

Thurrock Council Housing Waiting List

Information for Applicants

Contents	Page
What this booklet is about	3
How can I join the Housing Waiting List?	3
What will you do with the information I provide?	6
Do I qualify?	7
When will I know if I qualify?	15
How can I appeal if I do not qualify?	15
I qualify for the List - how will my application be processed?	16
How will the Council Contact me?	17
How many bedrooms am I entitled to?	17
Who can I include in my application?	18
I have shared care of children – can I include them on my application?	19
Will I be given a priority?	20
If I am given a priority is it time restricted?	21
What is a Suitable Property?	21
Can I appeal if I am refused a priority?	22
What are the priorities and how are they assessed?	22
Worsening circumstances deliberately	28
Providing false information	28
Do I need to re- register every year?	28
What happens if my circumstances change?	28
How does the Council decide who will be allocated a property?	29
How do I Bid for properties?	30
Do I qualify for Assisted Bidding?	31
How will you report the bidding results?	31
Can I bid for every available property?	31
If I am successful, what happens next?	34
I have been invited to a viewing – what happens next?	35
What happens if the property is not ready for me to move into yet?	36
Can I join the transfer list once I am a tenant?	36
Why have I been bypassed for a property?	37
Can I refuse the property offered?	38
What type of tenancy will I be offered?	39
Do I have to give notice on my current tenancy?	40
Are members of the Armed Forces given any priority?	41
Allocations to Thurrock Council Employees, Council Members and their families	41
Direct Offers	42
More Information	44

What this booklet is about

This booklet provides a summary of the Council's Housing Allocations Scheme.

It explains how the Council will allocate social housing in the borough – this includes the Council's own properties and Registered Provider (more commonly known as Housing Association) properties where the Council has the right to nominate people.

It does not deal with transfers – current tenants moving from one property to another - unless the tenants have an urgent housing need (priority).

Thurrock Council and Registered Provider Tenants with no housing need (priority) should refer to booklet - ***The Housing Transfer List***

The full Housing Allocations Scheme is available on the Council's website www.thurrock.gov.uk where you can download a copy.

Copies will also be available at the Civic Offices in Grays.

How can I join the Housing Waiting List?

Applications will need to be made on-line at www.thurrockchoicehomes.org.uk and you will need to have the following:-

- An email address

If you do not have an email address, it would be best if you signed up for one or asked someone else such as a family member or friend if you can use theirs, as we will use this to notify you about your application.

If you cannot sign up or find someone else's to use, you will need to contact the Thurrock Choice Homes team on 01375 652311 to arrange to use the Council's generic email account.

- Your National Insurance number

If you do not have a national insurance number you will not be able to apply.

- Your personal information

You can apply as a single applicant or as a joint applicant with someone else – usually a partner or spouse, but you will need to provide information about everyone in your household.

You will need to complete each of the questions honestly and give as much information as you can.

You may need to ask someone to help you with this – but if you have no one to help and you cannot complete the form yourself, we can arrange for someone to do this with you.

When you complete the form you will be asked a number of questions – for example how much money you earn. Your answers to these questions will determine whether or not you qualify to join the list.

The Council will not collect evidence of your answers at the application stage – we will expect you to be honest.

But if you are successful in bidding for a property (this means that you have been shortlisted as one of the top three bidders) you will be expected to provide the evidence supporting your answers within 2 working days, otherwise you will be bypassed for the property.

The evidence that will be required is on the following charts - original documents will be required. It is a good idea to prepare these documents in advance when you know you are near the top of the bidding list

What is being assessed		Documents required	When assessed
Identity & eligibility	Identity of applicant	1. Passport or birth certificate 2. An up to date photograph (passport size)	When you are shortlisted for a property
	Identity of joint applicant	1. Passport or birth certificate 2. An up to date photograph (passport size)	When you are shortlisted for a property
	Identity all other household members	Passport or birth certificate	When you are shortlisted for a property
Local Connection	Evidence of address	Utility bills or bank statements in the applicants name - 2 different documents showing current and past 5 years residence OR Council tax bills for past 5 years OR Tenancy agreement for past 5 years	When you are shortlisted for a property
	Evidence of employment	Either payslips or P60s for last 5 years or letter from employer	When you are shortlisted for a property
	Evidence of family living in borough	Name & address of a family member and the relationship to the applicant + council tax bills or other official evidence showing their residence in the borough for the past 5 years	When you are shortlisted for a property

Financial criteria	Evidence of income for both joint applicants	Last 3 month wage slips	When you are shortlisted for a property
		Interest earned on any investments, bank a/cs etc	
	Proof of all benefits	Award letter or most recent bank statement showing all payments received	When you are shortlisted for a property
	Evidence of savings	Copies of last 6 months bank and/or building society a/cs	When you are shortlisted for a property
	Evidence of assets	Copies of last 6 months bank and/or building society a/cs	When you are shortlisted for a property
		Evidence of any investments, stocks, shares etc	
	Evidence of home ownership	Copy of land registry document	When you are shortlisted for a property
	Evidence of equity in property	Recent valuation of property (within last 6 months)	When you are shortlisted for a property
Last mortgage statement (within last 12 months)			

Household make-up	Evidence of children living in household	Child benefit for children	When you are shortlisted for a property
	Evidence of non-dependents living in household	Bank statements or other official document showing address	When you are shortlisted for a property
	Evidence of shared care of children	Birth certificate of child AND Proof of Parental responsibility AND Court order or letter from sharing parent AND Proof of Child benefit or tax credits for child	Registration
		Evidence of pregnancy	Copy of ante-natal notes or a letter from GP or midwife re Expected date
Armed Forces	Evidence of service in the armed forces	Discharge letter or other evidence	Registration
Rent Arrears	Evidence of clear rent a/c	Rent statement from Landlord	When you are shortlisted for a property
Working Households	Evidence of employment	Either payslips OR P60s for last year OR employment contract	Registration

	Evidence of community work	Letter from charity manager confirming the number of hours volunteered or evidence of caring or volunteering	Registration
Sheltered Housing	Evidence of need for sheltered housing	If aged over 60 - completed sheltered housing assessment outlining need for support	Registration
		If aged 55-60 - evidence of Disability Living Allowance & completed sheltered housing assessment outlining need for support	Registration

Some people **will** need to provide certain evidence when they register – this is shown in the chart above as being assessed at registration. These documents are required at the beginning because they determine the types of property you will be able to bid for.

