



Hart District Council

Applying for a Home

How we assess your housing need

HS01 Housing Advice and Homelessness
Date Reviewed: February 2011

1. Introduction

Hart District Council transferred its housing stock to Sentinel Housing Association in 1994. As a result, there is no longer any Council owned housing within Hart. Housing associations are the primary providers of new and existing affordable homes for rent in the District. By applying to join the Hart Housing Register, you are applying to be considered for vacant housing association properties.

2. About this Leaflet

This leaflet explains how to apply for affordable rented accommodation within the district, how we will assess your application for housing and how nominations to vacant housing association homes are made. Full details of the current allocations policy can be found electronically on www.hart.gov.uk or in hard format direct from Housing Services.

3. How to Apply

You can apply online at www.harthomes.org.uk, for those who are unable to use a computer you can call into the Civic Offices in person to be assisted in using one of our computers. If it is necessary you can also collect a Housing Register application form in person or via email or telephone. For Hart Housing Services' contact details, please see Section 28 of this leaflet.

Please return your completed Housing Register application form to the Civic Offices where we will register it. If your form is incomplete, we will return it explaining which parts you should complete to enable your application to be registered. Once your application has been registered, we will send you a letter confirming your registration and advising you which band your application has been placed into.

You are entitled to apply to other Councils for housing. Later in this leaflet we provide a list of Hart's neighboring Councils.

If a Council says that you cannot join their Housing Register, you have a legal right to ask for a review of its decision.

4. Can I get help to make an Application for Housing?

If you think that you need help or assistance to complete a Hart Housing Register application form, you are welcome to contact Housing Services at the Civic Offices (contact details at the end of this leaflet) who will be happy to help you further.

5. Who Qualifies to Join the Housing Register?

Anyone can apply to join the register providing they are 16 years old or over, and the categories set out in section 6 below do not apply to them.

(Please note that applicants who are aged 16 to 18 can apply to join the register, but may need a guarantor before being offered a tenancy by a Registered Social Landlord).

6. Who Does Not Qualify to Join?

You do not qualify to join the Housing Register if:

- You, or a member of your household, are considered by the Council to be guilty of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make you unsuitable to be a tenant
- You are subject to immigration control and have no recourse to public funds
- You are not habitually resident in the Common Travel Area (UK, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, or the Republic of Ireland)
- You do not have the right to reside in the UK

7. How are Applications Assessed?

On receipt, your application will normally be assessed within 14 days, subject to any further information we may require.

















If you are eligible to join the Housing Register, you will be placed into a priority band dependent on your individual circumstances. (Details of the scheme are provided after the bedroom criteria). You will be registered according to the size of home you need.

For those applicants who are separated or divorced and sometimes care for their children, the Council will consider how often and for how long the children stay with them. If appropriate, the application may be awarded additional bedrooms for the children if it can be evidenced that there is a complete split of care and the children stay for 50% of the time with each parent. This is at the discretion of the Housing Needs Manager and subject to supporting evidence such as court papers, shared benefits etc.

** Please note that there is a severe shortage of affordable rented accommodation in the Hart District – particularly larger family sized and adapted accommodation.*

You will need to provide proof and supporting information to confirm your situation. You may also need to provide proof of your eligibility where appropriate.

NEW BEDROOM STANDARD POLICY:

Household Type	Number of Bedrooms							
	Bed sit	1	2	3	3 (2 living room)	4	4 (2 living room)	5+
Single Person								
Cohabiting or married couple (including same sex couple) including pregnant women who are less than 28 weeks pregnant with no other children								
Pregnant women where they are 28 weeks+ pregnant (end of 2 nd Trimester) with no other children								
Parent (s) with one child								
Parent (s) with one girl and one boy both under 7								
Parent (s) with two same sex children Under 16								
Parent (s) with two same sex children where one is over 16								
Parent(s) with one girl and one boy where the oldest child is over 7 years								
Parent(s) with three children regardless of age or sex								
Parent(s) with 4 children								
Parent(s) with 5 + Children								

PLEASE NOTE: Not all authorities have all of the above sized accommodation, for example Hart & Rushmoor do not have 4 Bedroom 2 living room properties available.

