

Stevenage Borough Council

Housing Allocation Policy – a Simple Guide

Introduction

This is a guide to the Council's new Housing Allocation Policy. It explains the rules to decide whether you will be able to join the council's housing register, how to apply to join and, if you are able to join, the band you may be placed into based on your housing need, and how decisions are made about allocating homes.

This is a summary guide and is not the Council's adopted Allocation Policy. The policy which includes full details and explanations for all of the areas covered in this guide can be accessed via <https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/housing/housing-policies-and-strategies/housing-allocations-scheme>

Who can apply to join the housing register?

Anyone over the age of 16 can apply to join the register however, we usually only offer a home to applicants aged over 18 unless there are special circumstances.

When you apply the Council has to decide whether you meet the rules to be included on the register. You can find more information and guidance about the qualification rules in the full policy available to view via the link above.

There are a number of rules we have adopted to decide if you can join the register. These rules include:

You must meet the Government's immigration rules to be able to join the register. These rules are quite complicated but, in summary, you need to be a British or Irish citizen, or have settled here, or have been allowed to come and live in the UK with a legal right to join the Council's housing register.

Outside of the immigration rules the Council has adopted a number of other local rules for who can join the register. These rules are fully explained in the allocation policy itself. In summary the main local rules adopted by the Council to decide whether you can join the housing register are:

- 1) You must have a local connection to Stevenage (see *1 below).
- 2) You must have an assessed housing need (see *2 below).
- 3) We don't have evidence that you or a member of your household is responsible for unacceptable behaviour
- 4) You don't have either current or former rent arrears, or another housing debt, owed to a Council, housing association or private landlord
- 5) You haven't tried to apply to join the register by making a false or misleading statement or by withholding relevant information
- 6) You are not a homeowner

*1 - To have a local connection to Stevenage Council you must currently live in the borough and have done so for a minimum of five years in the last seven years, with no more than two separate occasions outside of the borough.

There are some exceptions to this local connection residency rule namely:

- a) If we agree there are very exceptional circumstances requiring a move into the area. This will be decided on a case-by-case basis. Examples may include reasons of safety, for example if you are fleeing domestic abuse or hate crime from another area.
- b) If we agree there is a very exceptional need to live in the area to provide or receive essential support.
- c) If Stevenage Council owe you what is called the 'final' main homelessness duty
- d) If you are a young person owed leaving care duties having been looked after by Hertfordshire County Council
- e) If you are over the age of 60 and willing to accept an offer of a hard-to-let specialist accommodation for older persons.
- f) If you are a serving member of the regular armed forces due to leave the services, or if you served in the regular armed forces within the 5 years immediately prior to the date of your application. There is also an exemption for a bereaved spouse/civil partner of a former serving member of the regular armed forces who is no longer entitled to live in services accommodation following the death of their spouse/civil partner. There is a further exemption if you are a divorced or separated ex-spouse of a member of the armed forces as you will be exempt from the local connection rule for a period of six months following your divorce or separation.

*2 - To have a housing need to join the housing register you must

- a) Be someone who the Council has decided is legally homeless and owed a homeless duty by Stevenage Council
- b) Be living in very overcrowded accommodation or in very bad housing conditions
- c) Be someone who the Council agrees needs to move because of a disability, medical, welfare or hardship reason and your current housing circumstances are significantly impacting on your disability or medical condition or is the cause of your hardship or welfare problem.

The banding tables set out below in this guide give more detail on what the Council considers to be a housing need. However, the full policy available via the link given sets out fully how the Council assess whether someone has a housing need to qualify to join the register or not.

Despite these rules we will always consider if there are exceptional reasons not to apply one or more of these rules. If we agree that there are then you may still be able to join the register. When you fill out your application form, or if we decide that you cannot join the housing register, you should provide details if you think your circumstances are exceptional enough that we should not apply the rules to your case. However, we cannot make an exception if we decide that you cannot join the housing register due to the Government's immigration rules.

If we decide that you cannot go on the register we will write to you with our decision and you can ask for a review of that decision.

