

Choice Homes @ Pembrokeshire Allocation Policy Summary April 2006

As required under section 167 (4A) of the Housing Act 1996 this document provides general information to customers, which will enable them to assess how their application will be treated under the scheme. The same rules will be applied regardless of which organisation deals with the application.

If a customer requires any assistance with their application please contact any of the housing partners where help will be provided to them.

Which landlords are involved in the Choice Homes @ Pembrokeshire scheme?

The housing partners who manage the Choice Homes @ Pembrokeshire scheme are Cymdeithas Tai Cantref, Pembrokeshire Housing, Cymdeithas Tai Dewi Sant and Pembrokeshire County Council.

Who can join the scheme?

Anyone 16 years or over can join the scheme, a few exceptions apply; please see the full policy for exclusions. If a customer's application is excluded from the scheme, the housing partners will write to them explaining why and advise how customers can request a review of this decision.

Will you contact my current landlord?

This scheme aims to maximise choice and quality of service for customers. However, the communities where customers choose to live have a right to expect certain standards of behaviour from their neighbours, as do the housing partners.

In assessing any application, checks will be carried out. References may be asked for from current or previous landlords in relation to the suitability of the customer, or anyone living with them, to become a tenant of the housing partners.

Can I still join the scheme if I am currently living outside of Pembrokeshire?

Customers living outside of the county can still apply to join the scheme and will be considered using the same priority bands as current residents. But due to the high demand for properties in Pembrokeshire, additional priority will be given to customers of the same priority banding who meet the following criteria.

- Customers who have lived continuously in Pembrokeshire for 12 months prior to making an application
- Customers who need to move to a specific area of Pembrokeshire to provide or receive essential support.
- Returning forces personnel with a family connection to Pembrokeshire or guaranteed permanent employment prior to discharge.
- Customers escaping domestic violence
- Customers released from prison who were resident in Pembrokeshire for 12 months immediately prior to detention

- Customers who have to move to Pembrokeshire to take up key positions, which contribute to the provision and expansion of certain industries, e.g. agriculture and public services, for which there is a shortage of local people with the necessary skills (subject to confirmation from Economic Development) and for whom social housing is the only option

How are customers prioritised?

Customers will be placed into one of three bands dependant on their current housing needs, based on the information provided on the housing application form.

Within each band customers will be placed in date order of when their housing application form was received. Therefore those customers who have been waiting the longest will be placed highest within each band.

It is the responsibility of customers to inform the housing partners of any change in their circumstances. Changes may affect the banding given to an application.

Customers may be moved down to a lower band if:

- The behaviour of the customer, or person living with them, which it is deemed makes them unsuitable to be a tenant, i.e. rent arrears, breach of tenancy agreement, or anti social behaviour
- Someone has deliberately worsened their circumstances to increase their chances of being rehoused or deliberately given false information relating to their housing application
- Anyone who is violent, or threatens violence, to any member of the housing partners staff

Bronze Band (low priority) – Applicants who may want to move because of personal preferences rather than because they have a pressing financial, welfare or medical need. These will be customers who are:

- Existing tenants who are only eligible to move to the same size property and who have no medical, financial or social requirement to move
- Customers financially equipped to deal with their own housing needs
- Owner occupiers with no financial, social or medical need to move
- Where the behaviour of a customer is deemed to make them unsuitable as tenants
- Customers subject to a valid notice in relation to a breach of tenancy

Silver Band (medium priority) – Applicants who have some need but who can generally manage in their own homes. These will be customers who are:

- Customers with a need for social housing within a specific area of Pembrokeshire due to a medical or welfare issue as defined within S167(2) of Housing Act 1996 (as amended)
- Customers requiring 1 additional bedroom for their permanent household (not including children who are subject to access arrangements)
- Existing Pembrokeshire Council or Housing Association tenants who are under-occupying a property by 1 bedroom and who wish to move to smaller accommodation
- Customers sharing accommodation with family or friends who are not to be rehoused with them
- Customers who do not own any residential property and who are living in the private rented sector
- Customers who are intentionally homeless
- Owners of property with a welfare or medical need, which cannot be resolved through the sale of their property or adaptations
- Customers living in a property suffering disrepair that has been confirmed by an environmental health officer and statutory action is in progress
- Customers with a medical condition (supported by medical evidence) where rehousing would assist in improving that condition

