

HOUSING REGISTER FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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1. What is the Housing Register?

Keychoices use a common housing register for social rented houses in Rotherham. Social rented housing is housing that is provided by the Council and Registered Social Landlords, also known as housing associations. In Rotherham we allocate homes through a choice-based letting scheme.

If you qualify to go on the register you need to consider the cost of getting your own place to live, as setting up home is expensive. It is a good idea to start saving and buying items in advance. You need to consider how you will manage your income when you have bills such as rent, council tax, gas, and electricity to pay. You should only bid for properties that you can afford. If you qualify and are offered a property you will be required to pay one weeks rent in advance. You must continue to pay the rent and other charges, which are due weekly in advance.

2. Who qualifies to go on the housing register?

To qualify to go on Rotherham's housing register you must:

- Be aged 16 years or older.
- Meet the residency test to Rotherham other than where there are exemptions.
- Be in housing need.
- Not owe rent arrears or other housing related debt, exceeding the equivalent to eight weeks rent.
- Have not been evicted from a Council or housing association tenancy in the last 5 years. This includes if a possession order was issued but you left before eviction.
- Not have had a cancelled housing application in the last twelve months.

3. Am I eligible to join the Housing Register?

To be eligible you need to show that you meet Rotherham's residency test unless an exemption applies. This means providing proof that you have:

- Lived in Rotherham for three of the last four years.

4. What circumstances will affect my eligibility to join the Housing Register?

If you owe money to the Council, a private landlord or housing association for current or former rent arrears you will be required to set up a payment plan to reduce this debt.

You will not qualify to join the housing register if your debt exceeds the equivalent of eight-weeks rent arrears. If you have debt less than the equivalent of eight-weeks rent, you will be allowed to join the housing register but will be placed in suspension. If you are in housing needs (Bands One, Two and Three), the application will remain suspended until the arrears have been reduced by 25%. It will be your responsibility to inform the Council when the debt has reached the eligible level and agree to continue to reduce the debt by making regular payments via an agreed payment plan.

If you are not in housing need (Band Four), you will be required to have no tenancy related debts.

If you have any tenancy breaches or you have been evicted from a Council or housing association tenancy in the last five years, this will affect your eligibility to join the Housing Register.

5. How do I join the Housing Register?

If you believe that you meet the eligibility criteria, please visit:

<https://housingonline.rotherhamcouncil.org.uk/> and follow the steps below. This is so we can process your application.

There are two different ways to register a housing application, we need to know if you are a new applicant or an existing applicant/council tenant.

NEW APPLICANT

If you are new and have never held an account with us before, you need to select the option “Option 2. New Customers wanting to join the Housing Register – Create an account” and continue with the registration from there.

You will need a valid email address that you can access to be able to do this. You will be directed to Log In to your new account once this is complete. Once logged in you can select ‘Create New Application’, answer all questions (please refer to the user guide in the top right corner of the ‘Log in’ page to help you with this) and submit your application.

Uploading Documents

Once your application is complete you can upload all the requested documents via ‘My Saved Housing Application’. There are user guides available on the ‘Log In’ page to assist you with this.

IF YOU ARE AN EXISTING APPLICANT/CURRENT OR FORMER COUNCIL TENANT

You will need to select “Current and Former Tenants and anyone with an existing housing application – Create an account” this will then take you through verification for an existing user.

Even if you do not think you have an active application, but you do have a current or former council tenancy, you must complete verification this way.

The system will ask for a reference number from you to verify you in our system. This reference number can be either, your person reference number, application reference number or your payment reference number for any current or former Rotherham Council tenancies. If you do not have access to any of these details, you will need to call us on 01709 336 009 before you can continue, and we will provide you with this.

Once you have completed verification you will be directed back to log in to your account. You will need the email address and the password you have just created to do this. Once logged in to your account you can view any existing applications by clicking ‘My Accepted Housing Applications’, you can also place bids, update contact details and upload documents from here. There is a link to some helpful user guides in the top right corner of our ‘Log in’ page to assist you with this. If you are an existing or former Council tenant and want to make a new application, please select ‘Create new Housing Application’ after you have logged on. You will need to answer all of the questions (please refer to the user guide in the top right corner of the ‘Log in’ page to help you with this) and submit your application.