How can I apply to join the housing register?

The Stevenage Borough Council website provides an online housing application form to join the Housing Register. <https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/>

If you need help in completing the on-line application you can contact the council on 01438 242242 where we can guide you through the process of making an application on-line or alternatively we can offer you an appointment.

Please fill in your application form in full, taking care to make sure that the information is correct. When we have received your application form, we will assess it to decide:

- a) If you meet the rules to be able to join the housing register and, if you do,
- b) What band you have been awarded based on our assessment of your housing need

We will usually process your application within 28 days and will then send you a letter confirming:

Whether you are allowed to join the housing register and, if we agree that you can, the letter will tell you:

- your user number for your application and for bidding on the Council's Home Finder scheme
- your registration date
- the band we have placed you in based on our assessment of your housing need
- the number of bedrooms you need, and
- information about how you can view and bid for available properties.

Who can be included on your application?

Sole applications or joint applications can be made but joint applicants will only be accepted where the application is from a couple where both are aged 16 years or over and are married or civil partners; or have lived together for at least six months; or have a child of their relationship, provided each applicant is eligible and qualifies to join the register in their own right.

To include members of your family on your application it must normally be members of your immediate family who normally live with you. Any other person or persons will only be considered as part of your household if the council is satisfied that it is reasonable for that person to live with you. This will exclude lodgers or anyone sub-letting from you.

You should only include persons on their application who will be a permanent member of your household and who will be occupying any accommodation offered as their only or principal home.

People who usually live with you but are temporarily absent due to circumstances beyond your or their control (for example, they are in prison on a short-term sentence, or in the care of the local authority, staying in hospital, or undertaking a college or university course), may be considered as a 'usual' household member at the discretion of the council, and depending on the facts presented.

Specifically, a person's housing application can include the following household members:

- a) spouses or civil partners where the applicant lives with and/or intends to live with their spouse or civil partner.
- b) partners where the applicant is currently cohabiting
- c) children who reside with and are dependent upon the applicant. Children are defined as under 18 for these purposes.
- d) permanent, full-time, live-in carers residing with the applicant at the date of application will be considered as part of the household if written confirmation of the applicant's need for a permanent, full time, live in carer is received from the relevant Social Services department.
- e) any other household member such as an adult child where it is accepted that:
 - they have been part of your household for a period of 12 months prior to your application to the council; and
 - they reside with you as part of your household and
 - you can demonstrate that this is not a short term or temporary arrangement.

The council will not generally consider the following as members of a household, and they will not be included when assessing what size and/or type of property the applicant may be allocated:

- a) non-dependant adult relatives
- b) non-relatives
- c) non-resident carers
- d) lodgers
- e) live-in help
- f) children for whom the applicant or their partner has staying arrangements but who are not permanent members of the household
- g) Family members who do not currently reside in the UK

Your right to request a statutory review of certain decisions made on your application

If you do not agree with the band you are allocated, or have been told you are not eligible to register, or do not meet the one of the local rules to be able to register, you can ask us to review your application.

Under the housing legislation you will have a legal right to request a review of any of the following decisions reached by the council:

- a) a decision that you cannot join the housing register under the immigration or locally adopted rules.
- b) a decision regarding which band you have been awarded

- c) the registration date granted for the band awarded
- d) to remove you from the housing register under one of the rules in the policy that allows the Council to remove people
- e) any decision about the facts of the case that has been used to assess your application including any decision the council has made regarding who can be included in the application
- f) where you believe that a decision has been reached based on incorrect information.

If you are unhappy with a decision (as listed above) you should in the first instance contact the Lettings Team at the Council and explain why they think the decision is not correct or not reasonable. An initial informal review will then be undertaken by either the housing officer who dealt with their case or an equivalent officer.

You will then be notified in writing whether the decision still stands, and the reasons for this, usually within 10 working days.

If you wish to take the matter further, you can make a request for a formal review of the decision which must be made within 21 days of receiving the decision. Your request should be made in writing by letter or email. If you have not already given a reason for why you want a review in your review request letter, we will contact you to ask you to make a written submission stating the reasons for your request.