Gold Band (high priority) – People who have difficulty managing within their home and people with a number of housing needs: These will be:

- Customers with a need for a significantly adapted property (major adaptations which could not be achieved in their own home and are supported by an occupational therapist)
- Non-priority unintentionally homeless customers
- Customers requiring at least 2 additional bedrooms for their permanent household (not including children who are subject to access arrangements)
- Customers unable to succeed to a Pembrokeshire County Council or Housing Association tenancy following the death of the tenant and where the customer has been resident for at least 12 months prior to the tenant's death
- Existing Pembrokeshire County Council or Housing Association tenants who are under-occupying a property by at least 2 bedrooms and who wish to move to smaller accommodation
- Private sector tenants in accommodation that is confirmed as unfit by an environmental health officer, e.g., in substantial disrepair and/or lacking basic amenities and where statutory enforcement action is being taken
- Owner occupiers who live in accommodation which has been confirmed as unfit by an environmental health officer and who do not have the financial means to carry out improvements or to move to alternative accommodation financed by the sale of the property
- Customers with children, living in private rented accommodation, and who are sharing amenities with other households not related to the applicant

- Customers' experiencing severe harassment or threats of violence where this is confirmed by a professional agency (e.g. police) and where rehousing is the only option. In the first instance the housing partners will look to take action against the person responsible for the violence / harassment
- Customers with a chronic medical need or serious illness, where rehousing is essential and would significantly improve their quality of life (supported by medical evidence)
- Customers who suffer from a chronic or serious medical illness (supported by medical evidence) where rehousing to a specific area in Pembrokeshire to either receive support or medical care would significantly improve their quality of life and prevent hardship
- Customers who meet five or more criteria in the silver band

Will I get additional priority if I have a medical condition?

Priority will only be given if the medical condition is affected by a customer's current housing situation and will be alleviated if they move.

The level of priority will be based on the severity of the condition, the effect current housing has on it, and the level of improvement moving will have on the condition.

No priority will be given for a medical condition, however severe, if moving will not improve the condition, if you already live in suitable accommodation or if adaptations can be carried out to your current home.

Where a medical condition is identified, the housing partners will:

- Consider the effect of the condition(s) on the whole household.
- Only give priority on bids for suitable accommodation that will alleviate the medical condition
- Only consider a condition to be a priority where adaptations to the property that will ease the medical condition cannot be reasonably and practically carried out
- Consider eligibility for an additional bedroom where a particular condition warrants this or to facilitate the needs of a carer

What happens if I become homeless?

Priority cards will be issued to some customers that will give them preference over gold, silver and bronze customers. Time limits will be applied to this category.

Priority Cards will be issued to the following:

- Statutory 'priority need' homeless customers, where the Council have a duty to secure permanent accommodation under homeless legislation
- Customers unable to return home after leaving hospital due to their medical circumstances
- Customers leaving care, move-on accommodation or supported housing and where a referral has been made from Social Care
- Displaced agricultural workers who are subject to the provisions of the Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976
- Special allocations approved by a housing manager and a panel of the housing partners (taken on individual merit)

Priority cards will only be issued to persons with a local connection to Pembrokeshire or where a statutory homelessness duty is identified.

On properties receiving a very high number of bids, priority cards will not be accepted but customers will still be considered for these properties based on their original priority band and registration date.

Can I still apply for housing in the normal way if I have a priority card or am placed into temporary accommodation by the Local Authority?

Yes, all customers will be able to apply for the advertised properties in the normal way.

Generally the priority card will be valid for a maximum of six advertised property sheets; if a customer fails to bid or secure accommodation by the end of this period, the Council may bid on their behalf and make a direct offer of suitable accommodation. Customers will have the right to refuse one offer of reasonable accommodation but failure to accept a second offer may result in the Council discharging its duty towards them.

The Partners reserves the right to make a specific offer to a customer within the time period if there are good housing management reasons for doing so.

If a customer is placed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation, or temporary housing stock, the Priority Card will be backdated by 6 months. The priority card will then be valid for a maximum of three property sheets, for customers in Bed and Breakfast accommodation, or six property sheets for customers in other temporary accommodation. If a customer does not bid for any properties for which they match the eligibility criteria, during this period, the partners will bid for properties on their behalf. The partners will arrange for one reasonable offer of permanent accommodation to be made to them. If this offer is refused the Council may discharge its duty towards them.

