



Homesearch is the name of the Council's Housing Allocation Scheme. It decides how social housing is allocated within Bath and North East Somerset and determines priorities between those applicants registered with the scheme. Applicants are placed in one of three Groups: A, B or C. Group A has the highest priority and C the lowest. We also consider the date the applicant joined the scheme (their effective date) as it shows how long they have been waiting for a home. The applicant who will normally be given a property first will be the person in the highest Group who has been waiting the longest.

This document tells you about changes we would like to make to the scheme of which some have come about because of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The Act gave local housing authorities further duties to prevent homelessness, but before making these changes we would like to hear from you. To comment on this consultation visit: www.bathnes.gov.uk

Preventing homelessness

We will continue to place people owed a full housing duty in Group A. We propose to amend the scheme, so that only people owed (or likely to be owed) a full housing duty will be in Group B. People not owed a full housing duty will be placed in Group C and three months will be added to their effective date.

Group A	
People owed the full housing duty	

Figure 1 Housing Act 1996 Section 193 (2) (65(2))

Group B	
People who are homeless, or threatend with homelessness, and likely to be in priority need and unintentionally homeless	People who are receiving homelessness prevention advice and likely to be owed a main homeless duty

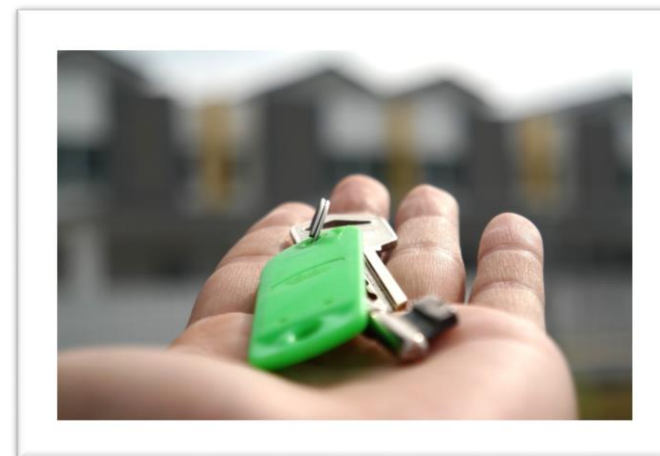
Figure 2 Housing Act 1996 s.189B (2), s.195 (2) and s.193 (2)

Group C will have three month added to their effective date
People who are homeless, but are not owed (or likely to be owed) a main housing duty

Figure 3 Housing Act 1996)

Direct property allocation

We believe people should choose where they would like to live, but sometimes it is not possible to offer choice, and directly offering a property to an applicant is the better option because it can reduce the length of time an applicant spends living in an unsuitable home and can also saves the Council money. We currently match people to properties, in a limited number of circumstances, including if an applicant has not been successful with bidding within three months of us accepting a main homelessness duty. The consultation proposes to remove the three months, so a final offer can be made more quickly to a homeless family in Group A and the Council can discharge their duty. We also propose to make a direct offer (final or otherwise) to people in Group B owed a prevention or relief duty.



Applying for a property also called 'Bidding'

Vacant properties are advertised on the Council's website:
www.HomesearchBathnes.org.uk

Applicants who are interested can place a maximum of three bids every weekly cycle. Bids can be made on-line or visiting Council Connect. We propose to no longer accept bids made through SMS text and remove the 0845 telephone number. Applicants can still bid by telephoning the team on 01225 396118.

The screenshot shows the Homesearch website interface. At the top, the logo for Bath & North East Somerset Council and the Homesearch logo are visible. A navigation menu includes 'Home', 'About', 'Low Cost Home Ownership', 'Property search', 'Housing Options', and 'My to do list'. The main content area features a 'Welcome to Homesearch' message with the tagline 'Helping you find a home in Bath and North East Somerset'. Below this are several blue buttons: 'Register', 'Log In', 'Plan your Options', 'Passport to Housing', and 'Search Homes'. A 'Read more...' link is also present. The footer section contains three main areas: 'Advertising dates' showing '2 days to wait' for the next cycle (starts 28 Oct, until 30 Oct); 'Latest news' featuring a headline 'New Affordable Rented Accommodation coming soon in Bath Spring Wharf 2019' with a small image and a 'View all news' link; and 'My Personal Housing Plan' with the text 'Discover your pathway to housing' and a 'Start your personal assessment' button with a house icon and an arrow.

Local connection

Homesearch, wherever possible, would like social housing to go to local people.

We will amend the scheme to reflect the change in law and help vulnerable people live in our district. Former relevant children owed a duty by Bath and North East Somerset Council under section 23C of the Children Act 1989 will have a local connection. Children provided with accommodation under section 22A of the Children Act 1989 will also have a local connection if they are normally resident for a continuous period of at least two years some of which before the age of 16. People living in our Council commissioned refuge, or temporary accommodation, and have fled domestic violence to come to Bath and North East Somerset will have a local connection.



Bedroom entitlement and priority

We propose to change the bedroom entitlement and priority for overcrowding. The table show that some families are eligible for two sizes of home (e.g. 2 and 3 bedrooms) this is because children over the age of 10 can have their own bedroom, but can also share their bedroom (up to the age of 16) with sibling of the same gender. Priority, such as for overcrowding, will be calculated on the maximum bedroom short which may affect the grouping an applicant is placed in.

Household type / No. of bedrooms	Studio	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	5 (+) bed
Single	√	√				
Couple		√				
Two adult (not in a relationship) * criteria applies			√			
Family with one child (or pregnant)			√			
Family with one child (under 10) and pregnant			√			
Family with two children (eldest under 10)			√			
Family with two children (same gender, eldest over 10)			√	√		
Family with two children (different gender, eldest over 10)				√		
Family with two children and expecting third child				√	√	
Family with three children				√	√	
Family with four or more children				√	√	
Allocated at the discretion of Homesearch						√

Table 1: Bedroom entitlement

Reduced priority vs suspending application

People who are not ready to move, such as unmanaged rent arrears, will currently have their group downgraded. For example: Group A to B, A to C, or B to C depending on their circumstances which will apply to their application for between 6 and 24 months.

As an alternative, we propose to suspend applications because it is more straightforward and easier to understand, however a suspended application will not be considered for available properties and will not accrue waiting time.

We will include two new grounds for suspension related to unmanaged housing related debt through Bath and North East Somerset Council, or a contractor on our behalf because we:

- a. Lent money, such as a deposit and rent in advance.
- b. Paid temporary accommodation costs, such as a bed and breakfast.

Our loans are interest-free loan, but even though the payments are affordable too many people are in arrears. We will not suspend an application where a person's financial difficulties are of the level that even the minimum payment towards their debt would be

unaffordable and deprive them of their basis living expenses. We will unsuspend the application when the applicant has cleared their arrears and maintained an agreed regular payment for a period of at least 10 weeks.

More information is available on www.bathnes.gov.uk/housing



Universal Credit

We will update the scheme, where necessary, to reflect the changes introduced by universal credit.

Table of authorities

The table will be updated to include the:

- Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2018 SI 2018/730
- Improving access to social housing for victims of domestic abuse in refuges or other types of temporary accommodation: statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England

Pay to Stay

References to 'Pay to Stay' will be removed because it is no longer being introduced into legislation.

List of registered providers

We will include our new housing providers:

- LiveWest (formerly Knightstone)
- Bromford (formerly Merlin Housing Society)
- Urbanbubble
- Five Nine Living



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www.HomesearchBathnes.gov.uk

www.bathnes.gov.uk/housing

This document can be made available in a range of languages, large print and Braille.