

# A GUIDE TO APPLYING FOR A HOME OF YOUR OWN WITHIN BRACKNELL FOREST

If you would like a copy of this leaflet in

- large print
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- another language

please call us on: 01344 351544

Minicom: 01344 352045

# CONTENTS .....

- About this guide .....4
- Comments about this guide .....4
- Can I join the Housing Register? .....5
- How do I contact Housing Services .....6
- What if I have an emergency out of office hours? .....6
- What happens to my application? .....7
- What information will I need to give to the Council? .....8
- Is my application confidential? .....9
- What happens if I give false information on my application? .....9
- How do I keep my application up to date? .....10
- How do I cancel my application? .....11
- How are my housing needs assessed? .....11
- What is unreasonable behaviour? .....13
- What If I have rent arrears or other housing related debts? .....14
- What if I own my home? .....15
- What is the points scheme? .....15
- What if I have an urgent medical, social or environmental problem? .....19
- How long do I have to wait? .....20
- Opportunity to express choice or preferences .....21
- How are nominations made for social housing? .....22
- How will I be nominated for accommodation? .....23
- What size of accommodation will I be considered for? .....24
- Can I be nominated for the empty property I have seen? .....25
- What happens if I refuse a nomination for accommodation? .....25
- Do I have the right for a review of a decision made on my application? ..26
- Advice, assistance and information .....26
- What if I am unhappy with the service I have received? .....27

# ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide sets out Bracknell Forest Borough Council's Allocations Policy for new applicants as from October 2003.

Bracknell Forest Borough Council aims to help people who have a housing need. The Council is committed to providing a fair and consistent service to all people who are eligible for housing.

This is achieved by:

- keeping a Housing Register of people eligible to apply for housing in the Borough;
- making sure that nominations are made to those people who have the greatest need, in accordance with the law and the Government's Code of Guidance;
- giving advice, information, and assistance, concerning all aspects of housing to people in all types of accommodation.

References to legislation in this leaflet reflect the law at January 2003 when this Policy was approved by Members of the Social Services and Housing Committee.

This legislation may be amended or superseded. Bracknell Forest Borough Council will, if necessary, amend its Nomination Agreement to comply with legal requirements. The references must be taken to include any subsequent amendments.



## **Our Standard**

**We will maintain a Housing Register and will make nominations in accordance with our Housing Nominations Agreement.**

**We will discuss your housing needs and options with you. Where necessary we will confirm the advice given, in writing within 10 working days.**

# COMMENTS ABOUT THIS GUIDE

While we have made every effort to ensure that the contents and listings in this guide are accurate and up to date, things do change. If you find that something is inaccurate, please let us know by using the form provided at the back of this guide.

# CAN I JOIN THE HOUSING REGISTER?

Our Housing Register is now open to anyone over the age of 16, unless they come within the 'ineligible' categories detailed in the Homelessness Act 2002.

Those who are 'ineligible' include:

- Certain categories of Asylum Seekers and people from abroad;
- Some people who are guilty of unacceptable behaviour.

If you fall within either of these categories, we will write to you to explain your position in more detail.

We will consider new housing applicants and Housing Association tenants looking for transfers under the one Allocations Scheme.

Reasonable preference will, as required by the legislation, be awarded through our points scheme to applicants on the Housing Register who are in housing need.

People in housing need include:

- Those who are homeless;
- Those living in unsatisfactory accommodation;
- Those who need to move on medical or welfare grounds;
- Those who need to move to somewhere else within the Borough where failure to do so would cause hardship.

Please note that we award points to reflect local connection. In view of the high demand from applicants resident in the Borough it is unlikely that applicants who live outside the Borough will be nominated for accommodation, unless there are no other eligible applicants in housing need living within the Borough.

To join the Housing Register, you must complete an application form and provide information about your housing need and personal circumstances.

**NB If you wish to join the Shared Ownership Register as well as the Housing Register, you may apply for both.**

# HOW DO I CONTACT HOUSING SERVICES

If you would like advice about Housing Services or more information about applying to join the Housing Register please contact us in person, by post, or by telephone.

