

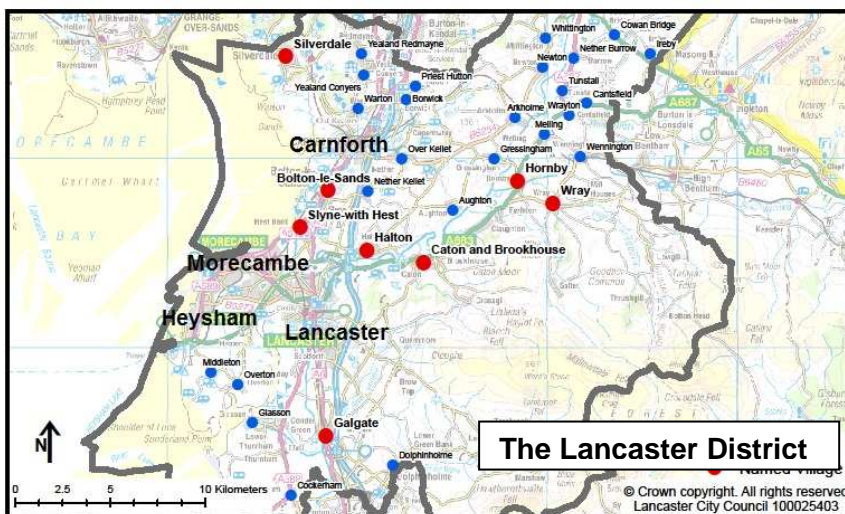


Ideal Choice Homes User Guide

Ideal Choice Homes is a choice based lettings scheme for rented accommodation in the Lancaster district. Under choice based lettings you are given information about available properties, giving you greater opportunity to find a home of your choice.

Vacant properties are advertised on a weekly basis, allowing you to choose which ones interest you. The scheme includes homes from Lancaster City Council and Housing Associations within the district.

This user guide explains how the scheme works, and what you need to do to take part.





About Ideal Choice Homes

Ideal choice homes allows you to choose which properties interest you, and gives you a greater say in where you live.

Available properties are advertised on a weekly basis on our website at www.idealchoicetohomes.co.uk, and in our newsletter which is available in a variety of locations (see page 5).

To be able to participate you need to have a live application on the Lancaster City Council housing register (see page 4).

You will then be given a banding based on your need for housing, and provided with your application number which will allow you to bid for available properties.

You can bid for properties in a number of ways:

- By visiting our website
- On our 24hr telephone bidding line
- By text message
- In person at our offices

Each property will normally be offered to the applicant with the greatest housing need out of all those who have placed a bid.

Some properties will only be available to people in a particular band, and so the person with the longest waiting time within that band will be successful.

Contents	Page
About Ideal Choice Homes	3
How to register for the scheme	4
Property adverts	5
Bidding for properties	6
How to bid on the website	7
How to bid by telephone	8/9
How to bid by text message	10
Offers of accommodation/ feedback	11
Priority bands	12/13/14
Contact details	16



How to register for the scheme

To take part in the Ideal Choice Homes scheme you must be on the Lancaster City Council housing register.



To apply to join the housing register you must be over 16 years of age. The easiest way to apply is online, at www.idealchoicetohomes.co.uk.

If you would rather complete a paper application form, please request one using the contact details at the end of this user guide.

Along with your application form, you will be asked to provide the following documents:

- Proof of identity (for example - passport, birth certificate, driving licence or medical card)
- Proof of children (for example - child benefit letter, child tax credit award letter, CSA letter, letter from school)
- Proof of address (for example - driving licence, recent utility bill, recent benefit letter)
- Proof of income

If you need help to complete the application form you can contact us and a member of staff will be happy to help. Once you are on the housing register we will write to tell you:

- The type(s) of property you are eligible for
- The band you have been placed in (see page 12-14) and your application date
- Your housing application number

Remember:

If your circumstances change you must tell us so that we can re-assess your application.

If we offer you a property and your circumstances have changed without you telling us, we may withdraw the offer.





Property adverts

Properties will be advertised on a weekly basis. A new list of available properties is produced every Wednesday and you can bid on these properties until midnight the following Monday.

