parties.

Q – You have asked me to supply further information/documents to support my application. How long do I have to get these to you?

A – In most circumstances, you will have to provide all the information we have asked for within 14 days. Failure to provide us with the information we ask for may affect the assessment of your application or it may be closed without further notification. If you are aware that there will be a delay in submitting any of the information we have asked for, you should contact us on 01473 432000 or via our website at <https://www.ipswich.gov.uk/contactus>

Q – I need to move urgently. How soon can I be offered alternative accommodation?

A – Gateway to Homechoice is a waiting list, and as there is a greater demand than supply of properties, it can take some time before alternative housing is offered. If you are facing an emergency, which means that you need accommodation very quickly, you should contact our Housing Options team on 01473 432000 (during office hours). They will provide you with advice on your housing problem and signpost you to the most appropriate services available to you.

Q – How long will it take for me to be moved via Gateway to Homechoice?

A – We are not able to say how long it will take you to secure alternative accommodation via Gateway to Homechoice. The demand for housing is greater than the supply of properties, so it can take some considerable time. We are unable to predict what vacancies will arise (and

who will bid on them when they do), therefore we cannot say how long you might wait. Some applicants may never be rehoused if they have a low housing need.

There is an “Average Waiting Time” tool on the Gateway to Homechoice website. This tool can be used as a guide as to how long applicants who have been rehoused to a specific area have waited on average.

You can increase your chances of being rehoused by being as flexible as possible regarding the type of accommodation you will consider and the areas you are willing to move to. The more specific you are with your choices, the longer you are likely to wait.

6. Assessments

Q – How do you assess what band I should have?

A – We consider all the information you have provided us with on your application form as well as any additional information we have received from you or other involved parties. We use this information to assess against our allocations policy what band your application should be given. Please visit www.gatewaytohomechoice.org.uk and view our allocations policy for more information.

Q – How do you assess what size of property I can bid on?

A – We will establish how many people will permanently live with you when you are rehoused, their gender and their age. These factors will determine the size of property that you will be permitted to bid on. The allocations policy provides guidance on how we work out an applicant’s bedroom entitlement. Please visit www.gatewaytohomechoice.org.uk for further information.

Q – I am living in a property too big for my household. Will I get more priority if I am willing to move to smaller accommodation?

A – You may be considered a high priority for housing if you have a three or two bed roomed property, live in social housing and are willing to move to smaller accommodation.

Q – I have access to children that do not live with me full time. Can that be taken into consideration when you assess my banding and bedroom entitlement?

A – Applicants with a shared residence order or staying access for children are not automatically entitled to bedrooms for their children in these circumstances. We would assess each case on its own merit.

Q – I have rent arrears. Will I be able to move?

A – Applicants that have current arrears of four weeks/one month with their landlord may not be shortlisted, despite having a need to move. You should look to clear your arrears as soon as possible in full or by a suitable agreement with your landlord. Applicants who have arrears from a former tenancy may receive a reduced priority or be bypassed for accommodation if they have not cleared or failed to make a suitable payments to reduce the arrears.

Q – I have recently received a decision regarding my band or other aspect of my application and I disagree with the decision. What should I do?

A – You have the right to ask for a review of decisions made about your application for housing or offer of accommodation. This includes: -

- decisions about refusing to allow an applicant to join the register
- removing an application from the register
- size or type of property
- assessments of bands
- offers of housing

You may request a review of the decision within 21 days of receiving the written decision. The request would usually be made in writing and you should provide any supporting information you have to support your request. For further information on review requests and appeals, please visit www.gatewaytohomechoice.org.uk and view our allocations policy.

7. Change of circumstances

Q – I need to update my application with a change in my circumstances. How can I do this?

A – To update your application, please go to www.gatewaytohomechoice.org.uk and use your login details to access your account. You can view each page of your application here and make any necessary changes. Please ensure that you save your changes by navigating to the last page and selecting “submit”. If you require assistance, please contact our customer services team on 01473 432000.

Q – I have updated my application to inform you of a change in my circumstances. Will you require any further information from me?

A – It depends on the change. If it is a change to your contact information, then no. We will require more information from you with some changes. For example: - a change of address, someone has been added to the application, someone is pregnant or has given birth or a change in someone’s medical needs.

Q – I have been served with a notice to quit/notice of seeking possession from my landlord. What should I do?

A – It is important that you seek advice as soon as possible from our Housing Options team on 01473 432000.

8. General

Q – How do you make sure that the scheme is fair?

A – In accordance with our allocations policy, we place applicants in bands according to their current circumstances and housing need. Within each band, every applicant is registered with

an effective date. The effective date is how long the person has been on the waiting list for, or when they qualified for a higher band.

This means that when placing bids, the applicant in the highest band with the longest effective date is usually successful. For further information, please visit

www.gatewaytohomechoice.org.uk

Q – What is a restricted property?

A – A restricted property is one where you need to meet specific criteria to be able to bid/be shortlisted. For example, you may need to have a local connection with a certain area. If the property is restricted, it should be clearly stated on the advert's property information. If you have further queries about a restricted property, please contact the landlord responsible for advertising the property in question. Further information can be found at

www.gatewaytohomechoice.org.uk

Q – Are all vacant properties advertised on Gateway to Homechoice?

A – There are some occasions where a vacancy may not be advertised for everyone to bid on. For further information, please view our allocations policy at www.gatewaytohomechoice.org.uk

Q – Will I need any money up front?

A – You do not require any money to participate in Gateway to Homechoice. You should be aware that most landlords require you to make a rent payment in advance before your new tenancy starts. Please check the advert for further information. Ipswich Borough Council asks that successful applicants make a rent payment in advance onto their rent account (either one week's rent, two weeks or a month) prior to signing your tenancy. Please contact our customer services team on 01473 432000 or via email at <https://www.ipswich.gov.uk/contactus> if you have any queries or require further advice.
