Housing Allocation Scheme
Summary
Introduction

In this scheme:
- **the Council, we, our or us** means Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council
- **borough** means the borough of Tonbridge and Malling
- **you or the applicant** means someone who applies for housing
- **register** means Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council’s housing register
- **scheme** means Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council’s housing allocation scheme
- **assessment form** means Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council’s housing assessment form
- **bid or bid for** does not involve offering money; here it means the same as apply or apply for.

This is a summary of our housing allocation scheme. Further details are given in the full scheme. This summary explains what affordable housing is, who is entitled to it and how to apply. It also explains how affordable housing is allocated; bearing in mind that demand far exceeds supply.

What is affordable Housing?
Affordable housing, also known as social housing, is for qualifying households at an affordable rent. It is for households whose needs are not met by the private housing market. In Tonbridge and Malling affordable housing is provided and managed by housing associations. The main one is Circle Housing Russet. In order to be considered for affordable housing, applicants must first be accepted onto our housing register.

Who qualifies to go on the housing register?
Only those applicants who have a local connection and a housing need qualify to join the housing register.

You have a local connection if you:
- have already been living in our borough for at least the last 6 months, or were previously living here for either 6 out of the last 12 months, or 3 out of the last 5 years; or
- are employed in our borough on a permanent basis, or need to move into our borough in order to take up an offer of permanent employment; or
- you are a housing association or Council tenant exercising your right to move for work related reasons; or
- have close family members (children, step-children, grandchildren, parents, step-parents, grandparents or brothers/sisters including foster siblings) who currently live in our borough and have lived here for at least the last five years; or
- are a serving member of the Regular Forces or a former member within five years of discharge (or a bereaved spouse or civil partner of such a member), or a serving or former member of the Reserve Forces who needs to move because of serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service; or
- have some other special reason for needing to reside in our borough.

The housing needs criteria are placed into four priority bands that broadly equate to:

- **A** - urgent need to move
- **B** - high priority
- **C** - medium priority
- **D** - low priority

Within each band, relative priority is decided only by priority date. Your household will be placed in the appropriate band according to its highest need, not the accumulation of its needs. For example, if you are awarded a high priority on medical, disability or welfare...
grounds, you will be placed into band B regardless of whether you are also threatened with homelessness or sharing facilities.

However, if the Council has determined that you have become homeless intentionally and you qualify to be included on the housing register, you will be placed into band C regardless of whether you have another housing need that would give rise to a higher priority band, for example overcrowding. Your priority band will be reviewed by the Housing Options Team 24 months after the Council’s decision that you became homeless intentionally. If you have not secured settled accommodation in this time, you will usually remain in band C.

### Band A
- Households where one or more members are wheelchair dependent in the home, and do not currently occupy a wheelchair accessible/adapted home.
- Applicants with an urgent need to move as they are unable to be discharged home from hospital or other NHS setting because their current accommodation is unsuitable for their medical or disability needs.
- Applicants whose current home has been assessed as presenting an immediate threat of serious injury or is life threatening.

### Band B
- Overcrowding – applicants needing at least one more bedroom than their current home.
- Homeless applicants where we have accepted a duty to secure accommodation under part VII of the Housing Act 1996.
- Households where one or more members are awarded a high priority on medical, disability or welfare grounds.
- Under occupation - housing association tenants living in the borough who need at least one bedroom fewer than their current home.
- Housing association tenants living in the borough in a home with significant adaptations to meet disability needs that are no longer required.

### Band C
- Homeless applicants where we do not owe a duty to secure accommodation such as:
  - non-priority homeless households;
  - households assessed as having become homeless intentionally;
  - those who are of no fixed abode, including those staying or “sofa surfing” with relatives or friends, or living in a garage, shed, outbuilding, car or tent.
- Private sector tenants who are threatened with homelessness because they have been served with a valid notice, to quit their tenancy (usually at least 2 months).
- Tenants occupying HM Forces service family accommodation who are threatened with homelessness because they have been served with a valid notice to vacate their tenancy (usually at least 3 months).
- Applicants assessed as needing sheltered accommodation who are not currently residing in sheltered accommodation.
- Applicants awarded priority on property condition grounds.
- Households where one or more members are awarded a low priority on medical, disability or welfare grounds.