If you do not qualify to join the Housing Waiting List, you will be advised of this during the on-line application process. You can appeal against the decision – see the section *How can I appeal if I do not Qualify?*

What will you do with the information I provide?

The information you give us when you complete your application, and at any other point during your application, such as when you re-register or tell us about a change of circumstances, will be used to determine whether you qualify for a property and what type of property you need. It may also be used to determine whether you qualify for a priority.

The information will be stored on a secure computer system owned by the East London Lettings Company (ELLC) and only authorised officers will be able to see the information.

When you provide documents to support your application these will need to be originals. We will scan the original documents and return them to you. We will store the scanned images electronically on the same computer system; we will not keep paper copies.

We will not share the information you provide with members of the public unless you give us your consent to do so. For example you may advise us that we can talk to a named family member or friend about your application.

We may share the information you provide with other agencies, both within and outside of the Council. Sometimes we will obtain your consent to share information, but there may be situations where we can share information

without your consent if the law allows. For instance, information may be shared with agencies such as the police, housing benefit department, tenancy investigation team and department for work and pensions, where this would help to detect or prevent fraud.

If you are housed through the Waiting List, your housing application will be cancelled but the information will continue to be stored on the computer system until your tenancy ends.

If your application is cancelled or closed without you being housed, your information will continue to be stored on computer system for a period of 7 years, after which time it will be permanently deleted. The Council is working towards also permanently deleting any data held about you within our own in-house system, after the same time period (7 years).

When an applicant is nominated to a Registered Provider, information regarding the applicant's household will be provided to the Registered Provider but the applicant's permission will be sought. Where the applicant refuses permission the nomination will not be made.

Do I qualify?

In order to qualify, you must pass a number of tests – it's a bit like jumping hurdles ... when you pass one, you move on to the next.

You will only qualify if you pass all the hurdles. The hurdles are not there to stop people from being housed, but to ensure that we allocate properties in a way that meets the needs of local people, and is fair, consistent and transparent.



Test One - The Eligibility Hurdle

Applicants must be eligible for social housing, under the current immigration rules. This is a legal requirement and there is no discretion.

The chart below will help you to see if you are eligible – although any eligibility will always be subject to checking information.

	You are eligible	You are not eligible	You may or may not be eligible - more information is required
I do not live in the UK			
I am a tenant of another Council (not Thurrock)			
I am a UK citizen and I have been living in the UK for the past 2 years			
I am a UK citizen but I have NOT been living in the UK for the past 2 years			
I am a citizen of a European Union* Country and I am working or self employed			
I am a family member** of a citizen of a European Union* Country who is working or self employed			
I am a citizen of a European Union* country and I have been living in the UK for more than 5 years			
I am not a UK or European Union* citizen and none of my family members are			

* European Union Countries

Austria	Denmark	Germany	Ireland	Lithuania	Norway	Slovenia
Belgium	Estonia	Greece	Italy	Luxembourg	Poland	Spain
Cyprus	Finland	Hungary	Latvia	Malta	Portugal	Sweden
Czech Republic	France	Iceland	Liechtenstein	Netherlands	Slovakia	Switzerland

** Family member means – mother, father, son, daughter, grandmother, grandfather, brother or sister

When making your on-line application you will be asked a number of questions about your nationality and where you have lived. You must answer these questions honestly, and you will be expected to provide evidence should you be successful in bidding for a property.

If your eligibility is not automatic, you may be asked to continue with the on-line application form, but advised that an officer will need to check your application further before a decision can be made.

If you are advised during the on-line application process, or after an assessment by an officer, that you are not eligible, you will be given the right to appeal against the decision – see *How can I appeal if I do not Qualify?*

If you pass the eligibility hurdle you can move on to the next test

Test Two - The Local Connection Hurdle

Applicants must have a local connection with Thurrock and this can be through one of the following ways: -

- Residence in Thurrock – this means you must be currently living in the borough and have done so for at least the past 5 years.

This rule does not apply to Members of the Armed Forces, including former service personnel making an application within 5 years of discharge.

Armed Forces mean the Royal Navy, Royal Marines, Royal Air Force and the Regular Army. It does not include the Army Reserve, the Territorial Army and forces raised under the law of a British overseas territory.

If you have lived in Thurrock because of a detention, or because you have been placed in temporary accommodation by another local authority or have been in hospital in the borough, this **will not** count as residence.

If you move out of the borough and then return at a later date you will have to build up your 5 years residence again.

- Employment in Thurrock – this means you must currently work in the borough and have done so for the past 5 years.

The work must be for a minimum of 16 hours per week and you must have a permanent contract or at least one year's temporary contract with the same employer, which is likely to continue.

If there are two members of your household who both work but for less than 16 hours each, then if the combined number of hours is 16 or more, this will count.

If you lose your employment you will no longer qualify unless you obtain further employment in the borough within the next 12 months.

- Family Connection in Thurrock – this means you must have a family member who currently lives in the borough and who has done so for at least the past 5 years.

“Family member” means mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, son, daughter, brother or sister.

- Other Special reason

You may not meet any of the connections above but still have a special reason why you need to move to Thurrock.

For example, you may need to move to the borough to receive specialist treatment or education, or to flee violence and no other borough is deemed safe.

In such cases, the Council’s re-housing panel (a panel of senior officers) will look at all the circumstances of your case and make a decision.

If you pass the local connection hurdle you can move on to the next test. Please note that at the point of offer you must show that you met the local connection criteria at the point at which you joined the waiting list.

For example – if you join the list in 2013 you will be expected to have a local connection dating back to at least 2008 (5 years ago). You will not be asked to prove that local connection until you are shortlisted for a property.