A formal review will then be conducted by a manager senior to the officer that made the decision and who was not involved in the original decision making process. You will be notified of the outcome of the review in writing, including the reasons for the decision reached on review. The council aims to notify an applicant of a review decision within 56 days; however, this is a target timescale and may be longer depending on operational pressures.

There is no right to request a review of a review decision.

If I meet the rules to join the housing register what happens next?

If you meet the rules to be able to join the housing register we will place you into a band based on our assessment of your housing need which we make using the assessment criteria set out in the policy. There are 3 housing needs bands and we will place you in the band which reflects your current circumstances.

Applicants in Band 1 have a higher assessed housing need than applicants in Bands 2 or 3. Applicants in band 2 have a higher assessed housing need than applicants in Band 3. The following tables are designed give you an indication whether you would be likely to be assessed as having a housing need and, if so, which band you may be placed in. However you should refer to the full policy document for more detailed information.

What band will you be placed into based on our assessment of your housing need?

There are 3 housing needs bands which are:

Band 1 – Urgent or exceptional housing need to move:

Band 2 – High housing need to move:

Band 3 – Lower housing need to move:

The following table provides details for how the policy defines and assesses housing need for an award of a band. It is important to note that you will be placed in the appropriate band following an assessment that your housing need meets the threshold for that band. If you qualify under more than one of the housing need criteria you will be awarded the highest priority that you are entitled to under the criteria. You will not be awarded a higher band just because they meet more than one housing need criteria. For example, if you meet 2 housing need criteria for Band 2 will still only be awarded band 2 and not Band 1.

BAND 1: Exceptionally Urgent Need to Move

These are applicants with the highest need for rehousing.

Note: To be awarded any of the bands an applicant must qualify to be included on the Housing Register. This means they must meet the residential connection rule and not be disqualified under any of the other adopted rules, unless the council has agreed that discretion should be applied to waive the residential connection rule or any other qualification rule due to exceptional circumstances.

1: Emergency medical or disability need:

A Band 1 award is for applicants who are suffering sudden or severe progressive life-threatening medical conditions or disability and need an immediate move (e.g., to facilitate hospital discharge) because their current home is unsuitable (as it does not meet their medical needs and/or cannot be adapted) and poses an immediate and serious danger to the individual.

Note there is an appendix in the full policy (appendix 2) that gives more details on how a medical or disability need will be assessed and when a Band 1 award may be granted with examples that may qualify for an award of Band 1.

2: Exceptionally urgent need to move

These decisions may be made by the manager for the applications and allocations service or made by the Council's Housing Panel where it is considered that a case is extremely complicated and would benefit from being scrutinised by the Panel.

In the interests of fairness to all these applicants these circumstances are kept to a minimum. Examples of exceptional circumstances include, but are not limited to:

- a severe threat to life by others
- emergency cases whose homes are damaged by fire, flood, or other disaster may be provided with another tenancy if it is not possible to repair the existing home, or if any work to repair is to take such a long period of time that there will be serious disruption to family life
- households which, on police advice, must be moved immediately due to serious threats to one or more members of the household, or whose continuing occupation would pose a threat to the community
- cases nominated under the Police Witness Protection Policy or other similar Policies that the council has agreed to be part of
- an applicant who has an exceptional need that is not covered in the Allocation Policy. For example, where child or public protection issues require rehousing or for domestic abuse where all other options to remain in the home have been considered
- other exceptional circumstances as authorised by the Head of the Housing Service or equivalent.

For any Private Registered Provider tenant, the expectation is that, where it is safe to do so, a like for like management transfer would be granted, or an emergency decant provided whilst a suitable transfer can be arranged and therefore the majority of these cases should not need to be awarded a banding by the Council.