## **Housing Options Team**

Bracknell Forest Borough Council, Time Square, Market Street,  
Bracknell RG12 1JD

**T:** 01344 351198

**T:** 01344 351353

**T:** 01344 351544

**T:** 01344 351197

**Minicom** 01344 352045 (general switchboard)

## **Our opening times**

**Monday to Friday** 8.30am to 5pm



### **Our Standard**

**The Housing Advice Duty Officer will try to see everyone who needs immediate advice about housing and homelessness who comes in to the Housing Reception on that day.**

Alternatively an appointment can be made to see a Housing Options Officer within 10 working days.

# WHAT IF I HAVE AN EMERGENCY OUT OF OFFICE HOURS?

If you have an urgent need to contact Housing Services outside our normal opening times, please phone the Emergency Duty Team (please note that calls on this number are recorded):

**T:** 01344 786500

**Minicom** 01344 786514

# WHAT HAPPENS TO MY APPLICATION?

Your application will be carefully considered to make sure that all questions have been filled in completely, and that you qualify to join the register. If further information is required from you, this will be requested.



## **Our Standard**

**We will assess all housing applications within 20 working days.**

Unless you are ineligible to be on the Housing Register, your application will be entered on the register and assessed under the points scheme. You will be sent a letter stating the date from which your application was registered.

You will also be advised of your priority under the allocations scheme i.e. points awarded, size of accommodation you are eligible for.

When you are close to being considered for nomination you will be visited at home in order to check the details of your application, and to ensure that your points have been correctly calculated. Sometimes visits will be arranged earlier if your situation is complex or there are queries about your application which can best be resolved by a home visit.

If you do not qualify to be on the Housing Register, you will be told the reasons for this decision, in writing.



## **Our Standard**

**Every applicant is entitled to see their entry on the Housing Register and the Housing Options Team will, if requested, supply a copy free of charge within 5 working days.**

# WHAT INFORMATION WILL I NEED TO GIVE TO THE COUNCIL?

You will be asked to give personal information, in confidence, on Bracknell Forest Borough Council's standard application forms. It is your responsibility to make sure that details of your circumstances are kept up-to-date. Inaccurate information can lead to confusion and disappointment, and false information will lead to your application being cancelled.

Before any offer of accommodation can be made the Council will need to verify the details of your application. It is likely this will take place during a home visit, when you may be asked to provide information such as;

- Proof of Identity – i.e. passport
- Proof you live at your address – i.e. rent book, driving licence, benefits payment book, bank statement,
- Birth certificates for your family,
- Proof of pregnancy for women who are pregnant – i.e. confirmation from your doctor on your expected date of delivery.
- Written proof that you no longer have a legal or financial interest in a property if you previously owned a property,
- Proof of any financial settlement you received from the sale of any property you owned,
- Legal proof (if you are divorced or separated) (i.e. Residency Order) confirming that your children will live with you as their principal home before being accepted for family accommodation. Contact agreements giving access for weekend or overnight visits will not qualify for family accommodation.

If you are unable to verify the information you have provided in your application, it will not be possible to nominate you for a property.

# IS MY APPLICATION CONFIDENTIAL?

Information about you as an applicant is treated as confidential. Housing Options Officers will not discuss any details of your application with other individuals or agencies, except in the circumstances outlined below, unless you have given your written consent. This includes members of your family who are not part of your housing application.

If housing officers become aware of issues that relate to your priority for housing need for care and support, or potential risk to yourself and/or others, they will liaise with relevant statutory and voluntary agencies in order to assess your situation fully. This will be done on a 'need to know' basis, and wherever possible with your direct consent. Information relating to child protection, or risk to the community, will always be passed to Social Services and other relevant agencies.

You are entitled to see your file (with exceptions) if you wish to do so. If the file contains information from third parties, e.g. letters from doctors, or statutory or voluntary agencies, the agency or individual will be contacted for their consent before these documents are available for you to see.

