

Frequently Asked Questions

Registering.....

Q - Can anyone register on Gateway to Homechoice?

A - Anyone over the age of 16 and eligible for social housing in the United Kingdom can apply to Gateway to Homechoice.

Q - Which areas are covered by Gateway to Homechoice?

A - Gateway to Homechoice covers areas within the following authority areas: Babergh, Braintree, Colchester, Ipswich, Maldon, Mid Suffolk, Suffolk Coastal and Waveney. If you wish to be re-housed in an area outside of this please contact the council covering 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 - 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 priority. Within each band, every applicant is registered with an effective date. This means that when placing bids, the applicant in the highest band with the longest effective date will be successful.

Please go to <https://www.ipswich.gov.uk/sites/www.ipswich.gov.uk/files/cblpolicy.pdf> for further information on banding and effective dates.

Q - How do I know that the Gateway to Homechoice website is safe and secure to give personal information?

A - The website is subject to a secure certificate. It should also be noted that we do not hold any financial information such as bank and credit card details.

Q - How do you work out bedroom entitlement?

A – Bedroom entitlement is assessed in accordance with our allocations policy. <https://www.ipswich.gov.uk/sites/www.ipswich.gov.uk/files/cblpolicy.pdf>

Q - How do you assess banding?

A - Banding is assessed in accordance with our allocation policy and taking in to account the applicants circumstances.

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

A - If your application is incomplete, you will be contacted by us and asked to provide the information, along with any documents within 14 days of the request. Failure to provide the information within the timescale will result in the closure of your application without further notice. For details of documents you may be asked to provide, please refer to

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A - You will be asked to provide the following original documents according to your circumstances. These will need to be presented at the Customer Services Centre at the Town Hall, Ipswich where copies will be taken.

- **Proof of identification for all household members over the age of 16**

This must be in the form of a photo driving licence or current passport. If you do not have either of these a birth certificate will be acceptable however, however you will need to provide two forms of proof of your address.

- **Proof of address for all household members over the age of 16**

This must be a current bank statement or utility bill (of no less than 3 months old) or a current benefit award letter. No other forms of proof of address will be accepted.

- **Proof of receipt of child benefit for all children to be housed**

This must be your latest Child Benefit award letter, or a bank statement (of no less than 3 months old) showing the payments. We will not include children on your application for whom you do not receive Child Benefit.

- **Proof of pregnancy if you, or a member of your household, are pregnant**

This must be in the form of your MATB1 maternity certificate showing the name and address of the expectant person, along with the estimated delivery date (EDD).

- **A valid Notice to Quit (Section 21 or Section 8 Notice)**

If this has been served upon you by your current landlord.

Q - Where can I provide the required documents?

A - Please present the original documents at the Customer Services Centre at the Town Hall, Ipswich where copies will be taken.

Q - Why do I need to provide these documents?

A - So that we can verify your identity and ensure that you are eligible for social housing.

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 - Will I get a high priority if I live in a council or housing association property that is too big for me?

A - Yes, it will depend on the size of your household and the size of the property you are transferring from. For further details, please refer to the allocation policy <https://www.ipswich.gov.uk/sites/www.ipswich.gov.uk/files/cblpolicy.pdf>

Q - I have a child that stays part of the week, how does this affect my band.

A - We only allocate a bedroom for children whom you are in receipt of child benefit for.

Q - Can I apply for housing if I am not a British Citizen?

A - Yes, we will request the necessary documents and paperwork from you and carry out checks to see if you are eligible to social housing in the United Kingdom.

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

A - No, if you are assessed and placed in band D-E it is unlikely that you will be successful. This is due to demand outweighing the supply of housing within Ipswich.

Timescales...

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

A - Application processing times can vary from 14 days to 28 days. You have 14 days from the date of request to provide your documents and all the information required. To find out what you need to provide please go to ***Which documents may I need to provide?***

Q - Will I be allocated housing straight away?

A - No, we do not run an emergency housing list. If you are likely to be homeless, please refer to ***Is Your Housing Urgent?*** You can start bidding on available properties as soon as your application has been activated, your position for that property will be determined by your band and Effective date. For example: someone with a band B and an effective date of 22/10/2009 will be higher placed for a property than someone with a band C and an effective date of 14/06/2007. This is because the applicant is in band B which is a higher priority band.

Q - How long do I have to provide my documents?