If you are then shortlisted for a property in 2015 you will need to show that you have a local connection of at least 7 years – i.e. the 5 years leading up to 2013 when you registered, and the 2 years since you registered.

Therefore at the point of offer you will be expected to provide evidence of your connection back to 2008. The type of documentation required is shown in the chart above.

Test Three - The Financial Hurdle

Applicants must not have an income and/or savings or assets above certain levels. The levels will be assessed annually and will be set according to current housing costs within the borough.

The agreed levels at January 2015 are:

Property size - according to household make-up	Net annual income required	
	Previous	New
Bedsit or room in shared house (single under 25 years old)	£18,000	£18,000

1 Bedroom (single over 25 or couple)	£22,000	£24,500
2 Bedrooms (Single/couple plus child/ren)	£27,000	£30,000
3 Bedrooms (Single/couple plus children)	£32,000	£40,000
4 Bedrooms (Single/couple plus children)	£40,000	£53,500
Sheltered Housing (includes sum for long term service charges)	£145,000	£158,000
Extra Care Housing (includes sum for long term service charges)	£213,000	£225,000

- Why are there different levels?

The levels are set according to the type and size of housing that your household needs. The sizes are determined by the Bedroom Standard, which works out how many bedrooms are required according to the number, ages and sex of people in the household.

You can work out your own bedroom need by looking at the Bedroom Standard table below and pairing up people in your household.

Household Members	Bedroom Entitlement
Married or Co-Habiting Couple	1 bedroom
Adult Aged over 21 years	1 bedroom
Pair of adolescents aged 10 – 20 years – same sex	1 bedroom
Pair of children under 10 years regardless of sex	1 bedroom
Adolescent aged 10 – 20 years and child under 10 years – same sex	1 bedroom

For example: if you are a couple with a boy aged 7 and a girl aged 5, they can share a bedroom, so your assessed need would be a 2 bedroom property.

But if you are a couple with a boy aged 14 and a girl aged 5, they would not be expected to share a bedroom so you would be eligible for a 3 bedroom property.

If you are eligible for sheltered or extra care housing the levels are set much higher to recognise that older and disabled applicants will usually not be in employment and will therefore not be able to obtain a mortgage.

However, these levels will only apply if you are eligible and want that type of accommodation. If you are eligible but decide that you do not want sheltered

or extra care housing, then the appropriate general needs levels will apply to you.

- How will the assessment be made?

You and any joint applicant will be asked to declare your savings, assets and income when you make your application and at any point when it is re-registered or your circumstances change.

If the total is higher than the level set for your household need (in terms of bedroom requirements) then you will not qualify.

You will not be required to provide evidence until you are successful in bidding but if you unreasonably use savings to deplete them, or move them into the accounts of other family members, you may be disqualified under the financial qualification criteria.

If you give false information about your finances, a property offer will not be made.

If a property offer is made to you, and subsequently the Council discovers that you gave false information to achieve that property, you could be evicted.

- What will the assessment take into account?

The assessment will be based on net income – this is income received after any tax deductions.

The following will be included:

- Any income such as salary/wages, child benefit, child maintenance payments, bank interest, tax credits
- Contributions from non-dependent children, lodgers etc.
- The net income of all joint applicants
- The net income of any partners who are not joint applicants

The following **will not** be included:

- Disability Living Allowance
- War Pension
- Any financial compensation received by members/former members of the armed forces, which has been received due to injury sustained on active service

Where there are non-dependents (other adults) living in the household it is expected that they will contribute to the household income. The following amounts will be included as a contribution to the household regardless of whether the non-dependent contributes or not.

The following amounts will be used for 2013-14 and are based on housing benefit regulations.

Non-dependents who are working	
Monthly Income of non-dependent (before tax)	Applicable monthly contribution
Under £537	£50
£537 to £793	£114
£793 to £1031	£156
£1031 to £1369	£255
£1369 to £1707	£291
£1707 and over	£320

- Will I be disqualified because I own a property?

Only in exceptional circumstances will you be offered a property whilst you still own a property.

If you own a property (including a property you do not live in) you may still qualify as a homeowner, but only if you do not have sufficient funds to maintain the property (both financially and physically) or the property is unsuitable for your needs but you do not have sufficient equity in the property and/or income to be able to sell it and buy an alternative property that does meet your housing needs.

If you can meet your own housing needs by selling your property you will be expected to do so and will not qualify for the Housing Waiting List.

If you do qualify for the Housing Waiting list and are successful in bidding for a property, you will need to provide the following details

- a recent independent valuation (usually by an estate agent)
- copies of your mortgage statements
- evidence of why the property is unaffordable or unsuitable for your needs
- evidence of why you cannot purchase an alternative property

This information will be required when a property offer is made and failure to produce it within 2 working days will mean the offer will not be made.

If all the information is provided and the offer is made, you will be expected to sign a written undertaking that you will sell the property once your new tenancy starts.

The Thurrock Choice Homes team will be responsible for ensuring the undertaking takes place and for checking that you sell the property. Failure to do so within a reasonable period of time could lead to you being evicted from the tenancy.

If you pass the financial hurdle you can move on to the next test

Test Four - The Behaviour Hurdle

If there is evidence that you, or a member of your household, have displayed unacceptable behaviour, you may not qualify for the Housing Waiting List.

- What is “unacceptable behaviour”

The Council can evict its own tenants on certain legal grounds, and it is these grounds that indicate the types of behaviour deemed unacceptable.

These include

- Anti-social behaviour
- Domestic violence
- Damage caused to property
- Damage to furniture
- Tenancy obtained by fraud
- Inappropriate behaviour

The Council will normally only decide that an applicant has been guilty of unacceptable behaviour where the Council or a current or former landlord of the applicant has taken formal action against the applicant or a member of the applicant’s household because of the behaviour.

- Will the disqualification ever be lifted?

The disqualification will usually last for 2 years and at the end of that period you would be able to re-apply.

However, if you have not kept to any arrangement under the formal action or if there is further unacceptable behaviour (in the Council’s opinion) within the two year period, the disqualification would continue for a further 2 years.

- Are there any exceptions to this rule?