# WHAT HAPPENS IF I GIVE FALSE INFORMATION ON MY APPLICATION?

**If you knowingly give false information or withhold information relevant to your application, you may be prosecuted.**

The Council also reserves the right to remove an applicant from the Housing Register or to take action to repossess any tenancy obtained by the provision of false information, or the withholding of relevant information by the applicant, tenant, or a person acting on the tenant's instigation.

# HOW DO I KEEP MY APPLICATION UP TO DATE?

You must inform the Housing Options Team of any change in your circumstances during the time you are waiting on the Housing Register. If there have been changes in your circumstances, which may affect your points, you will be sent a duplicate application form to complete and sign so that the Housing Options Team has accurate and up to date information.

**Remember that the Housing Options Team will not know that you have moved unless you tell them your new address.**

Many people believe that if they are on Housing Benefit, the Council will automatically know where they live and if they move. This is not the case; Housing Benefit records are held separately, and the Housing Benefits Team has no knowledge of whether claimants are on the Housing Register.

You must also renew your application each year. You will be sent a letter asking you to:

- Renew your application;
- Give information about any changes in your circumstances.

If you fail to renew your application after a reminder has been sent it may be cancelled.

# HOW DO I CANCEL MY APPLICATION?

You may cancel your entry on the Housing Register at any time by sending us your request in writing.

We may cancel your application if you fail to renew your application after two reminders have been sent.

If your entry on the Housing Register is cancelled, we will inform you in writing, giving you reasons why.

# HOW ARE MY HOUSING NEEDS ASSESSED?

We will give reasonable preference for housing to:

- Anyone homeless (within the terms of the Homelessness Act 2002, which includes provisions relating to 16 and 17 year olds);
- Those living in insanitary or overcrowded housing, or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions;
- Those who need to move to a particular locality within the Borough where failure to meet that need would cause hardship to themselves or others;
- Those who need to move on medical or welfare grounds.

Preference is also given to persons falling within the following categories:

- People living in housing which is temporary or occupied on insecure terms;
- Families with dependent children;
- Households consisting of or including someone who is expecting a child;
- People who need sheltered or extra care accommodation;
- Households whose social or economic circumstances are such that they have difficulty in securing settled accommodation.

Additional preference will be given to:

- Victims of domestic violence;
- Victims of racial harassment;
- People under-occupying Housing Association accommodation needed for families;
- Homeless people in temporary accommodation;
- People homeless as a result of violence;
- People who need to move because of urgent Medical grounds.

In determining priorities within the reasonable and additional preference categories, we will take into account:

- Local Connection – the points scheme includes points to reflect residence in the Borough. This will be taken into account in determining relative priorities for allocation in the Borough; (See “Can I join the Housing Register” )
- Financial resources available to an applicant to secure their own accommodation. This would include owner-occupiers or those whose financial assets would enable them to find alternative, suitable accommodation in the private sector;
- Any behaviour of the applicant (or a member of his household) which affects his suitability to be a tenant. This could include rent arrears and may mean an applicant is given lower priority than other applicants or that they receive no preference at all. (See “What is unreasonable Behaviour “)

We will consider transfer applications from Housing Association Tenants in the same way as new applicants, but we will consider the best use of social housing stock when making nominations.

Your application is assessed using the information supplied on your application form using the points scheme.

# WHAT IS UNREASONABLE BEHAVIOUR?

Under the terms of Homelessness Act 2002, applicants can be excluded from the Housing Register if it is considered that an applicant or a member of an applicant's household has been guilty of unacceptable behaviour.

This can include:

- Serious rent arrears;
- Serious breach of tenancy obligations;
- Serious nuisance or annoyance to neighbours;
- Use of premises for immoral or illegal purpose;
- Serious damage or neglect of a property.

Also lower priority may be given to applicants whose behaviour may not be serious enough to exclude from the Register but who may still be entitled to less preference than other applicants.

If an applicant is to be excluded they will be written to, notifying them of the reasons for this decision.

Applicants will have the right to request a review of any decision to exclude them.