### Band D
- Applicants who are not overcrowded but are sharing kitchen and/or bathroom facilities with others who are not part of their household.
- Applicants living in non-traditional housing (for example, houseboat, caravan or commercial premises) who lack any kitchen and/or bathroom facilities.
Details of how we assess priority due to overcrowding, under-occupation, medical, disability or welfare needs, and property condition are provided in the full scheme.

Down-banding may be applied if you are assessed as having deliberately worsened your housing situation.

You cannot be considered for inclusion on the register:
- if you are subject to immigration control within the meaning of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996, unless you are in an exempt group as decided by the Government; or
- if you are not usually resident in the Common Travel Area (a travel zone that comprises the islands of Great Britain, Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands) unless you are exempt from the habitual residence test; or
- because of your particular rights of residence under European Union law.

Financial considerations & disqualification
If you own or part own a property, whether or not you currently live there, you will not usually be included on the housing register. Homeowners who need to move on medical or welfare grounds or grounds relating to a disability may be considered for sheltered, adapted or other suitable accommodation in accordance with their assessed needs. You will also be disqualified if you have income or capital (including savings) above set amounts. The levels on 1 August 2015 are:

- households with no dependents with a total gross income of £40,000 or more; or
- households with dependent children with a total gross income of £60,000 or more; or
- households with total capital of £16,000 or more

If you are eligible to be considered for sheltered housing, the threshold for your household’s capital (including savings) is £100,000 and equity is £250,000 if you own or part own a property.

You will not usually qualify for inclusion on the housing register where you or a member of your household has behaved in an unacceptable manner in the preceding 5 years. Examples of unacceptable behaviour include (but are not limited to) the following:

- you have been evicted or otherwise lost accommodation due to anti-social behaviour; or
- you have been convicted of offences (including offences involving anti-social behaviour or the use and/or supply of drugs) in or near your home and still pose a threat to neighbours or the wider community.

How to apply to get on the register
To be considered for inclusion on our housing register you must:

- Complete and sign an assessment form. You must be at least 16 years of age to do this. The form covers your housing history and the current needs of you and your household;
- Provide original documents to prove your identity and current housing status; and
- Complete any other forms that we send or answer any extra questions we ask you.

Blank assessment forms can be printed from our website: www.tmbc.gov.uk. They are also available by emailing housing.services@tmbc.gov.uk, by telephoning our Homechoice Team on 01732 876067 or from our offices. Contact our Homechoice Team if you need help completing the form, or need it in another format.

The full scheme gives details of:
• who can be included in your application;
• what will happen if you have shared responsibilities for dependent children;
• how you are likely to be assessed if you have a carer;
• the declaration you must sign; and
• what we will do if you give us false or misleading information.

To help us ensure there is genuine equality of opportunity to access affordable housing we collect data for monitoring purposes. To assist in this monitoring we also ask you to complete the equal opportunities section on the assessment form.

Priority on the register
We assess all of the information you provide to support your application. If your household is not in housing need you will usually be excluded from the register because there is no realistic chance of you being offered accommodation. If your circumstances change you will need to re-apply.

Otherwise, the two main factors that determine your priority on the register are your housing need and priority date. We assess housing need using the four priority bands described previously, although other factors can sometimes affect housing priority in extreme cases.

We will write to tell you whether or not you have been included on the register. If you have been included, we tell you in which priority band you have been placed, and your priority date.

Your household’s priority date is the date that we receive your application form as long as you provide all the information we need to assess it at the same time or within the next 28 days. Otherwise, your application may not be included on the housing register.

You must tell us of any change in your circumstances within 14 days of the change. A significant change in circumstances, such as a move to another address, the birth of another child, a change to your household income or savings or a substantial change in mobility may result in a reassessment of your priority.

Keeping the register up to date
We will write to you once a year, on or near the anniversary of the date you were first registered. We will ask you whether you wish to remain on the register for another year. We will also remind you to tell us about any changes in your circumstances.

You will be removed from the register for any of the following reasons, where you:
• accept a tenancy offered by one of our housing association providers; or
• accept a private sector tenancy, including where we have provided financial assistance by way of a rent deposit/bond; or
• do not respond to the annual review; or
• do not respond to correspondence from the Council asking you to provide information; or
• are no longer eligible to be included on the register; or
• no longer wish to be re-housed; or
• have left temporary accommodation that we arranged for you and we do not have your forwarding address; or
• have moved without notifying us of your new address.