<p>3: Exceptional impact of an unfit private sector property</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private sector tenants and residents of dwellings where the council’s Environmental Health team has determined the property poses a Category 1 hazard under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (e.g. crowding and space, excessive cold or risk of falls) and • Following assessment, the applicants property is subject to a prohibition order, emergency action, demolition order or clearance under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System of the Housing Act 2004, and • The council is satisfied that the problem cannot be resolved by the landlord within six months and as a result continuing to occupy the accommodation will pose a considerable risk to the applicant’s health. This includes a property that has severe damp, major structural defects including subsidence, flooding, collapse of roof, or living conditions that are a statutory nuisance, and there is no prospect of the problems being remedied within a six-month time period.
<p>4: Applicants without access at all to any of the following facilities:</p>	<p>An applicant who has accommodation (not rough sleepers) with no access to the following within their current property:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) A bath or shower b) A toilet c) Running hot water supplies d) Electric/gas needed for essential activities <p>Applicants who have access to shared facilities re cooking; bathroom and toilet will not qualify under these criteria.</p>
<p>5: Statutory overcrowding or severe overcrowding by 3 bedrooms or more as defined by the bedroom standard</p>	<p>The measurement of overcrowding is set out in section 4 of the full policy.</p>
<p>6: Freeing up a social housing home that has been already significantly adapted</p>	<p>Where a tenant is living in a substantially adapted property and does not need the adaptations in their home they will be awarded band 1 in order to release the adapted home if the adaptations are assessed as being needed by an applicant listed as being in urgent need of the adaptations in the applicant’s property</p>

<p>7: Armed Forces who meet the following criteria</p>	<p>Applicants with urgent housing need and have access to no other accommodation who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Are serving (and will soon leave) the regular forces and are suffering from serious injury, illness, mental ill health, or disability which is attributable to the person's service b) Has recently ceased, or will cease to be entitled, to reside in accommodation provided by the MOD following the death of that person's spouse or civil partner who has served in the regular forces and whose death was attributable (wholly or partly) to that service or c) Is serving or has served in the reserve forces and is suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is attributable (wholly or partly) to the person's service <p>For this purpose "the regular forces" and "the reserve forces" have the meanings given by section 374 of the Armed Forces Act 2006.</p>
<p>8: Care Leavers</p>	<p>A care leaver who meets the criteria is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a care leaver who does not originate from Stevenage but has been placed into foster care or residential care in Stevenage and has been resident in Stevenage for five continuous years and meets the requirements for housing under the Leaving Care Act 2000 as being an eligible, relevant or former relevant person aged 18-21 (24 if in full time education).

BAND 2 – High Priority, Statutory Housing Need to Move:

These are applicants that have been awarded Band 2 priority based on their assessed high housing need.

Note: To be awarded any of the bands an applicant must qualify to be included on the Housing Register. This means they must meet the residential connection rule and not be disqualified under any of the other adopted rules, unless the council has agreed that discretion should be applied to waive the residential connection rule or any other qualification rule due to exceptional circumstances.

1: Homeless applicants who are owed one of the following duties by Stevenage Council only

- the Main Housing Duty under Section 193 of the Housing Act 1996, or
- a relief duty under Section 189B (2) where the applicant is, at the point of that 189B duty being accepted, considered likely to be in priority need and unintentionally homeless, whether a decision to that effect has been made or not, and the applicant is accommodated in interim temporary accommodation.

2: Severe medical or disability impact:

- Where an applicant (or a member of their household) is living in accommodation with a severe, long term, medical conditions (chronic or progressive) or severe disability that means they urgently need to move because their home is assessed as being highly unsuitable and is directly detrimental to the applicants' physical or mental health.
- Where an applicant's (or a member of their household) housing is unsuitable because of severe medical reasons or because of their disability. The applicant (or member of their household) is not housebound, but their current housing is exacerbating their health conditions.

Note there is an appendix in the full policy (appendix 2) that gives more details on how a medical or disability need will be assessed and when a Band 2 award may be granted with examples that may qualify for an award of Band 2.