PROPOSED BANDING SCHEME ASSESSMENT:

<p>Band A</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Urgent need to move</p> <p>We would expect applicants within this band to be able to successfully bid on a property within 3 months (subject to suitable properties being advertised)</p>
<p>Applicants in this band will be reviewed every 3 months</p>	<p><i>Applicants with an urgent need to move. Local connection criteria will apply, but will be waived if supporting evidence shows that it is unsafe to remain in own district. This Band is only granted in exceptional circumstances.</i></p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency medical and/ or disability grounds - because their current accommodation is completely inappropriate to occupy & no suitable adaptations can be made within a reasonable timescale • Urgent need to move because to stay would be life threatening such as Domestic Violence, Sex or other high risk offenders, National Witness Mobility Service (supporting evidence required i.e. police support) • Severe Environmental Health grounds that cannot be rectified within a 12 month period e.g. Extreme disrepair, Closure / Demolition Order as assessed by our E H officers.

<p>Band B</p>	<p>High need to move</p> <p>We would expect applicants within this band to be able to successfully bid on a property within 6 - 9 months (subject to suitable properties being advertised)</p>
<p>Applicants in this band will be reviewed every 6 months</p>	<p><i>Applicants who are considered to be a high priority, with an identified housing need and a local connection. Examples:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A need to move on medical or disability grounds; accommodation is not completely inappropriate but it is unable to address a major proportion of their housing needs • Need to live within 5 miles of family or friends / specialist medical facility or special school to provide or receive essential support • Priority overcrowding (lacking 2 or more bedrooms) • Priority prevention of homelessness cases such as loss of tied or forces accommodation, Former tenants that voluntarily gave up their tenancy for special reasons by agreement, Care leavers ready for rehousing • Move on from Supported Housing to make best use of supported accommodation available on a case by case basis whereby the authority has the resulting bed space • Under occupation of general needs accommodation and wishing to take up accommodation for older persons • Under-occupation of social housing with nomination rights to resulting vacancy when moving into more suitable accommodation

<p>Band C</p>	<p align="center">Medium need to move</p> <p>Applicants within this band should expect to have been on the waiting list for a number of years before being able to successfully bid on a property</p>
	<p><i>Applicants with an identified housing need and a local connection</i></p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to move on medical grounds and/or disability where housing circumstances can be demonstrated to be having an effect on an applicant's medical condition but re-housing to alternative accommodation would only have a marginal impact on the long term improvement to the applicant's medical condition. • Homeless households through no fault of their own or at risk of rough sleeping and actively engaging with the housing options team • Overcrowding - one bedroom deficient • Those applicants living in social housing bedsit / studio accommodation after 2 years of holding a tenancy • Unsatisfactory or insanitary housing conditions • Applicants in Supported Housing assessed as ready/ suitable for move on into general needs accommodation • Applicants assessed as suitable for sheltered/extra care housing • Applicants residing in Heathlands Court as per Allocations Policy ie need to be working with Housing team and able to show exploring move on options • Applicants ready to move on from hostels or similar accommodation e.g. women's refuge, single person's hostel • Applicants who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the local authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or to others) eg employment • Tenants in Private Rented Accommodation (Assured Shorthold Tenants) • Tied tenants seeking alternative accommodation with notice to vacate within 6 months

Band D	<p style="text-align: center;">Low Need to move</p> <p>Applicants within this band should expect to have been on the waiting list for several years before being able to successfully bid on a property</p>
	<p><i>Applicants with a lower level of need than the above bands and a local connection</i></p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicants that are not engaging with Housing Options or other services including those of no fixed abode • Other transfer cases with limited need • Applicants in hostels or supported housing projects within the partner authorities area but without a local connection, (including those who were nominated placed/funded by another local authority/agency, with agreement that they would provide move on accommodation) • Permanent tenants of an RSL with an identified housing need – Where the Local Authority applied to has no nomination rights to the vacancy • Tied tenants not required to vacate their accommodation within 6 months