The easiest way to access information about available properties is by visiting our website at www.idealchoicetohomes.co.uk.

We also produce a newsletter each week – a new one is available every Wednesday morning. You can collect a newsletter from the customer service centres at Lancaster and Morecambe Town Halls, or from the housing office on Cable Street in Lancaster.

You can also access information about available properties by speaking to a member of staff by phone, or in person in one of our offices.

Each advert also contains useful information such as:

- Rent
- Number of bedrooms
- Heating type
- Parking
- Garden details

On the website you can access detailed information about each property and its surrounding area including a street map, and details of local amenities such as schools, doctors, bus stops and more.

The property adverts contain information about each available property to help you decide whether to bid for it. It tells you if there are any special requirements you need to meet, such as age restrictions or which band will be given priority.

Remember:

It is ***not*** 'first come first served' – your final position on the shortlist for a property will be based on housing need.

Symbols on each advert help to show the features of the property.



Property has its own garden



Property available to over 60's only



Sheltered property



Property has off road parking

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Bidding for properties

Once you are on the Lancaster City Council housing register you can bid for up to two properties on each weekly advertising cycle.

You can bid for any property which you are eligible for. For example, if you only require one bedroom you will not be able to bid for a two bedroom property.

Some properties will only be available to particular applicants. For example, they may only be available to people in a particular band. This will always be made clear on the property advert.

Once you have decided which available properties you are interested in you can bid in the following ways:

- On the website – www.idealchoicetohomes.co.uk
- By telephone – **0845 505 8230 (24 hours)**
- By text message – **text 447537404370**
- In person – **at the customer service centres at Lancaster or Morecambe Town Halls**



Please note, we have touch screen terminals at Lancaster and Morecambe Town Halls where you can access the Ideal Choice Homes website.

Always remember that your queue position for a particular property can change between the time you place the bid, and the end of the bidding cycle. This is because your queue position is based on the band you are in, and your waiting time on the housing register.

If a number of people in the same band bid for a property, the applicant with the longest waiting time will finish higher in the queue for the property.

If there is a reason why you are not able to place your own bids for properties, you can nominate somebody to do this on your behalf – perhaps a friend or family member. Please contact us to discuss this.



How to bid on the website

Visit the website at www.idealchoicetohomes.co.uk

1. Click '**login**''/'**my account**' then enter your PIN number and date of birth. At this stage your login will be confirmed and details of any current bids will be shown.
2. Click the '**property search**' option. Select any search criteria that you require (for example, a particular size of property) and click search.
3. A list of properties that match your search criteria will be displayed. If you are eligible for a property then an '**apply now**' button will be displayed. It will also show what your current position would be if you chose to bid for the property, but remember this can change as other people bid. If you are not eligible then the reason you are not eligible will be displayed.
4. For a property that you are eligible for click the '**apply now**' button. You will be shown the property details and asked to confirm your bid. When you confirm your bid you will be told that your bid has been successfully placed.



Through the website you can find full details about the Ideal Choice Homes scheme.

You can access useful information, download publications, search for information about current and past vacancies, and place and withdraw bids for currently advertised properties.

Remember:

To login to the website you will always need your application number and date of birth.

If you forget your application number, please get in touch using the contact details at the end of this guide and we can remind you.





How to bid by telephone

To place a bid by telephone call the 24hr bidding line on 0845 505 8230. You will be charged the local rate for this call but please note that this rate will vary depending on your telephone service provider.

Through the telephone system you can place a bid, withdraw a bid, find out if you are eligible and what your current queue position is.

In order to bid by phone you will need:

- Your unique reference number (application number)
- Your memorable date password (usually your date of birth)
- The property reference number(s) that you want to bid for

Bidding using the telephone is done using the number keypad on your phone. You will also need to use the hash key (#).