<p>3: Existing Stevenage Council tenants who:</p>	<p>will move from a property defined as having more than one bedroom than is required for the number of occupants, based on appropriate sharing and/or single bedroom arrangements.</p> <p>Note the Council will assess whether a property that could be released is a high demand property and if so whether to award Band 1.</p>
<p>4: Existing Stevenage Council tenants who:</p>	<p>a) Has succeeded to the tenancy of a property which was specially built or substantially adapted for a person with a disability and they do not need this accommodation (see the succession policy for further information).</p> <p>b) Has an identified need for adaptations to their current property and there is another property with these adaptations already fitted. This will only apply when the applicant has been assessed by an Occupational Therapist and excludes minor adaptations i.e., grab rail.</p> <p><i>Note: many of these moves will be achieved through the Council initiating a management transfer and where this action is taken the transfer will not be carried out under this allocation policy.</i></p>
<p>5: Overcrowded by 2 bedrooms as defined by the bedroom standard set out in this policy</p>	<p>This group is defined as applicants overcrowded by 2 bedrooms who are living in the Stevenage area as defined under this Policy's overcrowding standard.</p>
<p>6: Succession to a tenancy</p>	<p>The applicant is a statutory or discretionary successor to a tenancy and is required to move to a smaller property. Note successors who are downsizing or are required to move to a smaller property will not be allowed one more bedroom than their housing need (as per the previous policy before this revised 2024 policy).</p>

<p>7: Unsatisfactory housing conditions or fitness</p>	<p>Private sector tenants that Stevenage Borough Council has determined that the property poses a serious category 1 hazard under the Health and Safety fitness rating and the Council's assessing officer is satisfied that the problem cannot be resolved by the landlord within 6 months and as a result continuing to occupy the accommodation will pose a considerable risk to the applicant's health. This includes a property that has severe damp, major structural defects including subsidence, flooding, collapse of roof, or have living conditions which are a statutory nuisance, and there is no prospect of the problems being remedied within a 6 month time period, and the household are not able to resolve their own housing problem by moving to alternative private sector accommodation.</p>
<p>8: Ready to move on from Council accredited supported housing scheme (except for the Haven YMCA and Housing First – See Band 3)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An applicant is in a Council accredited supported housing in the Stevenage area, and • Is ready to move to independent settled housing on the recommendation of the support worker or equivalent; and • The applicant is in need of medium to long term rather than short term ongoing tenancy support; and • That support package has been assessed and is in place.

Band 3 – Lower Priority Need to Move:

Note: To be awarded any of the bands an applicant must qualify to be included on the Housing Register. This means they must meet the residential connection rule and not be disqualified under any of the other adopted rules, unless the council has agreed that discretion should be applied to waive the residential connection rule or any other qualification rule due to exceptional circumstances.

1: Applicants owed one of the following homelessness duties

Applicants owed any of the following homelessness duties by Stevenage Council as set out below:

- a) Applicants where the Section 189(B) Relief duty has been brought to an end and an applicant has been assessed at that point as being intentionally homeless (and hasn't been disqualified under the unacceptable behaviour disqualification rule).
- b) Applicants owed the Section 193C (4) Main duty where the Prevention or Relief duty was ended by the council due to their deliberate non-cooperation.
- c) Applicants owed a Section 189B (2) Relief duty by the Council and not considered likely to be in priority need.
- d) Applicants owed a Section 195 (2) Prevention of homelessness duty by the Council.
- e) Applicants where the Section 189(B) Relief of homelessness duty has been brought to an end and the applicant is determined to be homeless but not in priority need and therefore not owed a Main Homeless Duty.