You may also be removed if we are satisfied that (on the balance of probabilities) you have given false or misleading information or have withheld any relevant information at any time.
Bidding for available properties
The types and sizes of affordable homes and the areas that they are in vary considerably. The needs of applicants also vary widely. Existing and newly built affordable housing may also be subject to certain restrictions.

We are a member of Kent Homechoice, a partnership of district councils and housing associations operating in Kent. It was set up to provide Choice Based Lettings (CBL). CBL enables applicants to bid for suitable properties. In this context “bid” does not mean offering money; here it means the same as “apply”.

After a property is let, feedback about the number of households that made a bid, the priority band of the successful applicant, and their priority date is available to view to all bidders on Kent Homechoice. This helps applicants understand the availability of suitable properties, their likelihood of success when applying and the possible time they could be waiting. The bidding process is described in detail in the full scheme.

Property size and bedroom guidelines
Generally, homes are offered in line with the following guide:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household size</th>
<th>Type and Size of Home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A single person.</td>
<td>Bedsit, studio flat, or one bedroom flat, house, bungalow or sheltered accommodation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A couple.</td>
<td>One bedroom flat, house, bungalow or sheltered accommodation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two adults with a verified need for separate bedrooms.</td>
<td>Two bedroom flat, house, bungalow or sheltered accommodation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A couple or single parent with one child or expecting a first child.</td>
<td>Two bedroom flat, house or bungalow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A couple or single parent with two children, or expecting a second child.</td>
<td>Two or three bedroom flat or house, depending on age/sex of children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A couple or single parent with three or more children, or expecting a third or subsequent child.</td>
<td>Three or four bedroom house, depending on age/sex of children.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Two children of the same sex would be expected to share a bedroom until the eldest reaches 16 years of age.
- Two children of the opposite sex would be expected to share a bedroom until the eldest reaches 10 years of age.
- A couple or single parent would not be expected to share their bedroom with a child.

Details of exceptions to these rules are provided in the full scheme.

Allocation of properties
When advertisements close for each property after 7 days, all bids for each available home are put into priority order. They are ranked according to the priority bands with band A first, band B second and so on. Within each band, order is by priority date, starting with the earliest. This produces a shortlist of eligible applicants for each property. For each property the housing association contacts the applicant at the top of the shortlist to check that the information they have given is correct and that the property is affordable. Subject to this, the highest priority applicant will usually be offered the property. If two or more applicants share the same priority date within the priority band, the housing association decides which of the applicants will be offered the property based on the best use of the housing stock and the
The applicant is normally expected to accept or refuse the property within 24 hours of the viewing.

If an offer is refused, the property will be offered to the next applicant on the shortlist, until the property is successfully let. We may refuse to shortlist or offer housing, for example where offering the property to the highest priority applicant would put others at risk. Housing associations may also refuse to offer housing to applicants:

- whose conduct has been unacceptable; or
- who do not satisfy their verification checks, which include confirming the members of the household and their current circumstances.

In these cases the housing association will contact the applicant and explain why they have been rejected.

Occasionally, certain properties are excluded from CBL and are allocated by making direct offers to selected applicants. For those applicants where we have accepted the duty to re-house them as homeless, refusal of a direct offer will usually result in discharge of the re-housing duty and their priority on the housing register will be reassessed.

The right to request a review of a decision
You have the right to request a review of any decision:
- to treat you as ineligible because of your immigration status; or
- to exclude you from the register because you do not have a local connection and/or a housing need; or
- to disqualify your application on the grounds of unacceptable behaviour; or
- about the facts of your case which have been, or are likely to be taken into account in considering your priority on the register; or
- to discharge our re-housing duty due to your refusal of a final offer; or
- to apply a lower priority band to your application.

Details of the time scales for review and the process are provided in the full scheme.

Service standards
We aim to process all completed assessment forms (including those where you have changed your address) within 12 working days of receiving all of the necessary verification documentation.

We will respond to all email or other written enquiries within 10 working days.

Getting more information
There are several ways to get your own copy of the full scheme:
- print a copy from our website www.tmbc.gov.uk;
- email housing.services@tmbc.gov.uk, and we will email a copy back to you;
- telephone our Homechoice Team on 01732 876067; or
- visit our offices at:
  - Gibson Building, Gibson Drive, Kings Hill, West Malling, Kent, ME19 4LZ
  - Tonbridge Gateway, Castle Street, Tonbridge, Kent, TN9 1BG

We may make a reasonable charge for providing a paper copy of the full scheme.