Band E	Housing Want, Reduced need and Demoted cases
	<p><i>Applicants with no identified housing need or circumstances that make them unsuitable to take up a tenancy at the time e.g. they are demoted for reasons of debt or behaviour. Those with a local connection will have priority over those with no local connection.</i></p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicants who have no assessed identified housing need who would like to move and they have no local connection • An applicant assessed as intentionally homeless – will remain in this Band for 12 months from date of intentionality decision • Social housing tenants in breach of tenancy – will remain in this Band for a period of 12 months after the breach has been cleared • Demoted applicants for example, due to behaviour or if applicants have deliberately worsened their circumstances within the last 5 years - to get more priority on the housing register

9. Rural Housing Schemes

In some rural areas, rural housing schemes have been developed on exception sites for those applicants who have a local connection with the village where the scheme is situated. In such cases the allocation of the properties is in accordance with strict local connection criteria. Rural housing schemes have been developed in the following localities: Bramshill, Crondall, Crookham Village, Dogmersfield, Eversley, Heckfield, Long Sutton, Mattingley, Rotherwick, and South Warnborough.

Some other rural housing developments may not have such strict local connection restrictions, and applications to these properties will be prioritised in the usual way.

For further information, please contact Housing Services (contact details are included in Section 28 of this leaflet).

10. What Happens if I am Nominated to a Housing Association Property?

When a nomination is made from the Hart Housing Register to a housing association property, you will be invited to view the property by the relevant housing association. It is likely that you will be interviewed and the housing association will decide whether or not to offer you the tenancy. If you are offered the property, and decide to accept, arrangements will be made for you to sign the tenancy agreement and arrange a handover of keys.

11. Will I be housed within my chosen area(s)?

The Council operates a choice based lettings system whereby the choice to be considered for a property is yours. Areas of choice can be specified on your Housing Register application form and this enables us to look at areas of demand for future developments. Please note that there is a shortage of affordable rented housing in Hart. Should you require accommodation in a specific part of the District, we may not be

able to accurately predict how long you may have to wait for an offer of accommodation.

If you have been accepted by Hart District Council under the provisions of homelessness legislation, whilst we will seek to nominate you to accommodation that meets your preferences, you may be considered for accommodation anywhere in the District regardless of your chosen areas. Please see Section 17 for further information.

12. Will the Council Visit me at Home?

To confirm your housing circumstances, we may need to visit you at home. We will normally notify you in advance of when the visit will take place. At the visit, the Housing Options Officer will check your circumstances and your Priority Band may change according to the circumstances the Officer finds.

An Environmental Health Officer may be asked to visit you at home to look at the condition and repair of your accommodation. The Officer will check if your housing conditions mean that you should be awarded any additional priority. Please note that your priority may also be reduced, for example, if your landlord can provide the facilities you are lacking or undertake repairs quickly. Please note that 'tenants of Local Authorities or Registered Social Landlords, for example, Housing Associations will need to be assessed by the relevant landlord's maintenance team prior to one of our Environmental Health Officers visiting therefore, If you are a tenant of a Housing Association in the Hart area and your home is in disrepair, you should contact your landlord first to try and resolve the problem.

13. Can my Health be taken into Account?

In order for your application to be assessed for medical priority, you may wish to complete and return a 'Medical Information Form' for each

person included on your application who is affected by a medical condition, where this is made worse by your current housing circumstances. These forms are available from Housing Services at the Civic Offices (contact details included in Section 28 of this leaflet).

In some circumstances, your General Practitioner, Consultant and / or Social Worker may want to write to the Council on your behalf.

14. What if my Circumstances Change?

It is important that you notify Housing Services immediately of any change in your circumstances from those originally stated on your application – for example, change of address and where your household size has increased or decreased. We would prefer you to put these changes in writing to us, and we will confirm that we have made the appropriate changes to your application.