2: Insecurity that risks homelessness

Note: Applicants in this category will be boosted to Band 2 after 6 months in Band 3. Their effective date for Band 2 will be the date they are boosted to Band 2 and not the date they were awarded Band 3

A pregnant applicant or applicant with a child or children who are sharing a home with family who are not part of their household and where:

- a) They have no ownership or tenancy rights, and the arrangement is short term and very insecure and only available whilst the applicant is actively seeking an offer of social housing or alternative accommodation with friends or in the private rented sector, and
- b) They were owed a prevention of homelessness duty as they were assessed as likely to become homeless within 56 days, and that duty has ended because they have been allowed to remain at home whilst they bid for social housing with their Band 2 priority and it is likely that they can remain for at least a year, and

	<p>b) c) The family member with the interest in the home has agreed to allow the applicant to remain for at least a year.</p>
<p>3: Applicants over 60 who have been assessed for specialist accommodation for older persons only</p>	<p>Single applicant or couples aged 60 or over and with no other priority. The applicant wishes to move to specialist accommodation for older persons and has been assessed as suitable by Stevenage Borough Council.</p>
<p>4: Overcrowded by 1 bedroom as defined by the bedroom standard set out in this policy</p>	<p>This group is defined as applicants overcrowded by 1 bedroom who are living in the Stevenage area as defined under this Policy's overcrowding standard.</p>
<p>5: Applicants who satisfy the 'Right to Move' criteria</p>	<p>These are applicants who meet the Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Right to Move) Regulations 2015. This banding award applies to existing social tenants who seek to move from another council in England, and who have a need to move for work related reasons to avoid hardship. However, under this Allocation Policy, Stevenage Council will limit these moves to no more than 1% of all lettings per year. See annex 3 for details of how the 'Right to Move' criteria will be applied.</p>

<p>6: Former Regular Armed Forces Applicants</p>	<p><i>Note armed forces that meet the legal requirement for additional preference will be awarded Band 1.</i></p> <p>Members of the Armed Forces persons who meet the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) They are serving in the regular forces and will be discharged within 6 months and have served for 5 years or more, or b) They were serving in the regular forces in the last 5 years and have applied to join the housing register within that 5-year period, and c) Had been previously living in the Stevenage area immediately before joining the armed forces or since leaving <p>And d and e below must also apply</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> d) They did not leave the armed forces as a result of a dishonorable discharge, and e) They do not own or have a legal interest in any other property <p>For this purpose "the regular forces" and "the reserve forces" have the meanings given by section 374 of the Armed Forces Act 2006.</p>
<p>7: Overcrowded by 1 bedroom as defined by the bedroom standard set out in this policy</p>	<p>This group is defined as applicants overcrowded by 1 bedrooms who are living in the Stevenage area as defined under this Policy's overcrowding standard.</p>
<p>8: Specific supported housing schemes subject to an annual quota</p>	<p>Haven YMCA supported housing scheme</p> <p>Housing First schemes</p> <p><i>These schemes are subject to an annual quota and will be let through direct lets.</i></p> <p><i>Outside of quota residents are still able to bid for appropriate accommodation.</i></p>

What else can affect my banding?

If we think that you have acted unreasonably to make your housing circumstances deliberately worse without good reason, or with the aim of trying to be given a higher banding, we will not give you any extra priority for those circumstances. You will be given or stay in the band you were in before making your circumstances worse.

If you owe under £1,000 in rent arrears to any local authority or housing association or your last private landlord, you can join the register (as long as you meet all of the other qualification rules) and be banded based on your housing need, but you will not be allowed to bid until the debt has been resolved. To resolve the debt you must have made a repayment commitment to clear the debt and be making regular payments of an agreed sum which you have maintained for a period of at least six months. This will normally mean not having missed a single payment and the arrears have reduced to a figure that is equal to or less than six weeks payable rent.

What is Home Finder?

We advertise the majority of new and existing council and housing association properties through a scheme we call Home Finder.

Bidding and offers

We offer most of our homes to people on the housing register through our choice based letting scheme called Home Finder. However, some homes are offered through a direct offer and not through the Home Finder bidding system. The main difference is that with the Home Finder choice based lettings you must bid for a property that is advertised to have a chance of being offered it.

If we make a direct offer, we will make the offer directly to you outside of the advertising and bidding system. In both the bidding and direct offer systems we will normally shortlist people based on the highest band and the date registered within that band.

For bidding under the Home Finder scheme you will have to look at the properties advertised each week on the Home Finder website which you will be able to access if your application qualifies for the housing register.