In exceptional circumstances, the Council may use its discretion to allow a person guilty of unacceptable behaviour to either join the waiting list or be disqualified for a shorter period of time.

“Exceptional circumstances” is considered on a case-by-case basis taking into account all the circumstances surrounding the case.

But before any discretion is given, the applicant will need to have shown that there is good reason to believe that the unacceptable behaviour will not happen again in the future.

When will I know if I qualify?

When you make your application on-line you will be notified of the results, which will be one of the following:

- You **do** appear to qualify - you will be advised immediately through the on-line system
- You **do not** appear to qualify – you will be advised immediately through the on-line system and given the opportunity to appeal
- You **may** qualify, but more information is required - you will have to wait for an answer because some of the information you have provided is inconclusive. The Council will write to you once a decision is made, and if that decision is that you do not qualify, you will be given the opportunity to appeal

How can I appeal if I do not qualify?

When you have been advised that you do not qualify for the Housing Waiting List you have a legal right to appeal against that decision.

This decision, including the reasons why you do not qualify, will be given either through the on-line application process or through a letter or email.

Where a letter or email is sent to the given contact address it will be treated as having been received if it was available at the Civic Offices for a reasonable period of time.

Where an applicant has difficulty in understanding the implications of a decision, the Council will make arrangements to advise the applicant verbally as well.

- 21 Days to Appeal

The decision message, letter or email will advise you that you have 21 days in which to appeal, and that the appeal should be in writing and addressed to the Housing Solutions Manager at the Council.

It will also be possible for a representative to submit an appeal on your behalf provided you give your written consent – for example the Citizens Advice Bureau or other agency.

The Council will use its discretion to allow an appeal outside of the 21 days in exceptional circumstances.

- Reviewing Officer

An officer who is senior to the original decision maker will carry out the review of the decision.

The review will be considered based on the Allocation Scheme, legal requirements and all the relevant information provided by you, and this can include further information that was not available at the time you made the original application.

The reviewing officer has 30 working days from the date the appeal was received, to carry out the review.

If an extension to the time limit is required – for example to enable the reviewing officer to obtain more information - you will be advised.

- The decision

The outcome of the appeal will be in writing and will give clear grounds for the decision. There will be no further right of appeal to the Council.

If you remain dissatisfied with the outcome because you feel that the correct procedures were not followed or the allocations policy was not applied correctly then you may seek legal advice or contact the Housing Ombudsman.

- What if my circumstances change?

Should your circumstances change so that you do meet the qualification test, then you will be able to make a fresh application, but the onus will be on you to outline the changes.

I qualify for the List - how will my application be processed?

When you make your on-line application and you pass the qualification process outlined above, you will then be asked to provide lots of information about yourself and your household. This information will help us to decide if you qualify for a priority.

You must answer the questions honestly and if you are successful in bidding you will be expected to provide evidence for the answers given, within two working days.

Remember – if you deliberately lie or withhold information, which misrepresents your housing needs and subsequently results in you being

offered a property when you should not have been, the Council may take court action to evict you.

More information may be needed – for example you may tell us that you have medical needs that make your current accommodation unsuitable. We will need to assess those circumstances to decide if you qualify for a medical priority. In this case a medical assessment form will be available for you to complete and send to us.

Once you have successfully completed the on-line form you will be given a bidding number and information explaining how you can bid. More information about bidding can be found at *How do I bid for properties?*

You will be advised of your band and the number of bedrooms that you are entitled to for your household size. You will be able to log in to your Thurrock Choice Homes page to check on bids you have made and their results.

How will the Council Contact me?

If you have provided an email address we will contact you via email – this is the quickest way and will speed up all the processes for you. Where we refer to “contacting you in writing” this includes via email.

If you do not provide an email address we will write to you. This method will take longer so it is in your best interests to provide your own email address or that of a friend or relative who can assist you if possible.

We may also leave you a message on your bidding page on the internet and/or text you if you have given a mobile phone number. This is usually the case where we are providing you with general information or asking you to re-register your application.

Where we need to contact you urgently we may also telephone you.

How many bedrooms am I entitled to?

We will determine the number of bedrooms you need according to the number of people in your household.

We do this by pairing off people who will be expected to share a bedroom according to the chart below – the bedroom standard

Household Members	Bedroom Entitlement
Married or Co-Habiting Couple	1 bedroom

Adult Aged over 21 years	1 bedroom
Pair of adolescents aged 10 – 20 years – same sex	1 bedroom
Pair of children under 10 years regardless of sex	1 bedroom
Adolescent aged 10 – 20 years and child under 10 years – same sex	1 bedroom

- **Pregnant household members**

Where a member of the household is pregnant, the new baby will count as a household member once the pregnancy has reached 28 weeks. The on-line form will not automatically count the baby, because evidence of the pregnancy will be required.

Where the sex of the baby is unknown but you have no other children then the baby will qualify for a bedroom of their own.

For example – a woman with no children who is 30 weeks pregnant will be assessed as needing 2 bedrooms.

Where the sex of the baby is unknown and you already have other children we will still count the baby as a household member, but award the minimal number of bedrooms.

For example – if you have a boy already and are expecting another baby but you do not know the baby's sex we will assume the baby is another boy therefore assessing your need as 2 bedrooms.

When the baby is born we will re-assess the bedroom need at that point.

You will need to provide evidence in the form of ante-natal notes or a letter from your GP or midwife confirming the expected delivery date.

- **Spare bedrooms**

You will only be entitled to the number of bedrooms according to the Bedrooms Standard - this means you will not be given a spare bedroom.

If there are medical reasons why two people cannot share a bedroom or a single person needs two bedrooms, you will need to provide the details and your case will be considered by the Council's medical/adaptation team and/or an independent medical service.

Who can I include in my application?

You can include all family members and other people who would reasonably be expected to live with you, provided they are currently living with you at the time of the application.

Exceptionally it may be possible to include family members who do not currently live with you, but this will need to be assessed on a case-by-case basis, depending on the household circumstances and the reasons why the family members do not currently reside together. This may include foster children.