# WHAT IF I HAVE RENT ARREARS OR OTHER HOUSING RELATED DEBTS?

If you are a Housing Association tenant and have arrears, or debts for rechargeable works, you will generally only be rehoused once these arrears are cleared, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

If you are a new applicant but have housing related debts owed to Bracknell Forest Borough Council or any other Local Authority or Housing Association, this will generally effect your rehousing. This will also include anyone who was granted a deposit loan to secure accommodation in the private sector and has not maintained repayments.

Applicants with serious arrears can be excluded from the Housing Register or given no preference for housing.

Applicants with minor persistent arrears or owing debts as indicated above, will be given lower priority than other applicants, who have no housing related debts.

In general terms, therefore because of the demand for housing in the Borough it is unlikely an applicant would be considered for housing until the debt is cleared

# WHAT IF I OWN MY HOME?

You will be able to join the Housing Register but unless there are exceptional circumstances, it is unlikely your application will be considered. In determining relative priorities between applicants in the same categories, financial resources will be taken into account.

You would need to show that you had insufficient financial assets, including equity in your property to enable you to secure suitable alternative accommodation for yourself.

You are likely therefore to receive less priority than other applicants who do not have financial resources available to them.



## **Our Standard**

**You will be notified of your points total within 5 working days of your application being registered.**

# WHAT IS THE POINTS SCHEME?

The Council will use a points scheme to assess the housing need of each applicant who falls within the reasonable and additional preference categories.

## **Applicants applying as homeless who are accepted as:**

Unintentionally homeless and in priority need – with a local connection	20
Unintentionally homeless and not in priority need – with a local connection	15
Intentionally homeless and in priority need – with a local connection	5

**Additional points can be awarded if: -**

People accepted as homeless are placed in temporary accommodation (including private sector lease properties, hostel accommodation etc)	20
People accepted as homeless with no fixed abode, where they are moving between different addresses	15
People accepted as homeless who are Rough Sleepers and where there is no accommodation available	30

**For applicants other than those accepted as homeless who fall within the reasonable and additional preference categories****Sharing or lacking accommodation or facilities**

For each member of your family who lacks a suitable bedroom	5
Having no living room	10
Sharing a living room with others	5
Sharing a kitchen with others	5
Sharing a kitchen with more than one family (families only)	10
Having no kitchen	10
Sharing a bathroom with others	5
Sharing a bathroom with more than one family (families only)	10
Having no bathroom	10
Sharing a wc with others	3
Sharing a wc with more than one family (families only)	5
Extra points for combined bathroom/wc	2
People living in shorthold, or non-settled accommodation, including private rented accommodation (non-shared)	10

When an application is pointed, so that all applicants are considered in the same way, bedroom shortage points are given to allow all children a room of their own, and couples are pointed as needing one bedroom.

This standard does not apply to the nomination of properties.

### **Local connection – people currently living in the Borough of Bracknell Forest**

Up to five years	3
Over five years but under ten years	6
Over ten years but under fifteen years	9
Over fifteen years but under twenty years	12
Over twenty years	15

### **Local connection – Housing Association Tenants within Bracknell Forest**

Families with children in flats above ground floor	20
Families with children in ground floor flats (without a garden)	10

### **Local connection – other than current residence**

Previous residence of over 5 years in Borough	2
Current employment in Borough	2
Close family living within the Borough	2

### **Time registered**

End of 1 year	2
End of 2 years	4
End of 3 years	6
End of 4 years	8
End of 5 years	10

### **Additional points can also be given to:**

Victims of domestic violence	20
Victims of racial harassment	20
People under occupying Housing Association accommodation within the Borough needed for families	50
People homeless as a result of violence	20
People who need to move because of urgent medical grounds	50

## Social needs

Additional social need points can be awarded to other applicants, who fall within the reasonable and additional preference categories.

This is at the discretion of the Head of Housing or the Housing Options Manager, up to a maximum of **fifty (50)** points.

On deciding if social need points are appropriate, we will consider:

- Whether you have any particular needs, which affect or are affected by your housing situation (for example, mental health needs, learning disability or other disability needs);
- How your circumstances compare to those of others on the Housing Register;
- Whether your personal difficulties are housing related or can be resolved by rehousing;
- What other options are available to you;
- Whether you have contributed to your current situation.