A - All applicants have 14 days from the date of request to provide their documents. Failure to do so will result in closure of that application. If there is a delay in obtaining your documents and providing them within that time, you will need to contact your Accommodation Officer to state the reasons why and see if you can have an extension.

Q - I have completed and sent in a medical form, how long until a decision is made on this?

A - Accommodation Officers are required to give a decision on a medical form within 5 working days of receipt of the form. However it sometimes might take longer if we require more information from you to make that decision.

Bidding.....

Q - What does placing a bid mean?

A - Placing a bid or bidding means registering an interest in a property.

Q - When will I be able to bid?

A - Bids can be placed any time between midnight on a Wednesday to midnight the following Wednesday. When the cycle finishes the top three applicants will be shortlisted and invited to the viewing of the particular property.

Q - How do I place a bid?

A Please go to <https://www.gatewaytohomechoice.org.uk/Data/ASPPages/1/94.aspx> and click on demonstration for details on how to place a bid.

Q - How many bids can I place?

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

Q - Can I change a bid if I decide I want to bid on something different?

A - Yes, you just need to login to your account on the gateway to homechoice website, click on **my bids** and follow the instructions. Once you have withdrawn your bid you can place a bid on a different property if you wish. Please note, bids can only be withdrawn when the cycle is still running.

Q - How do I bid if I don't have access to a computer?

A - If you do not have access to a computer you can use the free computers at the Customer Services Centre at the Town Hall in Ipswich, ask someone you trust to bid on your behalf or call our Customer Contact Centre on **433123** where a member of staff can place a bid for you.

Q - When does the bidding cycle start and finish?

A - The bidding cycle starts at midnight each Wednesday and ends at midnight the following Wednesday.

Q - Can I bid on a property that's too big for my needs?

A - No, you will only be able to bid on properties that you are eligible for.

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Q - If I have been recommended for a specific type of housing or an adapted property due to my medical needs do I have to bid only on that type of housing?

A - Yes, if you place bids on properties that are not deemed to be suitable for your housing needs, you will be skipped on the shortlist.

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

A - No, you don't have to use your two bids each week. However, if you wish to move as soon as possible it is advisable that you make use of your bids each week to maximise your chances of re-housing.

Q - I am unsuccessful with my bids every week, will I ever be successful?

A - Generally, applicants in bands A-C will be successful and those in bands D-E are very unlikely to be successful. This is because the demand far outweighs the supply of social housing. If you are in bands D-E it is recommended that you seek other methods of housing.

Q - If I bid straight after the cycle begins, will I have more chance of being successful?

A - No, it doesn't matter what day/time within the cycle that you place a bid. This is because a position for a property is determined by an applicant's band and effective date. Please refer to ***Will I be allocated housing straight away?*** for further information.

Q - When will I hear if I have been successful with my bids?

A - If you have been successful with your bids, you will usually be contacted on the Thursday or Friday following the end of the bidding cycle. Please make sure your contact details are up to date, if the Officer is unable to get hold of you by a certain time you may be skipped.

Change of circumstances.....

Q - How do I change my address on my application?

A - To change your address, please go to: www.gatewaytohomechoice.org.uk and log in using your unique reference and your memorable date (this will usually be your date of birth). Select 'My CBL' on the left of the screen and then select 'Click here to up-date your details'. Make sure you save your changes, when complete navigate to the last page and submit.

Q - How do I add/remove someone from my application?

A - Please refer to ***How do I change my address on my application?***

Q - How can I change my contact details on my application?

A - Please refer to ***How do I change my address on my application?***

Q - /someone in my household is now pregnant, what do I do?

A - Please refer to ***How do I change my address on my application?*** to update your application. You will also need to provide proof of this, which must be in the form of your MATB1 maternity certificate showing the name and address of the expectant person, along with the estimated delivery date (EDD).

Q - /someone in my household has given birth, what do I do?

A - Please refer to ***How do I change my address on my application?*** And update your application by adding the new household member. You will also need to provide proof of this in the form of a birth certificate and when in receipt of it an up to date child benefit award letter.

Q - /a household member has developed a medical problem that affects their housing, what do we do?

A - You will need to complete a medical form, these can be obtained from the Customer Services Centre at the Town Hall, by contacting the accommodation team on homechoice@ipswich.gov.uk or by calling our Customer Contact Centre on **01473 433123**.