**Start by
calling the
bidding line
on 0845 505
8230**

Logging on to the system – what you will hear

- “Welcome to Ideal Choice Homes in the Lancaster district.
Please select your language from the following list. Press 1 for English, press 2 etc...”
- “You have selected English. Press 1 to confirm, 2 to re-select your language.”
- “Please enter your unique reference number, followed by the hash key (#).”
- “You have entered the following unique reference number”. The reference number you entered will be read back to you.
- “Press 1 to confirm your unique reference number, or press 2 to re-enter.”
- “Your unique reference number has been accepted. Please enter the day of your memorable date followed by the hash key.”
- “Please enter the month of your memorable date, followed by the hash key.”
- “Please enter the year of your memorable date using all four numbers, followed by the hash key. For example one, nine, six, five to represent nineteen sixty five.”
- “Thank you, your details match our records. Press 1 to place a bid, press 2 to review your bids, or press 3 to exit”



How to bid by telephone

Making a bid – what you will hear

- “Please enter the property reference number of the property you wish to make an application on, followed by the hash key (#).”
- “You have entered the following property reference number”.

The property reference number you have entered will be read back to you. If you are not eligible you will be told why. If you are eligible you will be told your current queue position. Note that your queue position will change as other people bid.

- “Press 1 to confirm, 2 to change the property reference number”.
- “Your bid has been accepted.”



Review and/or cancel your bids – what you will hear

If you have already placed bids on the current advertising cycle you can choose to check or cancel them. Once you have logged on to the phone system you will hear:

- “You have bid on these properties”, followed by the property reference numbers you have bid for.
- “Press the number of the property that you wish to cancel the bid for, followed by the hash key (#).”
- The property reference number and current queue position will be read out to you. You will be told, “Subsequent bids may affect your queue position and some properties may be offered to the most suitable candidate. Press 1 if you are sure you want to cancel your bid, otherwise press 2 to exit.”

Exit – what you will hear

- “Thank you for using the system, goodbye.”



How to bid by text message

You can bid for properties by text (SMS) message using a mobile phone.

Text message charges vary depending on who your mobile phone provider is but are usually 10p or less per message.

Step 1

Start a new text message on a mobile phone

Step 2

Type your unique reference number (application number), followed by a space. e.g. 12345

Step 3

Type your memorable date password (usually your date of birth), followed by a space – use 2 digits for day and month and 4 for year, with a forward slash in between. e.g. 16/03/1975

Step 4

Type the first property reference number followed by a space. (If you have finished bidding go to step 6).

Step 5

Type the second property reference number followed by a space.

Step 6

Send the text message to 447537 404370



Step 7

You will receive a text message confirming that your bid(s) have been made or, if they have not been made, why not.



Offer of accommodation

All bids received for a property are put in order to produce a shortlist of eligible applicants for each property advertised. This is based on which band you are in and the date of your application.

When a number of people in the same band are on the shortlist for a property they are put in order of waiting time.

If your name is at the top of the shortlist we will contact you, ideally by telephone, and you will normally be invited to view the property.

Once you have viewed the property, you must decide whether to accept or refuse the offer.

If you decide to refuse the property it will be offered to the next person on the shortlist. You will not normally be penalised for refusing a property and will continue to be able to bid for properties advertised.

If you are offered a property you will not be shortlisted for other properties until you have decided to either accept or refuse the offer.

Some properties will be available only to people in a particular band. Out of everybody in the correct band who bids for these properties the person with the longest waiting time will be successful.

Remember:

If you change your telephone number please make sure you let us know.

This will make it easier for us to contact you with an offer.



Feedback

We publish information about homes which have been recently let. This includes the priority band of the successful applicant for a property, and the number of bids placed for it.

This information can give you an idea of how popular particular areas and types of properties are, and may help you make decisions about which properties to bid for.

It may also give you an idea of how long you may have to wait to be successful for a property. This feedback information is available in the 'recent lets' section of the website, and as part of the weekly newsletter.





Priority bands

Housing and transfer applications received will be assessed and placed in one of five bands (A-E), with Band A being the highest priority and Band E the lowest.

Within each band applications will be placed in date order. So where two applicants are in the same band, the one with the longest waiting time has the higher priority.

Remember:

Make sure your housing application contains all your current circumstances, so we can assess your priority correctly

The date of your application will be the date your application was registered with us. If your circumstances change and you move up a band the date used will be the date you moved into that band. If your application is re-assessed and you stay the same, or move down a band, you keep your original application date.