Properties are advertised weekly when noticed is received. They are uploaded on a Thursday and bidding will close the following Wednesday.

You are allowed to express an interest on a maximum of 3 properties in any single bidding cycle.

At the end of each lettings cycle the bids will normally be sorted in order of:

- a) Meeting the lettings criteria as stated in the property advert

- b) Date order from Bands 1 to 3. If you bid for more than one property and are top of the short list for more than one property, you will be offered the property for which you first bid.

When might the Council make a direct offer outside of the Home Finder bidding system?

There will be circumstances in which there are urgent operational or financial reasons to make a direct offers outside of the bidding system and also, very occasionally, outside of the normal band and date order criteria. Specific examples include but are not limited to:

- a) people that need to move due to a fire or flood, or severe storm damage to their home.
- b) where there is an evidenced threat to life in the area in which an applicant currently lives for example, people who are at imminent risk of violence and are to be housed through a Witness Protection Programme.
- c) people who it has been agreed must be housed urgently as part of a multi-agency protocol where it is agreed there is a need to manage where a person should be housed.
- d) where a vacant adapted property or a property designed to disability standards becomes available it may be offered to those households with a need for this property type regardless of their band or the date they were registered.
- e) in the case of a secure council tenant who is willing to transfer from a property they do not require, and which is particularly suitable for an applicant with special or support needs.
- f) applicants who have given up their secure council tenancy whilst they are in prison and there is an intention to return.
- g) where an applicant is homeless and in temporary accommodation and the council wishes to make a direct offer to move applicants out of temporary accommodation to manage any financial pressures or legal requirements placed on the council.
- h) a vulnerable applicant where the outcome of an assessment is that a managed let in a particular suitable location is the best letting solution for that applicant; or
- i) special allocation arrangements may also apply in respect of properties available for letting on new-build developments.
- j) where the previous tenant of a vacant property has perpetrated anti-social behaviour and there may be a need to let that property sensitively in respect of understanding the impact on the community of the previous tenant.
- k) the applicant is a statutory or discretionary successor to a tenancy and is required to move to a smaller property. In these circumstances the chance to bid for a property will be limited because of the legal rules that require the Council to serve a notice requiring

them to move six months after the tenant's death but before 12 months for the notice to be considered valid.

- l) Specialist accommodation for older persons properties - these will be let entirely outside of the bidding system. They will be let through a direct offer.

If I am offered a property will it only be offered in an area I have chosen?

If you meet the rules to go on the housing register you will be able to express a preference for an area, or areas, in which you would ideally wish to live and the type of property you would prefer. However, the ability to satisfy your wishes is limited by the lack of available social housing in the Stevenage area.

While the council is committed to offering you as much choice as possible, the vast gap between the supply and demand of social housing means that we expect the refusal of offers of accommodation following a successful bid to be rare. However, the considerable housing pressures faced in Stevenage limit the degree of choice that we can offer you and therefore, expressing a preference over where you would ideally wish to live does not mean that preference can be met, or that you won't be offered a direct offer of suitable accommodation outside of your preferred area.

You will be asked at the time of registration to state any area in which you believe that you cannot live due to fear of violence, harassment, or domestic abuse. We will then assess your claim and decide whether these areas must be ruled out if you were to be offered a home.

How we assess overcrowding and the bedroom size that you can be allocated

For the purpose of assessing your housing need for overcrowding and for the purpose of deciding the number of bedrooms you may be allocated the following criteria will be used:

1 bedroom will be allowed for:

- One bedroom for applicant and partner/spouse (if any)
- One bedroom for any additional adult couple
- One bedroom for any two additional people of the same sex (up to the age of 18)
- One bedroom for any two additional people of the opposite sex under age 10
- One bedroom for any additional person (aged 18 or over)

Notes on how the Council will apply the above criteria:

- Children are not considered as part of the household of the applicant if you have children that have a main permanent residence elsewhere.
- A couple or single parent expecting a baby is entitled to one bedroom. Unborn babies are not considered when determining the number of bedrooms needed
- Single people without children may be offered a studio
- Single bedrooms will be used for one person not sharing (for example a single parent)
- Double bedrooms will be used for two people sharing (for example two children sharing)