It is sometimes the case that, grown-up children wish to join their parents' application and in such circumstances you will need to provide evidence that the grown-up child is residing with you and that this is envisaged to be a long-term arrangement.

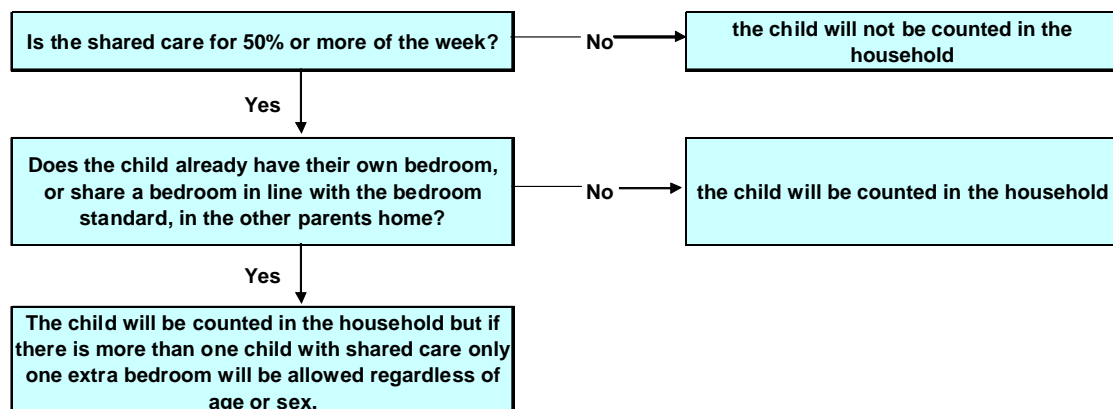
Grown-up children who are living away from the household on a temporary basis – e.g. because they are studying at university – will be able to join the application but evidence will be required.

If you are entitled to Housing Benefit you will need to check how many bedrooms you qualify for under the Benefit rules.

I have shared care of children – can I include them on my application?

Because Council accommodation is a scarce resource the Council needs to make sure that properties are not under-occupied.

If you share the care of a child or children a calculation will be made to decide whether or not the child or children will be included in the household for the assessment of bedrooms. The calculation is based on how much time the child or children live with you.



The chart above shows how we will carry out the assessment.

Because the assessment of bedroom need is carried out at the beginning of the process, you will need to provide evidence of the shared care of any child/ren when you first register. This will need to be in the form of

- A copy of the child's birth certificate; AND
- Evidence of parental responsibility for the child/ren; AND
- Proof of a Court Order or written agreement by the sharing parent evidencing shared care; AND
- Evidence of benefits received for the children e.g. Child Benefit or Child Tax Credits. It is expected that parents with shared care will also share any State Benefit provided for the child.

When assessing an application, officers will need to inspect your original documentation and in some cases it may be necessary to interview applicants and/or make further enquiries with other agencies.

If the information provided is not accurate then you could be bidding for properties that you are not eligible to bid for.

If you are entitled to Housing Benefit you will need to check how many bedrooms you qualify for under the Benefit rules.

Will I be given a priority?

The Council has a duty to prioritise certain groups of people. If you fall into one of those groups you will be awarded a priority and placed into the appropriate priority band.

There are 5 bands.

- Bands 1, 2 and 3 are the priority bands for those with the most urgent housing need
- Band 4 is the band for people with no priority but who are not adequately housed
- Band 5 is the band for people who are adequately housed or who have rent arrears.

There are many different priorities within the priority bands and each has its own set of requirements. You can see the priorities and requirements, and how they are assessed in the next section.

If you feel that you meet the requirements for a particular priority you will need to be assessed according to the assessment process. This may require you to provide extra information such as medical information.

It may be necessary to share that information with other people such as our medical advisor, but you will be asked to give your consent before we would do this.

If a priority is given it is awarded an effective date and it is this date that counts when applicants are shortlisted – see section *How will the Council decide who will be allocated a property?*

If I am given a priority is it time restricted?

Priority bands may be restricted to a time limit – this is shown in the chart of priorities and reflects the urgency of the applicants' housing need.

Where a time restriction is placed on an application, the Thurrock Choice Homes Team will monitor the bidding activity. If an applicant fails to bid for suitable properties that have been advertised within the time limit period, then the priority may be removed or suspended, or a direct offer made.

Time limits must be reasonable and appropriate and where there have been no suitable properties advertised, or there are special circumstances for not bidding within the time limit period, an extension may be granted.

What is a “Suitable Property”?

“Suitable property” means a property that will meet the housing need of your household and it will be the Council's determination of suitability.

When considering if a property is suitable the following factors will be taken into account:-

- The number of bedrooms available – do these meet the bedroom standard for your household size?
- The area of the property – is there any reason why it would be unsafe for your household to live in a certain area?
- The affordability of the property – is the property rent higher than other properties of a similar size in the area such that it makes it unaffordable for the household?
- The type of property – e.g. is the property unsuitable because it does not meet the needs of a disabled person within the household?

A suitable property may be a house, flat, maisonette or bungalow.

Due to the shortage of social housing, applicants are unlikely to be able to choose houses or bungalows in preference to flats or maisonettes. Where an applicant has a time restriction, they will be expected to bid for all suitable property types and not restrict themselves to one property type - e.g. only houses. This may involve a compromise on preference in order to meet urgent housing need.

Applicants will have the right of appeal against a decision to remove or suspend priority or make a direct offer. Any appeal against the removal of a priority should be made to the Housing Solutions Lettings manager. The decision on whether or not to extend the priority will be made by the Re-Housing panel.

Can I appeal if I am refused a priority?

Once the assessment has been carried out you will be advised whether or not the priority has been awarded. You can appeal against the decision. You can also provide further information if appropriate.

An officer who is senior to the original decision maker will carry out the review of the decision. The review will be based on the Allocation Scheme, legal requirements and all the relevant information provided by you, and this can include further information that was not available at the time the original decision was made.

You will be told in writing of the appeal decision.

What are the priorities and how are they assessed?

