What is Choice Based Lettings?
Choice Based Lettings (commonly known as CBL) is a way of allocating properties owned by the Council and Housing Associations in Stevenage. Instead of the Council contacting you when a suitable home becomes available, our properties will be advertised so that you can choose which ones you are interested in (within certain guidelines) by placing bids on them. We have been using this system for six years.

Why was Choice Based Lettings being introduced?
The significant benefit of Choice Based Lettings is that it gives you choice in where you would like to live. Choice Based Lettings is a clear, open, understandable, fair and transparent way to access social housing and is used in most parts of the country. Choice Based Lettings provides you with more choice and information to help you find the right accommodation in Stevenage for you and your family.

How does Choice Based Lettings affect me?
If you are eligible for Social Housing, your housing need will be assessed and you will be placed in a band according to your circumstances. You will be able to tell us which properties you are interested in by ‘bidding’, this simply means putting your name down for those homes through our website.

Advice and support from our dedicated Lettings Team is available if you need it by contacting us on 01438 242 666 or lettings@stevenage.gov.uk

How is Choice Based Lettings different to the previous system?
Previously, if you were on the housing waiting list you had to wait until you were contacted with an offer of a home. You could not chose which home you were offered, you did not know what other properties may have been available and you had no notice that you were about to be offered a property. Under the current system, our homes are advertised weekly. This means that if you are registered for housing you know what homes are available and can decide if you want to express an interest (by bidding) for any of the homes being advertised, that meets your needs.
How am I prioritised?
The banding allocated to you depends on your priority for housing.

Your priority is decided based on the criteria set out in our Allocations policy (which can be seen on our website). The greater your need the higher your priority.

If the property you are in meets your current needs, and there is no reason to move other than you would like to, then you will be placed in Band E.

Why does my position on the list change?
Your position on the shortlist is based on your priority banding and the number of other applicants that may bid on the homes advertised your position is likely to change on a week by week basis. For example, in one week you may have the second position, but in the following week, should someone with a higher priority place a bid your position will go down.

This means that your position is never static and will move up and down depending on who else bids and what homes are available in any given week. If you are second position one week you should not think that you will receive the next offer. The more popular the home advertised then the more bids we receive, so the more likely your position will change on these homes.

How do I apply for housing and bid for available homes?
You will need to register and complete an application form. You can get forms by contacting our Customer Service Centre. Available homes will be advertised on a weekly basis and applicants can express an interest in them.

Everyone who successfully registers for housing will be notified of their registration date; banding and reference number to log on to the Homes 4 U website so that bids can be made. https://www.home4u.org.uk/

How does Choice Based Lettings work?
There are four easy steps:

1) Register – complete the application form. You can get a copy by contacting our Customer Service Centre on 01438 242 666.

2) Choose – most vacant homes will be advertised. Our adverts will give details and information about the homes that are due to become available. The adverts can be found on the Homes 4 U website.

3) Bid – if you see a home that interests you and it is suitable for you (according to our lettings policy) you can express an interest in the property.

4) Offer – if your bid is successful we will contact you to arrange to check your circumstances and invite you to view the available home. If
you do not hear from us you have been unsuccessful. Once the home has been let you will be able to see information about the number of bids, the band of successful applicant and how long they had been waiting. This will help you decide the best homes to bid for and shows you which homes and areas are in the greatest demand.

**Can I bid for more than one home at a time?**
You can bid for more than one home at a time but please only bid for homes that you are definitely interested in. You should only bid for homes that you are eligible for; this is detailed in your confirmation of registration letter. You are allowed 3 bids per week.

**How is my application assessed?**
When assessing your housing application, we will look at your current situation. There is a clear policy which aims to be fair to everyone and give priority to those people in the greatest need. You will be assessed on your eligibility for social housing, the property you need, level of housing need and local connection.

Once we have assessed your application, you will be placed in one of our bands, according to your level of housing need. You will then be sent a letter stating which band you are in and why, along with details of the type of properties you can bid for.

**How will the Council help elderly or vulnerable people bid to make sure they don’t miss out on homes?**
It is very important that there is equal access to Choice Based Lettings. Those who are considered to be vulnerable will be able to be part of selective assisted bidding (this is where we can bid on your behalf) to support their needs and help them to find suitable housing.

**Will the number of homes available increase with choice based lettings?**
There are more people waiting to be housed than the number of homes available each year. We let about 400 homes a year but the number of people on the Housing Register is consistently above 2,000. The type of properties we let is a mixture of studio, 1 bedroom and family accommodation, including flats and houses. Family-sized houses are the most popular and so receive the highest amount of bids, some receive more than 200.

Choice Based Lettings does not mean there are more homes available to let. However, the scheme aims to be more transparent than the previous scheme and ensure people have a much better understanding of whether or not they are likely to be
offered a Council or Housing Association property. You will be able to see how many homes are available, how many other applicants have bid for the properties and your chance of success. Applicants who are placed into Band E and considered not to be in any housing need should be aware that they are extremely unlikely to receive an offer of accommodation through this scheme. These applicants will be encouraged to consider other housing options.

**Do you advertise all homes that become vacant?**
No, there are instances where we have legal requirements to house applicants, urgent rehousing due to repairs or a specially adapted home becomes available, for example. In these instances we will do a direct let. We aim to let no more than 10% of our properties in this way.

**Do you let all homes in strict priority order?**
No, to ensure that all bandings have a chance of receiving an offer we operate a quota system, which distributes accommodation across bands. The current quota is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Band</th>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Quota % of lettings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Urgent priority</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Very high priority</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>High priority</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Medium priority</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Low priority</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>No priority</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>86%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transfers no preference/ direct lets</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Temporary accommodation</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The quota is used as guidance only, as our allocations depends on the demands at any given time, particularly when we have a legal requirement to make an offer, so it is not always possible to achieve this quota. The quota is reviewed annually.

**No of homes let in 17/18 were 274 General Needs of which:**
- 28 Studio flats
- 78 two bedroom properties
- 76 three Bedroom properties
- 9 four bedroom properties
- 1 five bedroom property

We also let 82 independent living (sheltered) accommodation

**Our quota system means that we aim to let:**
- 1 to 2 properties to Band A applicants
- 105 to Band B applicants
- 67 to Band C applicants
- 88 to Band D applicants
- 1 to 2 to Band E applicants

**Can I get help to understand the scheme?**
If you require any more information on the Allocations Policy or Choice Based Lettings scheme then please contact our Lettings Team on 01438 266666.