# WHAT IF I HAVE AN URGENT MEDICAL OR ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEM?

Fifty (50) points can be awarded for priority re-housing on urgent medical grounds. These will only be awarded in cases of exceptional need.

Decisions will be made in relation to your housing circumstances only, and not about whether you have a particular illness or condition. If you wish to apply for medical priority, you should ask for the relevant form. You may need to get supporting evidence from your doctor. If medical advice is needed a Housing Options Officer with your consent, will write to your GP or Consultant and ask for any necessary information.

You should note that if medical professionals charge for the supply of advice or information, it is likely that these charges will have to be met by YOU.

The Housing Options Manager in conjunction with the Head of Housing will decide whether an applicant should be given medical priority, in accordance with the 1996 Housing Act as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002, and Bracknell Forest Borough Council's Housing Policy.

If your home is unfit for occupation and a Demolition or Closing Order has been made, you will usually qualify as homeless and in priority need. Your application will be investigated and processed on this basis.

Otherwise up to five (5) points can be awarded where there is no statutory power available to secure a remedy for your property if it is unsuitable for you because of its layout, location, or condition, or, where such action is deemed inappropriate in the circumstances.

The Housing Options Team will seek guidance from the Environment Department on these issues where necessary.

# HOW LONG DO I HAVE TO WAIT?

You are entitled to be given general information about whether accommodation appropriate to your needs is likely to be made available and your position on the Housing Register. It is never easy to be precise about waiting times, as we cannot predict how many people will apply who are in greater need than you, or how many properties will become available to let.

The length of time you will wait depends on several factors. These include:

- Your points level;
- The size and type of property you require;
- Your areas of choice;
- Suitable vacancies becoming available;
- If you have any housing related debts.

If you only want a very limited area, or have very particular requirements, you may wait longer than if you are prepared to consider any area.

# OPPORTUNITY TO EXPRESS CHOICE OR PREFERENCES

When you complete your application form you will be able to indicate what areas and type of accommodation you wish to be considered for (see “what size of accommodation will I be nominated for?”).

Your preference will be discussed with you at the home visit, which is normally undertaken when you are close to being considered for nomination.

What was discussed will be confirmed in a letter to you, which will indicate the areas, type of accommodation you wish to be considered for as well as any other specific requirements.

The letter will also confirm that you are now on the active list, or will explain why this is not appropriate.



## **Our Standard**

**We will send you a letter within 5 working days of a home visit confirming your housing requirements.**

# HOW ARE NOMINATIONS MADE?

**The Housing Options Manager will have day to day responsibility for nominating to Housing Associations. S/he will nominate in accordance with the Nominations Agreement and the points scheme.**

It is often the case that several applicants are interested in a property, and wish to be considered for it. There is no system which can satisfy every applicant, and be completely fair to everyone. We try to be as fair as possible, and to make sure that applicants in the most need are given highest priority.

Please remember that we cannot discuss with you why another applicant has been nominated for a property ahead of you. If you believe that another applicant has been nominated for a property unfairly, you should contact the Housing Options Team. You will need to give the address of the property concerned, and your reasons for believing that the applicant should not have been nominated for the property. The Housing Options Team will check that the nomination was correctly made.

In addition to applicants who are on the active list, other people who could have priority for re-housing, include:

- People who need to move because their home needs major work, which cannot be done while the property is occupied;
- People who need to move on urgent medical grounds.

# HOW WILL I BE NOMINATED FOR ACCOMMODATION?

You will be placed on the active list and considered for a nomination to suitable accommodation when your application reaches the top of the Housing Register. You must have had your home visit.

The Council will try to nominate you for properties as close to your needs and preferences as possible.

You will be contacted by the Housing Association you have been nominated to. You will be advised if your nomination has been accepted and if so the Housing Association will arrange for you to view the property.

# WHAT SIZE OF ACCOMMODATION WILL I BE NOMINATED FOR?

**Single people** will normally be considered for studio apartments or one bedroom flats. (There is likely to be a much higher demand and therefore a longer wait for one bedroom flats).