Full details regarding the criteria for priorities can be found in the full Housing Allocations Scheme document but the table below outlines all the priorities and how they are assessed:

Band 1	How assessed	Criteria	Bidding Restrictions	Property type restrictions
Violence or threats of violence (including domestic violence and sexual violence)	Decision made by the Re-Housing panel following investigation	Violence or threats of violence established and recommendation made in conjunction with police and/or other agencies at a senior level	No bidding – direct offer made	Applicants will be offered a suitable property appropriate to assessed bedroom entitlement and outside of danger areas
Permanent Decants	Director or Head of Housing to identify properties to be decanted due to refurbishment or	Properties needing demolition or major refurbishment where the tenant	Either 6 weeks or 3 months - Time limit determined by urgency of decant - monitored by	Applicants are restricted to moving to a suitable property type but appropriate to assessed bedroom

	demolition	cannot continue to reside	TCH team	entitlement
Band 2	How assessed	Criteria	Bidding Restrictions	Property type restrictions
Additional Preference - Cumulative Need	TCH team to identify two or more priorities which have been awarded. Housing Solutions Manager to award priority	Applicants must meet the criteria for the two or more priorities in the usual way	1 year – after which the priority will be removed	Applicants are restricted to moving to a property type which meets the entitlement of both priorities
Additional Preference – Members of the Armed Forces	TCH team to identify initial priority awarded and connection to the armed forces as per the criteria. Housing Solutions Manager to award priority	Applicants must be eligible for a priority and be a former member of the armed forces	1 year – after which the priority will be removed	Applicants are restricted to moving to a property type which meets their assessed need
Delayed hospital discharges	Hospital discharge team to identify patient and time ready for discharge - TCH team to investigate	Applicants current accommodation must be shown to be inadequate and the hospital need to provide a discharge date when applicant is medically fit	No bidding – direct offer made	Applicants will be offered a suitable property appropriate to assessed bedroom
Medical – Priority 1	Assessed through the medical priority service	This priority will only be awarded to the most urgent of cases	1 year – after which the priority will be removed	Applicants may be restricted to bidding for a property type recommended by the health Advisor

Carer – Priority 1	As per the medical framework procedure - by the Private medical service manager upon recommendation made by social care or other agency	Where daily care is required with a level of personal care and dependence such that if the care were not provided by the carer then it would need to be provided by formal carers via Social Care or the Health Authority	1 year – after which the priority will be removed	The priority can be awarded to the carer or the care receiver – care receivers may be restricted to bidding for a property type recommended by the health Advisor.
Housing Adaptation Panel (HAP) Priority	HAP panel meets to discuss case and advises if adaptations are not going to be made	Priority awarded following full investigation by HAP panel taking into account the physical and financial issues of carrying out the recommended works	1 year – after which the priority will be removed	Applicants can only bid for the property type which will meet their medical needs
Under - occupation by more than 1 bedroom	Assessment & registration team assess at point of registration and identify to TCH team to investigate records	Applicants currently under-occupying	No time restriction except where applicants are in receipt of DHP and then reviewed at 6 months	Applicants are restricted to a smaller property which meets their assessed property entitlement
Retiring Thurrock Council Resident staff	Assessment & registration team assess at point of registration and identify to TCH team to investigate records	Where an applicant is leaving a Thurrock Council job that involves tied accommodation and the property is required for a new member of staff	3 months bidding priority - monitored by TCH team	No restriction
Succession to a	Priority awarded through Change of	Current property is too large to meet the	No time	Applicants are restricted to a

tenancy that is under-occupied	tenancy procedure at Local area office	applicants assessed property entitlement	restriction	smaller property which meets their assessed property entitlement
Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence	Decision made by Re-Housing panel following investigation of case	It must be determined that an urgent move to alternative accommodation is in the best interests of the applicant	4 weeks bidding priority - monitored by TCH then a direct offer will be made	Applicants will be offered a suitable property appropriate to assessed bedroom outside of any danger area
Change of tenancy	Priority awarded through Change of tenancy procedure at Local area office	Applicants are not eligible for succession or property is too large or discretion used to allow a move from an under-occupied property	1 year – after which the priority will be removed	Applicants are restricted to a smaller property which meets their assessed property entitlement
Band 3	How assessed	Criteria	Bidding Restrictions	Property type restrictions
Homeless applicants	Homeless officer will determine duty and advise applicant via s184 letter	Homelessness duty accepted under s 193 or s195 Housing Act 1996	4 weeks bidding priority - monitored by homeless officer then a direct offer will be made	No restriction
Medical - Priority 2	As per the medical framework procedure - by the Health Advisor	Where quality of life is compromised but applicant does not meet the criteria for medical 1 priority	1 year – after which the priority will be removed	Applicants may be restricted to bidding for a property type recommended by the health Advisor
Carer- Priority 2	As per the medical framework procedure - by the Private medical service manager upon recommendation made by social	Where regular care is required for someone who cannot care for him/herself within the home - the priority can be awarded to the carer or the	year – after which the priority will be removed	The priority can be awarded to the carer or the care receiver – care receivers may be restricted to bidding for a property type recommended by

	care	person cared for		the health Advisor.
Care Leavers - move on	TCH Manager in conjunction with leaving & after-care team	Applicant must be a looked after child who is ready to live independently with on-going support from leaving & after care team	1 year – after which the priority will be removed	No restriction
Supported housing - move on	Report received from supported housing scheme manager advising applicant is ready for independent living - assessed by TCH team	Applicant must have completed a reasonable period of time in the supported housing during which time he/she will have participated in the required training etc	1 year – after which the priority will be removed	No restriction
Court Order	Copy of Court Order received - checked by TCH team	Criteria is dependent on particular Court Order	No time restriction	No restriction unless ordered by the Court
Properties with severe Housing Hazards	Report provided by Housing Environmental Health officer identifying the hazards	Property has category 1 hazards as identified by qualified officer	4 weeks bidding priority - monitored by TCH then a direct offer will be made	No restriction
Overcrowding	Local area officer / environmental health officer to visit and carry out calculations and to provide results to TCH team	Priority will be awarded where the household is 2 or more bedrooms short of the Bedroom Standard	1 year – after which the priority will be removed	No restriction