Q - I have been served with a notice of seeking possession/notice to quit by my landlord and am likely to be homeless soon, what do I do?

A - Please contact the Housing Options team on **01473 433033** and make an appointment to see a Housing Options Officer.

When I log on.....

Q - It states that my password is incorrect, why is this?

A - Your password is usually your date of birth for example: 01/01/1985. If you are having problems logging in please phone the Customer Contact Centre on 01473 433123 or email homechoice@ipswich.gov.uk

Q - It states that I do not have an active application, what does this mean?

A - This means that the application has either been suspended or closed. This may be for a number of different reasons but usually because the applicant failed to provide the necessary documents within the 14 days as requested.

To request your application is re-opened please email homechoice@ipswich.gov.uk, call our Customer Contact Centre on **01473 433123** or attend the Customer Services Centre at the Town Hall in Ipswich. A request will then be made with your Accommodation Officer and they will re-open the application for 14 days for the applicant to update their details and provide the necessary documents. Failure to do so may result in the closure of the application.

Q - I can't see any properties that I am eligible for, what does this mean?

A - This means that there are no properties available. Each authority and housing association can only advertise the properties they have vacant at the time.

Q - I can see properties in areas I don't want to live, why is this?

A - Gateway to Homechoice is across the sub-region and properties vacant in Babergh, Braintree, Colchester, Ipswich, Maldon, Mid Suffolk, Suffolk Coastal and Waveney areas are all advertised together. This means applicants have the ability to bid in any of these authority areas. You can select one or more areas to look for properties by using the search and filter options.

My current accommodation...

Q - My home is damp/suffers from mould, what do I need to do?

A - Please report these problems to your landlord in order for them to remedy this.

Q - I am suffering from anti-social behaviour in my current accommodation what should I do?

A - Please report these problems to your landlord and if the perpetrators of the anti-social behaviour are committing crimes please contact the police and your local safer neighbourhood team.

Q - I have rent arrears, will I be able to move?

A - Generally applicants with over four weeks or one month's rent arrears are not able to move until the arrears are cleared or there is a suitable agreement in place. Applicants with rent arrears are placed in a reduced preference band until their Accommodation Officer has received proof of this.

Q - I am homeless and have been accommodated by the council in temporary accommodation, can I still take part in Gateway to Homechoice?

A - Yes, you will be asked to register on gateway to homechoice, advised of your band and given instructions as to how to bid.

General...

Q - How do I request a review of my band?

A If you feel that your application has not been assessed correctly in accordance with the allocations policy, you will need to write to your Accommodation Officer requesting a review of your band, state your reasons and provide us with any supporting evidence. You will then receive a decision on the outcome of your review. For more information, please refer to the allocations policy

<https://www.ipswich.gov.uk/sites/www.ipswich.gov.uk/files/cblpolicy.pdf>

Q - I have lost my registration number, what do I do?

A - Please contact us via email on homechoice@ipswich.gov.uk, call our Customer Contact Centre on **01473 433123** or attend the Customer Services Centre at the Town Hall in Ipswich.

Q - What is a restricted property?

A - A restricted property is a property advertised for only applicants who have a local connection to that particular area. Local authorities sometimes advertise restricted properties so that they go to local people. A local connection is where the applicant(s) live in the area, have a mother, father, brother, sister, son or daughter living in the area and they have lived there for five years, the applicant(s) work in the area and have for five years. For further information please refer to the allocations policy <https://www.ipswich.gov.uk/sites/www.ipswich.gov.uk/files/cblpolicy.pdf>

Q - Why are some homes not advertised?

A - On some occasions a small number of properties may not be available for applicants to bid on. This is because they will have been direct let. Direct lets may apply in the following circumstances:

- Extra care and very extra care properties (very sheltered).
- If a property is needed to house someone in a Council property temporarily.
- In cases where someone needs to be moved immediately.
- In the case of a specially adapted property built for a specific person.
- Decants.
- Where a homeless applicant has either failed to bid on a property on which they could be successful, or has refused a property and/or they need to be moved on from temporary accommodation.
- If there is no alternative for temporary accommodation and the Council would be breaching their duty.
- Where it has been deemed that the person is at risk or is a risk to others and unable to bid through CBL.

Q - Will I need any money up front?

A - No, no money is exchanged in the bidding process.

Q - Are properties carpeted or furnished?

A - All social housing properties are not furnished.