Failure to notify the Council of a change in your circumstances may lead to the incorrect assessment of your Housing Register application, or the cancellation of your application. As part of your Housing Register application form you will be asked to sign a declaration confirming you are aware that you must keep us up to date regarding changes to your circumstances.

15. How Do I Renew my Application?

We will send you a reminder for you to renew your application from time to time – this will usually happen on the anniversary of your registration.

It is your responsibility to renew your application – if you fail to renew, your application will be cancelled.

16. Can the Council decide not to consider me for a property?

Your Housing Register application can be deferred, overlooked, or 'put on hold'. This means that whilst you will not lose your position within a Band, your application will not be actively considered on the Housing Register and offers of accommodation will be withheld. Examples of circumstances where your application may be deferred for a period of 12 months include (see next page):

- If you have provided false information, or withheld information that is reasonably required in order to accurately assess your Housing Register application
- If you are deemed to have deliberately worsened your circumstances to obtain advantage on the Housing Register

Examples of circumstances where your application may be deferred for a shorter or unspecified period of time include:

- Whilst investigations are carried out under homelessness legislation
- Whilst a review of the suitability of accommodation offered is being carried out
- If you have notified the Council of a change in your circumstances and we are awaiting an updated change of circumstances form to be returned (your application will receive active consideration again once a change of circumstances form has been received and updated)
- Where further investigations into your Housing Register application are deemed necessary to confirm your housing circumstances (your application will receive active consideration as soon as the Council has verified your circumstances and confirmed they are as stated on your application)
- If you have rent arrears from a current or previous tenancy with a Registered Social Landlord and you have not entered into an agreement to make regular payment to the landlord, or you are not complying with the terms of such an agreement

- If you have an outstanding debt to Hart's Rent Deposit Scheme and you are not making regular payments
- If we consider that you, or a member of your household, is guilty of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make you unsuitable to be a tenant.

17. If I've been accepted under the Provisions of Homelessness Legislation how am I affected?

All accepted as homeless households & those placed into Heathlands as a prevention of homelessness who have failed to exercise choice within 2 months of their homelessness application being accepted or their tenancy start date (whichever is earlier) will be contacted by Housing Services staff to find out the reason(s) why they have not placed a bid and to encourage them to bid for future properties.

Where households continue to fail to exercise choice after this contact they will be made a suitable 'direct offer' of accommodation which could be in the private sector, If this offer of accommodation is refused the Council will discharge its duty to them under the Housing Act 1996, Part VII (as amended), and possession proceedings will commence. Their Housing Register application will be suspended until they have vacated the accommodation. Bidding and withdrawing on properties and also bids on Homeselecta properties where the applicant stands no chance of winning does not count as a suitable bid.

Those applicants who are not engaging with the Housing Service to clarify engaging means: seen to be actively bidding on suitable properties, not bidding and withdrawing, attending housing options interviews as arranged, the ability to be able to demonstrate that they are actively exploring realistic move on options (i.e. Private Sector or alternative options other than relying solely on the housing register as Heathlands Court must remain as temporary accommodation. Any applicants not engaging as described above will be demoted into Band D with their original effective date until the Council is satisfied they are realistically exploring their move on options.

18. Can my Application be cancelled?

Your application can be cancelled and removed from the Housing Register in certain circumstances, for example:

- At your request
- If you fail to return an application form or requested documentation within 21 days when requested
- If you have moved and not informed us of your new address and we are unable to contact you
- If you fail to renew your application
- If you have deliberately given false and/or misleading information
- If you accept an offer of accommodation through the Housing Register
- If you cease to be eligible for assistance

19. How do I make Enquiries about my Application?

You may call in person at the Civic Offices, write, email, fax or telephone to enquire about your application.

When you are writing to the Council, please make sure you quote your name, address and reference number clearly. This will enable staff to reply to your correspondence quickly.

20. Can I See my File?

Under the Data Protection Act 1998 you have the right to ask for a copy of the information we hold about you (for which we may charge an administration fee) and to correct any inaccuracies in your information. By completing and returning the application form to us, you consent to our processing sensitive personal data about you where this is necessary (for example health and other personal information). As part of your Housing Register application, you will sign to say that you give your consent for us to share and request information about you with / from other agencies.