Welfare grounds	Decision made by Re-Housing panel following investigation of case	Full investigation of case in conjunction with other agencies such as police, health professionals, social care and support agencies	1 year – after which the priority will be removed	Applicants may be restricted to moving to a property type which meets their needs according to the particular circumstances
Transfer within sheltered housing to lower floor	Assessment made by the housing Occupational therapist in conjunction with the sheltered housing officer and medical information	Applicants to show why they can no longer manage the first floor accommodation - if a more urgent move is required medical priority to be considered instead	1 year – after which the priority may be removed	Applicants are restricted to moving to a ground floor property within the same scheme or another close by
Under-occupation by 1 bedroom	Assessment & registration team assess at point of registration and identify to TCH team to investigate	Applicants currently under-occupying by 1 bedroom	No time restriction	Applicants are restricted to a smaller property which meets their assessed property entitlement
Band 4	How assessed	Criteria	Bidding Restrictions	Property type restrictions
Applicants who are adequately housed but who have been issued with a valid notice to quit	Registration team assess at the point of registration - by examination of appropriate documents	Valid notice to quit received	No time restriction	No restrictions - subject to property size entitlement
Applicants who are not adequately housed	Registration team assess at the point of registration - by examination of appropriate documents	Applicants are not adequately housed in terms of size or affordability of accommodation but do not meet the criteria for any other priority	No time restriction	No restrictions - subject to property size entitlement

Non-Statutory Homeless	Homeless officer will determine duty and advise applicant via s184 letter	Applicants who are homeless but do not meet the statutory criteria for a homeless duty	No time restriction	No restrictions - subject to property size entitlement
Band 5	How assessed	Criteria	Bidding Restrictions	Property type restrictions
Applicants who are adequately housed	Registration team assess at point of registration	Applicants must be eligible and qualify to join the Housing Waiting list	No time restriction	No restrictions - subject to property size entitlement
Applicants with rent arrears on a current tenancy or a Council tenancy within the last 6 years	Registration team assess at point of registration	Applicants must be eligible to join the Housing Register	No time restriction	No restrictions - subject to property size entitlement

Worsening circumstances deliberately

Applicants, who have deliberately worsened their circumstances in order to achieve a priority, will have the priority removed and any offer made withdrawn.

Providing False Information

If you provide false information or documents and as a result you are allocated a property, the Council could obtain a court order to evict you from that property.

It is important to tell us the truth at all points of the application process.

Do I need to re- register every year?

Yes – you will be asked to re-register your application every year – usually on the anniversary date of when you first registered.

You will be reminded to do this via an email sent to your email address and a message on your bidding page. You will be required to re-register on line.

If you do not re-register within the given time limit you will be sent a further reminder by post.

Failure to re-register an application within the requested timescales may result in your application being cancelled and the loss of any accumulated waiting time.

What happens if my circumstances change?

If your circumstances change, for example you change address, telephone number or the number of people in the household changes, you must advise us so that your application can be updated and re-assessed if necessary.

It is your responsibility to make sure that your application is up to date and failure to do so could result in any offer being withdrawn or your application being incorrectly assessed.

How does the Council decide who will be allocated a property?

Thurrock Council uses a process known as Choice Based Lettings for allocating properties, and the system is administered by the Thurrock Choice Homes (TCH) team.

You will be able to choose which properties you are interested in and register that interest via a “bid”. You are allowed two bids each week.

The “bidding” system does not involve a payment for property – placing a bid merely indicates that you would like to be considered for that property.

Every week TCH advertise all the properties available for allocation in either the Thurrock Enquirer and/or on the TCH Website at www.thurrockchoicehomes.org.uk

The advertising cycle begins on a Thursday morning and ends at midnight on the following Monday.

It does not matter when you bid during the cycle because the system will prioritise your application according to the priority it is awarded.

At the end of the bidding cycle the system makes a list of every applicant who has bid for each of the properties and prioritises them according to:-

- The priority banding
- If there is more than one bid within each band, the applications are further prioritised by their date – this is their “effective date” not the “application date”

- If there is more than one bid with the same effective date, the application with the lowest number will go ahead

The following charts show how this works

The following applicants have placed bids for a property

Applicants	Band	Effective date
Applicant A	1	22nd Dec 2010
Applicant B	2	23rd Dec 2010
Applicant C	3	24th Dec 2010
Applicant D	4	25th Dec 2010
Applicant E	5	26th Dec 2010
Applicant F	1	27th Dec 2010
Applicant G	2	28th Dec 2010
Applicant H	3	29th Dec 2010

These will shortlisted as follows:-

Order of priority	Band	Effective date
Applicant A	1	22nd Dec 2010
Applicant F	1	27th Dec 2010
Applicant B	2	23rd Dec 2010
Applicant G	2	28th Dec 2010
Applicant C	3	24th Dec 2010
Applicant H	3	29th Dec 2010
Applicant D	4	25th Dec 2010
Applicant E	5	26th Dec 2010

The TCH team then assess the applications to determine if they meet the criteria for the property – in terms of bedroom size, clear rent account, adaptations etc.

Being the top bidder does not automatically mean you will be offered the property, it will still be the responsibility of the TCH team to ensure you meet all the required criteria for the property.

How do I Bid for properties?

You can bid in any one of the following ways and will be prompted on what to do next:

- Call the 24 hour automated Thurrock Choice Homes bidding line on 0800 2700 558

- Place a bid on the internet at www.thurrockchoiceshomes.org.uk
- Text 07781 486526

Once a bid has been placed you can check your position in the queue, and if you wish, you can remove the bid for that property and place the bid on another at any time during the bidding cycle.

You may find that there are some bidding cycles where there are no properties for which you are eligible to bid. This could be for a number of reasons, including the following:-

- There may be no properties available in your bedroom need size
- Your application may be suspended – this could be for a number of reasons including that the application has been cancelled or you are under offer for a property or there is a problem with the application

You should contact the Thurrock Choice Homes team on 01375 652311 or 652200 to discuss any bidding problems.