²The time limit will only be extended in exceptional circumstances and will be at the discretion of the senior officer within each partner organisation.

Will I be penalised for refusing an offer?

No, there will be no penalties if you change your mind and refuse an offer unless you are a priority cardholder and an offer of accommodation is made because of this.

I am already a tenant of the Housing Association or Council can I apply for a move?

Tenants of permanent Council, or Housing Association, properties within the County may apply for a move after 12 months, as long as they are an assured or secure tenant.

Bids will not be accepted from tenants owing more than 8 weeks payable rent.

Will all vacant properties be advertised?

To assist the housing partners in making the best use of their limited stock, some properties may not be allocated through the Choice Homes @ Pembrokeshire Scheme, these will be:

- Some "Home for Life" properties
- Furnished tenancies
- Some properties where a possession order has been obtained and where all debts have been cleared
- Adapted properties for people with a disability
- Accommodation deemed suitable by the Multi Agency Public Protection Panel (MAPPP)
- Temporary accommodation for some homeless customers

What accommodation can I apply for?

For the purposes of determining property eligibility, the partners consider that separate bedrooms are required for –

- Partners or single parents
- Each person aged 14 years or over
- Children aged 8 years or over of different sex

For carer or access arrangements a maximum addition of one bedroom will be considered.

The size of accommodation that an applicant will be eligible for will be:

Single person	Bedsit or any 1-bedroom property
Couple	1 bed or some 2-bed properties (upstairs flats, some bungalows)
Person/s with 1 child	2-bedroom property
Person/s with 2 children	2- or 3-bedroom property (dependent upon the age of the children)
Person/s with 3 or more children	3 or 4 bedroom property (dependent upon the age of the children)

Bids will not be accepted for properties that are 2 or more bedrooms in excess, or deficit, of the households' needs.

Where an existing tenant is giving up a property with 3 or more bedrooms, some 2 bedroom properties will be allocated to single customers or couples without children e.g. upstairs flats and some bungalows.

If a member of the applicant's household applies for housing in his/her own right, they will no longer be considered a part of the applicant's household for rehousing.

Will I get preference if I have a strong need to move to a particular area?

A percentage of rural community properties will be advertised giving preference to applicants who can prove a need to move to that particular electoral ward area, and that failure to move there would cause hardship to themselves or others.

This policy only applies to customers placed in silver band or above. An applicant may have a local need if they meet the following:

- To provide support to, or receive support from, a parent or close family member who lives in the electoral division and where the quality of life of either the customer, or their family member, would be dramatically improved by the move
- Customers who currently have their main residence within the electoral division and have lived their on a permanent basis for the past 12 months
- Customers who have lived in that electoral division for 5 out of the past 10 years

Customers who have a connection to a particular electoral division will have priority increased within their band when they apply for suitable homes within the community, that have been advertised with a local connection preference. If two or more customers apply for a home with a local connection the person in the highest band, who has been waiting the longest, will be offered the home.

If I don't have a connection to an area can I still apply for homes advertised for customers with a local connection?

Yes, because if no one with a local connection makes a bid for the property, the property will be allocated in the standard way.

What happens if I am only entitled to a one-bedroom property and there are not any in the area I need to live in?

In rural areas where there is no one bedroom accommodation 10% of appropriate two bedroom properties (i.e. upstairs flats or some OAP bungalows) will be allocated to single people who meet the local letting criteria.

What can I do if I disagree with a decision in relation to my housing application?

Where an applicant is dissatisfied with a decision in relation to the following issues they should in the first instance, contact a Housing Officer to check the information in an attempt to resolve the problem informally.

- The banding group they are placed in
- Their ineligibility to join ChoiceHomes@Pembrokeshire
- The fact that they have been denied a priority card
- The reasonableness of the offer made to them as a priority card holder. for example: Location, size, affordability, proximity to support services.
- The cancellation of their registration following a 12 month review

If the applicant remains dissatisfied, they can formally request a review of the decision made. This must be done within 21 days of notification of the decision with an explanation as to why they think the decision is wrong and the applicant may also provide any additional evidence that may be relevant to the review. The review will then be undertaken on the basis of all facts known at the time.

The applicant will be notified of the outcome of the review, including any reasons for the decision within 4 weeks of the request for review.

There will be no further right to a review of this decision by the housing partners.

A COPY OF THE FULL ALLOCATION POLICY IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST FROM ANY OF THE HOUSING PARTNERS.