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## HomeChoice West FAQs

### Who can apply for properties through HomeChoice West?

You must have been accepted onto any one of the four authorities Housing Registers to be able to apply for rented housing through HomeChoice West. Anyone aged 16 or over can apply to join the register.

### How do I apply?

You will need to register and complete a separate application form for each Local Authority you wish to apply to. You may also have to complete a separate form which gives details of your previous addresses, or family connections. Please see the Local Authority websites for further information.

Your application will be assessed according to the lettings and assessment policy of the local authority you have applied to. If you apply to more than one, you will be assessed according to each policy individually.

### How will I know if I've been accepted?

You will receive a letter confirming that you have been accepted onto the Councils scheme that you have applied to. This will tell you which band you have been placed in for normal properties and which Band you have been placed in for HomeChoice West properties. It will also tell you the date your application has been registered from and what size of property you are eligible for.

### Banding

When you receive your banding letter, it will show that you have been placed into two bands. You will be in one band for HomeChoice West properties (where the local connection restriction has been lifted), and another band for all the other properties. Your banding for HomeChoice West properties may be higher than that for normal properties as the local connection restriction will have been lifted.

### How long will I stay in the same band?

You will stay in the same band providing that your circumstances do not change. If they do, or your address changes, its very important for you to notify the local authority/ies you have applied to. If you dont, it could affect your chances of being re-housed as we will have the wrong information about you.

## **How does the Local Connection criteria work?**

Each local authority has a local connection policy. Properties advertised which are not labelled as a HomeChoice West property will have the local connection policy applied. However, for any property advertised as a HomeChoice West property, we will change the way we assess your local connection. If you have a local connection with one of the partnership areas, we will assess your local connection as if you had a connection to the area you are applying to.

For the purposes of HomeChoice West, Local Connection will be interpreted in the same way as the local connection policy of the Council to whom the person is applying, replacing the name of that Council with 'West of England partnership. Please see below for details of each Local Authority's local connection policy: -

### **Bath & North East Somerset**

a) Your sole or main home is in the West of England area (Bath & N E Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire

b) You are permanently employed in the West of England or have a firm offer of permanent employment in the area and this is confirmed by the employer

c) You need to move to the West of England to receive intensive care and support from a close relative\* and this is confirmed by the relative

or

You need to move to the West of England to provide intensive care and support for a close relative\* and this is confirmed by the relative

or

You need long term specialist health, education or other support services that are only available in the West of England.

d) You or your partner have lived or worked in the West of England prior to or during military service,

or

You or your partner has a close relative\* living in the West of England and this is confirmed by the relative.

\*Eligible relatives are mother, father, adult brother or sister, or adult child over 18

### **Bristol**

A person has a local connection with the West of England if s/he or someone who might reasonably be expected to reside with him/her has a connection with Bristol because:

a) s/he is, or in the past was, normally resident in the West of England, and that residence is or was of his/her own choice\*,

The length of residence in the West of England required to establish local connection in the West of England is as follows:

- residence for six out of the last twelve months;
- residence for three out of the last five years; or
- residence for the majority of his/her lifetime

- b) s/he is employed in the West of England,
- c) s/he has a family association in West of England. Family associations may extend beyond parents, adult children or siblings. They may include associations with other family members such as step-parents, grandparents, grandchildren, aunts or uncles provided there are sufficiently close links in the form of frequent contact, commitment or dependency. Family associations may also extend to unmarried couples, provided that the relationship is sufficiently enduring, and to same sex couples.
- d) s/he has a special circumstance. This might include the need to be near special medical or support services, which are only available in I West of England.
- e) s/he does not have a local connection anywhere else and has made an application to the Council.

Former asylum seekers are covered by the provisions of s199 (6)-(7) of the Housing Act 1996.

\*Residence in the West of England, is not of a person's own choice if:

- a) s/he becomes resident in the West of England because s/he, or a person who might reasonably be expected to reside with him/her, is serving in the regular armed forces of the Crown, or
- b) s/he, or a person who might reasonably be expected to reside with him/her, becomes resident in the West of England because s/he is detained under the authority of an Act of Parliament.

### **North Somerset**

- a) Either the applicant or partner has, by choice, lived in the West of England for at least three out of the last five years immediately preceding the date the application is made or reviewed;
- b) Either the applicant or partner has, by choice, lived in the West of England continuously for at least five years at any time in the past;
- c) Either the applicant or partner is employed in the district
  - a. For at least 12 months and
  - b. Remains in employment in the area continuously from the date of their application and
  - c. The employment was not purely of a casual nature

*Note:* Residency in a property where treatment or rehabilitation of any kind whilst working will not count towards establishing a local connection.