Uploading Documents

Once your application is complete you can upload all the requested documents. If you have already got an active Housing Application, you can upload documents by clicking on 'My Accepted Housing Application', if you have made a new application and it is pending, then you will need to click on 'My Saved Housing Application'. There are user guides available on the 'Log In' page to assist you with this.

DOCUMENTS REQUIRED

Your application cannot be processed until you have uploaded all relevant documents listed below:

- Proof of photographic identity for everyone to be rehoused including children (such as a passport or driving license)
- Proof of income (such as one month's full bank statement, pay slips, benefit award letters)
- Proof of current address (such as a bank statement, or recent gas or electricity bill)
- Details of your address history for the past five years
- Proof of your residential connection to Rotherham – proof that you have lived in Rotherham for three of the last four years (such as proof of your address history evidencing that you have lived in Rotherham for three out of the last four years) or proof that you are exempt from the residency test (e.g., contract of employment and current wage slip evidencing you have held employment in Rotherham for three of the last four years).
- Proof of your bank account including recent bank statements for all accounts held showing at least one month's transactions and dated within the last three months (it will be mandatory to pay your rent by Direct Debit)
- Proof of pregnancy including MAT B1 form (if applicable)
- Proof of child benefit (if applicable)
- Proof of overnight access to children (if applicable)
- Evidence of your right to reside in the UK if you are not a British citizen. This could be your passport and other relevant documents from the Home Office. We will require share codes for all household members to check immigration status (if applicable).
- If you are currently renting, please provide an up-to-date rent payment statement from your landlord and your landlord's contact details so that a reference can be requested

6. I do not have access to a computer, how do I join the Housing Register?

If you do not have computer access at home, you can use a computer for free at the library. You will require an email account that you can access to complete the registration.

7. What happens after I have registered?

Once you have completed your housing application and uploaded all the required supporting documents onto your online account, please call us on 01709 336 009 to arrange a telephone pre-tenancy appointment to verify your application.

8. What is a pre-tenancy interview?

A pre-tenancy appointment is conducted over the telephone to assess your housing application in accordance with the Council's housing allocation policy. You will be provided with a range of housing advice depending upon your circumstances. If all documentation has been provided, including a satisfactory landlord reference your housing application will be activated.

9. Can I make changes to my Housing Register application?

You can update your contact details on your online account. If you have any changes in your circumstances, it could affect your eligibility or banding on the housing register. You must let the Keychoices Team know as soon as possible, the team can be contacted by calling 01709 336 009.

10. What is my effective date?

Your effective date is the date your banding is awarded following receipt of documents.

11. How quickly will I get a property after joining the Housing Register?

It is not possible to give a timescale for when you will be re-housed. Each property is advertised, following your bid you will be placed on a shortlist depending on your Band and Effective Date.

The more bids you place, the more likely you will be matched with a property sooner. When you are matched with a property on the Housing Register, an officer will contact you and it will be your responsibility to submit any final documents.

12. I've forgotten my login details

If you cannot remember your password, click the forgot password button. This will send a link to your email where you can reset your password. Keychoices do not have the facility to reset your password.

If you cannot remember your memorable information, you will need to contact the Keychoices Team. A request will be made to reset your memorable information. The team can be contacted by calling 01709 336 009.

13. What happens if my circumstances change?

A change of circumstances can affect you qualifying for Council housing. It is important that you keep in touch with us and tell us of any changes in your circumstances, address and contact details.

If you have been accepted as homeless, please let your Homeless or Resettlement Officer know immediately if anything has changed, such as getting a new job, problems with your temporary accommodation or changes to your income.

14. How do I apply for Medical Priority?

To apply for Medical Priority, you must be eligible for the housing register and have completed an online application form housingonline.rotherhamcouncil.org.uk. We cannot process your medical assessment until this has been completed. To apply for medical priority, you must tell us how your property is no longer suitable for your health and wellbeing. Once you have completed your housing application click here to apply for Medical Priority <https://www.rotherham.gov.uk/council-social-housing/apply-rehousing-medical-grounds/1>

15. What is the banding system at Rotherham?

If you are eligible for the housing register, you will be placed in either Band 1, 2, 3, or 4, depending on your level of need in accordance with the Council's housing allocation policy.