**Couples** will be considered for one bedroom flats.

**Families with one child, or two children of the same sex**, will usually be considered for two bedroom flats or two/three bedroom houses (The wait for a house, particularly a three bedroom, is likely to be considerably longer because of much higher demand).

**Larger families** will be considered for flats, maisonettes or houses according to their need (four bedroom houses, rarely become available and there is a high demand).

**Older people** can apply for bungalows, one bedroom flats, sheltered or extra care accommodation.

For people who require a resident carer, an extra bedroom will be added to your requirements.

You will be nominated once for accommodation. If however this nomination is unsuitable, it may be withdrawn. No more than one nomination for housing will be withdrawn.

# CAN I BE NOMINATED FOR THE EMPTY PROPERTY I HAVE SEEN?

You are welcome to let us know if you see a property you would like to be nominated for. Your interest will be noted. However, please remember the following points:

- ***The property may not belong to a Housing Association; it may be a privately owned property.***
- The property may have already been nominated to another applicant. Usually a nomination will be made before a property has been vacated.
- The property may need major repairs or structural work which means that it cannot be considered for nomination for some time.
- There are likely to be other applicants who are interested in the property, who may have higher priority than you.

# WHAT HAPPENS IF I REFUSE A NOMINATION FOR ACCOMMODATION?

You may have one nomination for accommodation withdrawn, but you must put your reasons for refusal in writing. Refusals will not normally be justified if the property matches your requirements.

If a property is refused unreasonably, or if you refuse a property after a previous nomination has already been withdrawn, you will be removed from the Housing Register. You can re-apply immediately, but your points will be recalculated from the date of your new application.

# DO I HAVE THE RIGHT FOR A REVIEW OF A DECISION MADE ON MY APPLICATION?

If you are dissatisfied with a decision about your eligibility to be on the housing register, removing you from the register or to awarding you a lower priority or preference, you have the right to have that decision reviewed.

You must ask for a review, in writing, within 15 working days of the notification of a decision.

The review will be carried out by an officer, who was not involved in the original decision, who is senior to the officer(s) who made that decision. This will usually be the Housing Options Manager/ Head of Housing. Details of the procedure for review will be sent to any applicant who applies for a review.

## ADVICE, ASSISTANCE AND INFORMATION

The Housing Act 1996 and the Homelessness act 2002 require Local Authorities to provide housing advice, information, and assistance.

We will provide advice and information free of charge to people on all housing issues, including their rights to make an application. This advice and information may cover issues relating to owner occupation, shared ownership, private tenancies and Housing Association tenancies. Where more specialist advice is necessary, for example if there are complex legal or financial problems, we will refer you to specialist agencies, which can help you.

Where practical, we will prevent homelessness by assisting people who are, or may become homeless; to obtain privately rented accommodation. In order to do this, we may provide you with information about local letting agents, and may assist you to obtain such accommodation by lending money for a deposit. The use of bed and breakfast accommodation is seen as a last resort, and this type of accommodation is not available in Bracknell.

Bracknell Forest Borough Council will offer assistance to anyone who may have difficulty in applying for accommodation. This service will be offered through our Housing Officers, or by our partner support agencies.

# WHAT IF I AM UNHAPPY WITH THE SERVICE I HAVE RECEIVED?

If you are unhappy with the service that you have received, in the first instance, you should speak to the staff who have been working with you, or their manager.

If you feel unable to speak to them, or you feel that they have not dealt with your concern satisfactorily, you should put your concerns in writing to the Head of Housing Strategy & Needs:

## **Housing Options**

Environment, Culture & Communities

Bracknell Forest Borough Council, Time Square, Market Street

Bracknell RG12 1JD

## **Other useful contacts:**

### **Citizens Advice Bureau**

40-42 The Broadway, Bracknell RG12 1AG

**T:** 0844 499 4107

Mon, Tues & Thurs

10:00-4:00

Wednesday

10:00-12:30

### **Drop-in on**

Mon, Tues, Weds & Thurs

10:00-12:30

Saturday

10:00-12:00

### **Appointments**

Mon, Tues & Thurs

1:00-4:00

Fax 01344 867171