- d) Either the applicant or partner has a close relative that lives in the district and has done so for at least five years immediately preceding the date the application is made or reviewed. For the purposes of this paragraph a close relative means mother, father, adult son or daughter, brother or sister or grandparents;
- e) Either the applicant or partner has demonstrated to the councils satisfaction that a local connection applies to the district through special circumstances.

For the purposes of this section, residence in the district is not of a persons choice if it is a consequence of serving in the Armed Forces or being detained under the authority of Act of Parliament or by being placed in the area to receive treatment or rehabilitation of any kind for any kind of dependency.

Applicants will initially be placed in the relevant band according to whether or not they have established a local connection. If, when their application is renewed they then meet the criteria for local connection, they will be moved to the appropriate band from the time they acquire that local connection.

### **South Gloucestershire**

In principle, homes provided through the partnership are for letting to people who have a local connection to the West of England (Bath & N E Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire). Applicants are deemed to have a local connection if: -

- a) They have lived here for at least six months out of the last twelve months or three years out of the last five years.
- b) They have a close relative (parent, child, brother or sister) who has lived in the West of England for the past five years.
- c) They have a permanent job in the West of England.
- d) They are serving in the armed forces, based in the West of England, and approaching discharge, or they are ex-service personnel residing in the West of England and within 6 months of leaving the forces.
- e) They have a connection with the West of England for some other special reason, e.g. they receive specialist medical treatment in the West of England which they cannot receive elsewhere.
- f) They have a local connection with another area only but someone in their household might experience domestic violence if they return there.
- g) They have no local connection with any part of the UK – for example, if you have recently come here from another country.

### **Where will properties be advertised?**

Properties will be advertised on each local authoritys website, or you can contact them direct if you wish. Some authorities also advertise in local newspapers: -

South Gloucestershire	<a href="http://www.homechoice.southglos.gov.uk">www.homechoice.southglos.gov.uk</a>
Bristol City Council	<a href="http://www.homechoicebristol.co.uk">www.homechoicebristol.co.uk</a>
Bath & North East Somerset	<a href="http://www.homesearchbathnes.org.uk">www.homesearchbathnes.org.uk</a>

Details of how to bid can also be found on each authoritys website but the main methods of bidding are: -

- On line
- By telephone
- Text
- Local Offices

### **How many properties will be advertised?**

Each local authority had agreed to advertise 5% of its properties through HomeChoice West. This means that every one in twenty properties will be labelled accordingly, regardless of what type of property it is.

HomeChoice West properties will be shown with this icon:-



### **What property information with the adverts contain?**

The adverts will show the same information as you would see on your home local authority's properties. The advert will tell you the landlord, location, size, rent and other features of the property. Where available a photograph of the property will be provided and you will be able to access local information about the local area and facilities.

The advert will also tell you if there are any special requirements that you must meet, such as age, whether there are any disabled adaptations or any special restrictions the landlord may wish to apply to the property. It also tells you the number of bedrooms that applicants applying for the property need to be entitled to. If your bedroom entitlement is different to this, you will not be able to bid for that property.

### **What happens after I have placed my bid?**

Once the closing date for bids has passed, a shortlist of interested applicants is drawn up. The shortlist is in order of eligibility according to the criteria stated in the advert for details for that property. The applicant at the top of the shortlist will normally be offered the property.

If you are first in the shortlist, you will be contacted either by the local authority or by the landlord directly.

### **How will I know what has happened to the properties that were advertised?**

Information about homes that have been successfully let is published. We will tell you the number of applicants that expressed an interest in each property, the band and the registration date of the successful applicant. This will give you a better idea of how popular a particular property or area is and how long you would normally have to wait. You can then decide whether to look for other types of property or areas where you might not have to wait as long.

### **Further information**

If you have more detailed questions about HomeChoice West, please contact the Local Authority you wish to apply to who can give you more detailed information. You can either visit their website or give them a call:-

North Somerset

[www.homechoicensomerset.org.uk](http://www.homechoicensomerset.org.uk) 01934  
426330

Bristol City Council

[www.homechoicebristol.co.uk](http://www.homechoicebristol.co.uk) 01179  
222400

Bath & North East Somerset

[www.homesearchbathnes.org.uk](http://www.homesearchbathnes.org.uk) 0122  
5396118

South Gloucestershire Council

[www.southglos.gov.uk](http://www.southglos.gov.uk) 01454  
868005

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