Band 1 is the highest band and is for people who need to move urgently. Band 1 is assessed by our housing assessment panel. Applicants with Band 1 will be entitled to one offer of accommodation. When determining suitable areas, the housing assessment panel will consider the property household size, the type and size of property and stock levels as well as turnover and demand, along with any support or educational / employment needs. Applicants can remain in band one for 3 months. If there have been suitable properties advertised in the agreed areas and applicants do not bid, they will be removed from band 1 and their application will be reassessed and placed in a band to reflect their circumstances where one offer remains. The time limit reflects the urgency for people in this band to move.

Applicants in Band 2, 3, and 4 qualify for two offers in any area of Rotherham. If they refuse both offers their application will be cancelled and they will not qualify to go on the register for 12 months. Homeless applicants will only receive one offer in Band 2.

16. How are properties allocated in Rotherham?

Council-owned properties in Rotherham are allocated to people in accordance with the Council's housing allocation policy. Housing Associations use their own rules for deciding who is offered their properties. We will share information on the housing register with Housing Associations who advertise their properties on Keychoices.

At the close of the advertising cycle a shortlist is produced of all applicants who have placed a bid. We will contact the successful applicant to verify their application when the property is ready for letting. All properties are required to meet the lettable standard and therefore timescales for keys to be returned can vary. Please be assured you will be contacted once the keys have been returned and there is no need to contact us.

17. How are properties advertised?

We have two letting cycles per week. Letting cycle 1 – Tuesday to Thursday and letting cycle 2 – Friday to Monday. To help you decide which properties are right for you the adverts tell you the details of the landlord, size, rent and other features of the property. The advert also tells you if there are any special requirements that the applicant must meet such as minimum age and which band will be given preference.

18. How do I bid on a property?

- Log in to your housing online account at <https://housingonline.rotherhamcouncil.org.uk> using the email address and password you have set up previously then click Log In. The My Summary homepage will display.
- Select the Choice Based Letting tile from your homepage. The Choice Based Lettings Welcome page will display.
- From here select the Actions menu, then select List of Available Properties. This will display all the properties that are currently being advertised that you are eligible for
- To view more information on any property please select the View Details button. This will display all the information relating to the property being advertised such as rent and any additional charges, any adaptations and number of bedrooms etc.
- If you wish to place a bid/apply for the property, you will need to scroll down the page then select Add to Basket. Property added to basket page will then display, confirming the property has been added to your basket.
- If you wish to bid/apply for other properties or view other properties you are eligible before submitting your bid, please select Return to List of Properties and follow the above steps for adding the property to your basket (remember; you can only bid/apply for a maximum of three properties during this advert cycle)
- If you only wish to bid on the one property or have successfully added the properties you are interested in, then select View Basket. Your Basket page will then display.
- Simply scroll down the page and select the Apply button.
- If you have properties in your basket you no longer wish to bid on/apply for, or you have too many properties in your basket for the number of bids you have left, then please tick the box next to the properties you wish to remove from your basket then scroll down and select Remove
- Once you have selected Apply from your basket a page will display which will confirm that the bids have been successfully placed for those properties

19. How do I know what a property will look like?

Our properties are advertised displaying a photograph.

20. Can I visit a property before I bid on it?

A property can be advertised during the notice period. We do not advertise the property number; however, the street and post code are provided for you to visit and look around the street and surrounding area. If you are not familiar with an area, we highly recommend that you visit before placing your bid. Consider things such as, distance to work, local schools, public transport links, local amenities. Placing a bid tells the Council that you want to be considered for re-housing to the property, if you are offered and refuse the property it can be counted as an offer. You receive two offers of accommodation before your housing application is cancelled, therefore it is important that you carefully consider all properties before bidding to ensure it meets your needs.

21. I keep bidding, why have I not been shortlisted for a property?

- Our properties are in high demand and lots of people may also be placing bids on the property you have chosen. It is important to keep bidding on a wide range of properties to maximise your chances of getting a property sooner.
- Remember to log on and look for homes regularly so that you don't miss out on properties that you would qualify for
- Remember that properties are offered in date order based on how long you have been in your band.
- The system will let you see your position on the shortlist, and you can withdraw and place bids on other properties.
- When bidding for flats, consider the age of the youngest person who is moving – some flats are reserved for people over a certain age.