A summary of the priority bands is as follows:



Band A – Emergency need for housing

Substantial evidence must exist before you are placed in this band, and this will have to be supported by a Local Authority, Police, Health Authority or Social Services.

- You have been accepted by the Council as being homeless and in priority need
- You have an emergency medical need
- Your home is in emergency disrepair
- You are escaping violence or threats of violence, or a traumatic event, where there is a serious risk to the household
- You have an emergency housing need due to exceptional circumstances as identified by the Local Authority, Police, Health Authority or Social Services
- You have another emergency housing need

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Priority bands

Band B – High housing need

- You have an urgent need for re-housing on social or welfare grounds
- You have been assessed as having a high medical need
- Your home is permanently lacking a toilet, bathroom or hot and cold water
- You need two or more bedrooms than you currently have
- Your home has been assessed as being in a high level of disrepair
- You live in a high demand specially adapted property that you no longer require
- You are a Lancaster City Council tenant who has succeeded to a property that is too large or unsuitable for your needs (i.e. where the previous tenant has died and you have been allowed to take over the tenancy)
- You are a tenant of one of the landlords involved in the Ideal Choice Homes scheme and you have two or more bedrooms than you need
- You are a Lancaster City Council tenant who is moving into sheltered accommodation from a general needs property
- You are a Lancaster City Council tenant who lives in a high demand property that needs to be released to aid the wider management of the social rented stock
- You have been seriously injured or disabled in action in the Armed Forces
- You have successfully completed your stay in supported housing and need to move into general needs accommodation



Band C – Medium housing need

- You have been assessed by the council as being homeless but you are not in a priority need category
- You are roofless
- You have been assessed as having a medium medical need
- You are sharing facilities (kitchen, bathroom, toilet) with people you are not related to. Please note, you cannot claim this need if you are living with an ex-partner/spouse
- You have two children of differing sexes both aged over 5 who are sharing a bedroom
- You live in an above ground floor flat and have two or more children under 16
- Your home has been assessed as being in medium level of disrepair
- You are an agricultural worker needing to move on from tied accommodation
- You are employed in the district or have been offered permanent employment in the district

Priority bands

Band D – Low housing need

- You have been assessed by the council as being intentionally homeless
- You have been assessed as having a low medical need
- You live in an above ground floor flat with one child under 16
- You need one more bedroom than you currently have
- Your accommodation limits your access to children
- You are sharing facilities (kitchen, bathroom, toilet) with family
- Your home has been assessed as being in a low level of disrepair
- You need to move nearer to someone to provide or receive support
- You live in private rented accommodation
- You live in a mobile home, caravan or boat
- You live in tied accommodation
- You have a license to occupy
- You are serving or have served in the armed forces and have a local connection either current or previous through residence or employment in the district



Band E – Very low housing need

- You do not have a local connection
- You are an owner occupier who does not have a high medical and/or support need
- You have enough savings and/or capital to enable you to buy a suitable property
- You are in the process of getting divorced or legally separated where the outcome, or settlement of the former matrimonial home is not yet known
- You have worsened your circumstances deliberately



Contact information

Ideal Choice Homes

Health and Housing Services

Postal Address:

PO Box 4, Town Hall, Dalton Square, Lancaster, LA1 1QR

Office:

Customer Service Centre, Lancaster Town Hall, Dalton Square, Lancaster, LA1 1QR
Customer Service Centre, Morecambe Town Hall, Marine Road East, Morecambe, LA4 5AF

Telephone:

01524 582005 (general enquiries)
0845 5058230 (24hr bidding line)

E-Mail:

idealchoiceways@lancaster.gov.uk

Websites:

www.idealchoiceways.co.uk
www.lancaster.gov.uk/idealchoiceways

The customer service centres are open 8am – 5pm for telephone enquiries, and 9am – 5pm for enquiries in person.

If there is an emergency ring the council's Central Control Centre on 01524 67099, 24hrs a day, 365 days a year.



This leaflet can be made available in large print, on audio, in Braille and in other languages.

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