



Members Guide – Frequently Asked Questions

Q – How can I help my resident secure a social tenancy?

A – A resident needs to be registered for Devon Home Choice in the first instances. To maximise the opportunity to secure a property they should use all 3 bids weekly if there are suitable properties to bid on and be flexible in terms of area and property type of choice. If your resident is not bidding or restricting the properties bid upon to a specific area or property type they are likely to be awaiting an offer for much longer

Q – Does my resident need to bid as early as possible on a Wednesday to increase their chances of being successful?

A – No, allocation is made based on a combination of the priority banding awarded and the length of waiting time within that banding; and not on a first come first served basis.

Q – Does my resident have to use all 3 of bids every week?

A – No, there are no repercussions for bidding on less than 3 properties or not bidding at all unless they are Band A or they are owed a Relief or Full Homelessness Duty by the Local Authority when restrictions do apply. If your resident is uncertain if this applies to them they can speak to their Housing Case Manager for more information. Applications in Band B will be monitored every 3 months. Applicants will be encouraged or supported to bid if they have not been bidding. Applicants in Band B who have not placed a bid in the previous 12 months may be suspended from bidding

Q – How can I help my resident increase their banding?

A – An applicant's level of priority is awarded based on the Devon Home Choice Policy which can be found at www.devonhomechoice.com. The policy gives a detailed outline of how priority is awarded and the information that the team needs to assess that need. Encouraging residents to be aware of the policy and to ensure that they have provided all the relevant information for assessment will ensure that their level of priority (referred to as their 'Banding') is accurate. No priority can be awarded outside of the Devon Home Choice Policy.

Q – Why has my resident not been awarded a Band A?

A – Usually because all the evidence we have received has not justified the award of Band A under the terms of the DHC Policy. Certain cases, such as escape from serious domestic abuse,) will need to be put to a virtual panel. Band A referrals can only be made by a relevant professional such as the police. This referral is then sent out to a digital panel who must vote on whether to agree the Emergency Priority and state the reasons for their decisions. In exceptional circumstances Band A

can be awarded outside this process only if there is relevant supporting evidence from a medical professional stating clearly why a move is an Emergency. In order for band A referral to be accepted all other housing options must have been exhausted or deemed unsuitable/unsafe for the applicant including making a Homeless Application. Band A for housing defects will only be awarded if upon the advice an Environmental Health Officer in line with the requirements set out in the Devon Home Choice Policy. More information on this is available in the Devon Home Choice Policy.

Q – My resident has a 4 or 5 bedroom need but these rarely come up on Devon Home Choice, why can't they bid on a smaller property?

A – They can sometimes (see policy 3.18.6) if the landlord thinks the property could accommodate a larger household without creating statutory overcrowding. As a Local Authority we are required to allocate people suitable accommodation. We do encourage landlords to be flexible on bedroom need with larger homes where it will not cause statutory overcrowding.

Q – What can I do if I think my resident has been given the incorrect level of priority?

A – If the application is up to date and all the relevant supporting evidence has been provided and you and/or your resident think their priority is incorrect then the resident has the right to appeal the decision. This needs to be done in writing within 21 days of the decision notification and the applicant must clearly state the reason why they believe they have been incorrectly assessed. The Appeal will be passed to a senior officer who has 56 days to consider the Appeal.

Q – What if I or my resident still believe the assessment is incorrect?

A – If following the appeal process the applicant still believes the assessment is incorrect they are advised to seek advice from a solicitor or the Citizens Advice. They have the right to appeal to the County Court on a point of law only. This must be done within 21 days of the appeal decision notification. It may be advisable for the applicant to get independent legal advice regarding this course of action.

Q – My resident is worried that all the homes are being allocated to applicants outside Devon, is this true?

A – No, this is not the case. In 2019/20 less than 3.5% of homes were let to people who lived outside Devon. Of those who lived outside Devon, many may still have had a local connection to Devon. For example because they have lived in Devon in the last 5 years, work in Devon or have immediate family members who have lived in Devon for over 5 years. In addition, many will have moved very short distances into Devon. For example, from Saltash to Plymouth, or from Dorset to East Devon.

In addition to this some local authorities (including South Hams and West Devon) have a Local Allocations Policy to ensure that in rural locations people with local connection to that parish with a housing need are given priority when bidding. This is also supported in many new developments by the enforcement of a Section 106 agreement as part of the planning process, again ensuring that people in housing need with local connection to the parish or district are given priority.

Q – My resident is in a high band but keeps being skipped for properties because they have no local connection, is this right?

A – This could be correct. Where there are Local Connection criteria all applicants in housing need that meet the Local Connection requirements will take priority over applicants without Local Connection regardless of their banding. Applicants should be advised to ensure all their local connection details are correct on the application

Not all S106 agreements and Local Allocations policies are the same. The property adverts may contain links to the relevant documentation or information regarding the requirements and it is worthwhile reading each one in case the banding/local connection criteria differs.

Q – My resident needs to move quickly and is high priority but it is taking a long time, is there anything more we can do to help?

A – Across Devon there are over 24,000 people on the waiting list and only 4,204 properties were let in 2019/20 so accessing social housing is rarely a quick option. Bidding on wide geographical areas can increase the number of suitable properties they can bid on, as can considering all suitable properties which can include flats as well as houses. If your resident needs a home quickly we may recommend that they also look for private rented accommodation if this is an appropriate option for them. If they are threatened with homelessness we recommend that they contact their local Housing Team who will be able to give them more tailored advice and work with them to avoid the risk of homelessness.