- Council tenants under occupying in their current properties from properties with three or more bedrooms will be allowed, if they wish, to be considered for properties with one bedroom more than they need.
- An applicant should note that for Private Registered Provider properties, the Housing Association may have adopted different criteria for determining the number of bedrooms a household requires.
- In exceptional circumstances agreed by a manager, 3 bedroom or more need families who are willing can choose to be considered for a direct let of a smaller council owned properties that are up to one bedroom size less than their assessed need as long as this does not mean that they will be statutorily overcrowded. For 3 bedroom properties this is limited to families with more than one child under the age of 5 who have been assessed as having a 3 bedroom need but opt to be considered for a 2 bedroom property. For 4 or 5 bedroom properties this is limited to families with more than 4 children.

Further information about how Home Finder works

All applicants, regardless of band will be able to bid for any property of the right size and type (including age-designated properties, subject to being of the required age). Applicants in Band 1 will be considered first for any property they are eligible to bid on. Applicants in all Bands can bid for properties that they are allowed to bid for but it is likely that they will only be successful if no applicants from a higher band places a bid or accepts the property. Applicants within the same band will normally be prioritised in date order.

If there is subsequently a change of circumstances your application will be re-assessed, and you may as a result:

- Be placed in a higher band
- Be placed in a lower band
- Remain in the same band
- Be removed from the Housing Register

If after submitting a change of circumstances you do not agree with the band you are then granted or have been told you are no longer able to remain on the housing register, you can ask us to review our application. You must do this in writing within 21 days of the date you receive our decision letter.

The relevant date of the change in your circumstances will be used to prioritise between applicants within the same band.

The number of offers you can receive

You can receive up to two suitable offers of accommodation except for certain households awarded a band due to being homelessness who will only receive one suitable offer.

If you refuse 2 suitable offers within a 3 year period you will be disqualified from the housing register and not allowed to reapply for a period of 12 months. This rule is intended to tackle the problem of some people making a successful bid and then refusing the

property offered, which has the impact of increasing the time it takes to re-let that vacant home. It is therefore not advisable to turn down any suitable offer of a council or housing association home.

The Council can place a bid on your behalf (we call this assisted bidding) or allocate you a property through a 'direct offer'.

The Council will not normally consider non-essential preferences concerning the location or type of re-housing requested.

How will I know if my bid has been successful?

If you are successful, the Council or Housing Association landlord management team will contact you by phone or sometimes by email. It's important that you tell us if you change your phone number, or email address otherwise you might miss out on a property. You will be offered the opportunity to view the property and we will also re-check your application to make sure you are entitled to the property.

If you have not heard anything within one week after bidding closes it means that your bid has not been successful and you should continue to place bids for other available properties.

We will publish details of the successful applicant's band and their application date on the Home Finder website. This information can help you decide where you have the best chance of being rehoused and to consider other housing options available to you.

What must I do if my circumstances change?

If your circumstances change, you will need to tell the Council. This includes telling us about the following changes.

- A confirmed pregnancy
- Any member of the family or any other person on the application who has left your household
- A change of name
- An addition to the family (we will need proof of residence and identity)
- Changes in status of accommodation (for example, you have received a notice to quit)

To tell us about any changes, you will need to fill in a change of circumstances form, which you can download from the Home Finder website or ask us to post or email to you.

If you have changed address, you need to fill in a new application form. Any change of circumstances may result in a change to your banding or whether you are able to remain on the housing register.

After we have received your completed change of circumstances form, we will write to you and let you know if your application and if any banding has changed as a result.

You can contact Stevenage Borough Council to ask about any aspect of this policy or your application: By email: lettings@stevenage.gov.uk

Or by writing to:

Lettings

Stevenage Borough Council

Daneshill House, Danestrete,

Stevenage Herts

SG1 1HN

By telephoning: 01438 242242