21. Do I have the Right to Request a Review of the Council's Decisions?

You can ask us for a review of the following decisions:

- You do not qualify to join the Housing Register
- Your details are removed from the Housing Register
- You are not considered for accommodation because you, or a member of your household, are guilty of unacceptable behaviour
- You are accepted under the law on homelessness and refuse a second suitable offer of accommodation

You may ask us to review any of the above decisions within 21 days of being notified of the decision. For more information regarding the review process please see the Council's leaflet 'Seeking a Review - Housing Advice and Homelessness'.

22. Can a Housing Association Refuse to House me?

A housing association may operate a policy which means it cannot house you, for example, if you were previously a tenant of the association and you still owe rent arrears or you were evicted by them. If an association decides it will not house you, you should be provided with the reason(s) in writing with an explanation of how you can appeal. If you are not happy with the outcome, you can approach the Independent Housing Ombudsman (contact details included at the end of this leaflet).

23. Equal Opportunities

It is the aim of Hart District Council to ensure that no-one applying for housing is treated less favorably for any reason. The Council is therefore committed to giving equality of opportunity and ensuring that it does not discriminate against any person on the grounds of sex, disability, race, religion or ethnic origin. To assist us to ensure that we are administering

the Housing Register fairly, you will be asked to complete a monitoring questionnaire at the back of your application form. *We will treat this information in the strictest confidence and it will not affect your application in any way. You do not have to answer any of these questions if you do not wish to.*

24. How to Complain

If you wish to complain about your application, you should first talk, email, or write to the Housing Needs Manager at the Civic Offices. If you remain unsatisfied, you should talk, email or write to the Head of Housing Services. If you are again unsatisfied you should ask for our complaints procedure and form. Finally, if you are still unhappy, you can contact the Local Government Ombudsman (contact details at the end of this leaflet). Please note that the Ombudsman will not normally consider a complaint that has not been through the Council's complaint procedure.

25. What happens if I give the Council False or Misleading Information?

If you knowingly or recklessly provide false information, or knowingly withhold information when you make an application for housing, you are committing a criminal offence. In all such cases, the Council will consider taking appropriate action, including prosecution. If prosecuted by the Council and found guilty you could be ordered to pay a fine of up to £5,000. Furthermore, if a tenancy is granted as a result of a false statement, it is possible for housing associations to take action to seek possession.

26. Can the Council help me with Private Rented Accommodation?

We have a list of letting agents operating in the area and further advice is available from our Housing Options team.

27. How do I apply for Homebuy properties in the Hart District?

Homebuy schemes (part buy / part rent) are administered by Swaythling Housing Society, the Government appointed Zone Agent for Homebuy in Hampshire. For further information about these schemes, please contact Swaythling Housing Society on telephone number 023 8062 8000 or go to www.homesinhants.co.uk . Alternatively, Homebuy leaflets are available from Housing Services at the Civic Offices (contact details below).

28. How Can I Contact the Housing Options Team at Hart District Council?

The Housing Needs Section operates a Duty Housing Advice service. Our Duty Housing Options Officer can be contacted by either:

- Telephoning our Housing Needs Section on (01252) 774420;
- Calling into the Civic Offices between Monday and Friday, 9am to 12pm, or 1pm to 4pm, for an interview with the Duty Housing Options Officer; **PLEASE NOTE WE ARE CLOSED EXCEPT FOR EMERGENCYS ON A WEDNESDAY**
- Emailing housing@hart.gov.uk;
- Faxing the Housing Needs Section on (01252) 626886;
- In Writing – address overleaf:

All Housing Advice Leaflets are available in the Hart District Council Reception or via our website at www.hart.gov.uk

Contact Details:

Address: Hart District Council,
Civic Offices, Harlington Way,
Fleet, Hampshire,
GU51 4AE

Tel: 01252 774420

Fax: 01252 626886

Email: housing.services@hart.gov.uk

Web: www.hart.gov.uk