22. What happens if I don't bid on a property?

We operate a housing register of need and therefore applicants will be expected to place bids that meet their needs. If you fail to make a bid within a twelve-month period, your housing application will automatically be closed.

If you require assistance with bidding your application can be placed onto auto-bid, the system will place bids on properties that meet your housing needs.

23. If I am shortlisted for a property, what is the next step?

You will be contacted for your application to be verified and to discuss the property you have placed a bid on to ensure it meets your housing needs.

The Area Housing Officer may contact you to discuss your offer of accommodation as part of this process.

An affordability assessment will be arranged to check that the property is affordable to you. You will be required to provide one month's bank statements for all accounts held (dated within the last three months) and a timescale of 24 hours will be given to provide this. Failure to provide this may result in you being bypassed for the property.

24. How will I view a property?

You will be contacted to arrange a suitable date and time for your viewing. A Housing Advice and Assessment Officer will meet you at the property to conduct an in-person viewing. If you have identified medical needs that require a suitability assessment, a Housing Occupational Therapist will also attend.

25. What is Rent in Advance?

If you are offered a property, you will be required to pay a week's rent in advance prior to signing the tenancy agreement.

26. When will I receive my keys?

All properties are required to meet the lettable standard and therefore timescales for keys to be returned can vary. Please be assured you will be contacted once the keys have been returned and there is no need to contact us.

27. I will need furniture in my property, what should I do?

Applicants who have been offered a Council tenancy can choose to have a furniture package. A furnished charge is added to the rent account. There are different types of furnished packages to rent, which vary in cost. You will be advised prior to being offered a property if a furnished package is affordable to you.

28. What happens if I refuse a property?

If you refuse two offers your application will be cancelled and you will not be able to reapply for 12 months.

29. I don't like the property that I have accepted, can I change it?

Once you have accepted a property, the verification process will have taken place. This verification process ensures that the property is suitable for your needs. If you choose to terminate the tenancy you will be responsible for any rent and council tax owing during the notice period. Please note your application will have been cancelled at the point of rehousing and you will not be eligible to join the housing register for 12 months.

30. Are there any reasons why the Council would not offer me a property?

The Council has the right not to make an offer, if the applicant:

- Requests an area where they may be unable to sustain a tenancy due to lack of support, for example if they have medical priority on support grounds and the property is not near the support network.
- Requests a property that is too small for their family circumstances, and this would lead to cramped living conditions.
- It has specific needs for disability adaptations, and the property does not meet these requirements.
- Has been involved in anti-social or criminal behaviour in the last twelve months (including members of the household)
- Has breached a condition of their current tenancy, for example rent arrears.
- Cannot afford to take on the tenancy.
- Where the property or area has been deemed unsuitable to safeguard the applicant or neighbouring residents

Where the Council has reserved the right not to offer a property the applicant will be advised in writing of the reasons for this decision.

31. Why has my application been cancelled?

When an applicant has been successfully rehoused, their application is cancelled, and that person will not qualify to go on the housing register for 12 months. If an applicant has been evicted from a Council tenancy, they will not qualify to go on the housing register for five years following the eviction date.

Applications will also be cancelled when the applicant:

- has submitted a Right to Buy application for their current Council property.
- Is granted a tenancy by the Council or housing association.
- Has voluntarily terminated their secure tenancy (although in some cases they will be able to reapply when their circumstances change)
- Has been evicted from a Council or housing association tenancy.
- Has abandoned their Council or housing association home.
- has more than one application registered.
- has been nominated to a shared ownership scheme.
- Has succeeded or been assigned a Council tenancy.
- Has accepted and signed a mutual exchange.
- Has applied and accepted major adaptation work that meets their long-term needs.
- Has refused two suitable offers of Council or housing association accommodation.
- Has told us to do so.
- Has failed to make a property bid within the last twelve months.
- Has not replied to a housing register review letter within four weeks.
- Has provided false information on their housing application.

32. Do I have the right to request a review of my application?

You have a right to request a review if you disagree with the Council's decision concerning your application in relation to exclusions, band, date of application, cancellation or providing false information. If you wish to exercise your right to review you must do so in writing within 28 days of receiving your decision letter. The review will be conducted by a senior officer who will notify you of their decision within 28 days of receiving your request for a review