The Council reserves the right to place a bid on behalf of an applicant where a priority has been awarded but the applicant is failing to bid, despite suitable properties being available.

Do I qualify for Assisted Bidding?

Thurrock Council is committed to equality for all and is determined to ensure that all applicants are able to bid for properties of their choice.

In order to ensure that vulnerable applicants are not disadvantaged, we operate an assisted bidding scheme.

A list of such applicants is kept and reviewed weekly. The service offered will be determined by the specific needs of each applicant but may involve posting out a printout of the adverts weekly, telephoning an applicant to discuss an advertised property and/or placing bids for applicants.

In order to join the assisted process an applicant will need to complete an assisted bidding application form outlining their needs. Alternatively, a support worker or the applicant themselves, can contact the Thurrock Choice Homes team to discuss joining the list. Forms are available at the Civic Offices and Local Housing Offices.

Thurrock Choice Homes will send a letter or email to applicants confirming when they have been added to the Assisted Bidding list.

How will you report the bidding results?

After each bidding cycle, the results will be advertised on the Thurrock Choice Homes website. They will also be available when the next group of properties are advertised in the newspaper. This will enable applicants to see how properties have been advertised and the banding and effective dates of the successful bidders. You will be able to check your own personal results by logging into your TCH page online.

Can I bid for every available property?

Usually applicants can bid for any property that matches their assessed bedroom need, in any area of their choosing but there are some situations where the choice is limited to a particular property type or area – For example:

- Where you have been given a priority to move away from a certain area because of violence – you would not be able to bid for a property in that area
- Where you have been awarded a medical priority because of mobility problems a recommendation may be made for the most appropriate type of property

There are also certain properties that will only be available to certain groups of people – these will be identified in the adverts and usually if you do not meet the criteria for these properties you will not be able to bid for them. However, even if you can bid any offer is still subject to suitability and your eligibility at the time of the offer.

- **Transfer applicants properties**

25% of all properties will be advertised only for applicants who are already Thurrock Council or Registered Provider tenants, living in the borough.

- **Adapted Properties**

The Council operates an Accessible Housing Register (AHR) that records the details of waiting list applicants who have been awarded a priority for, or are in need of, adapted properties. Applicants on this register are assisted by the Housing Adaptations officer to look for adapted properties that meet their particular needs.

Some properties will already have major adaptations and will be advertised so that only applicants on the Accessible Housing Register will be able to bid for them.

Viewings of adapted properties are usually accompanied by the Housing Occupational Therapist or Housing Adaptations officer, who will determine whether or not the property meets the particular needs of the applicant it has been offered to.

Where the officer determines that it does not meet those needs, the offer will be withdrawn, unless it is reasonable and practicable to adapt the property through minor or major adaptations. This will be discussed with the applicant at the time of the viewing / offer.

Any agreed adaptations will be carried out in due course but this may not be immediately. Subsequently, an applicant may be required to move into the property before adaptations are completed. However, where an immediate risk to the applicant is identified, it will be eliminated by the installation of minor adaptations.

In exceptional circumstances it may be necessary to allow a family to under-occupy a property where there are extensive adaptations, in order to make best use of public funds. This may involve advertising a property again and extending the bidding to applicants with a lesser bedroom need.

Applicants who are allocated a property that results in an under-occupation will need to be aware of restrictions in Housing Benefit payment under the new Welfare Reforms. This will be discussed with any such applicant when the offer is made.

- **Properties only for Working Households**

Thurrock Council has decided to allocate a maximum of 15% of its advertised properties only for applicants with a member of the household who is working. This will not include sheltered housing.

The Council recognises that some households have no family members who are able to work due to age, disability etc. Therefore consideration will also be given to an applicant who has shown a contribution to the community - for example through voluntary work or caring for someone else.

In order to be eligible to bid for one of these properties an applicant would need to show that someone within their household meets the following criteria:

- In permanent employment for at least the past 12 months and that employment is for at least 16 hours per week

OR

- Involved in voluntary work (or other contribution to the Community such as caring for someone else) for at least the past 12 months and the time spent volunteering involves at least 16 hours per week.

Where there is no one in the household who meets the 16 hours criteria but there are two people whose combined working hours are 16 or more this will be counted.

If a property is advertised for working households only and there are no successful bidders, then the property will be re-advertised the following week for all applicants on the Housing Waiting List

- **Sheltered properties**

Sheltered housing is designed and built with the needs of older people in mind. Most of our sheltered housing schemes are made up of one-bedroom flats or bungalows, although there are a very limited number of two-bedroom properties.

Sheltered housing enables people to live in their own property with the security of a sheltered housing officer in case any assistance is needed. Each property has an alarm system that can be activated to allow the tenant to speak to the sheltered housing officer (or to Care Line if the sheltered housing officer is not on duty). The sheltered housing officer also makes a courtesy call to every tenant each morning and is there to provide support.

Most sheltered housing schemes have communal halls where activities take place daily, so there are opportunities to socialise with others.

In order to be eligible for these schemes applicants must meet all of the following criteria

- 60 years and over or aged 55 to 59 years and in receipt of Higher Rate Disability Living Allowance (Mobility or Care element)
- Single or joint applicants with no children
- In need of the housing support provided by the scheme

Applicants for this type of housing will need to complete a Sheltered Self Assessment form indicating the type of support that is required, and provide evidence of their Disability Living Allowance where appropriate.

Exceptionally, it may be possible to allocate a sheltered property to an applicant below the age range described above, but this is usually due to a severe disability. The Council's Re-Housing panel will agree such a move.

- **Community Alarm properties**

These properties tend not to be in schemes and provide a lower level of support. They offer a community alarm service but do not have a specified Sheltered Housing Officer.

In order to be eligible for these properties applicants must meet all of the following criteria

- 60 years and over OR a person with a physical or sensory disability, or other vulnerability
- Single or joint applicants with no children
- In need of the housing support provided by the scheme

Applicants for this type of housing will need to complete a Sheltered Self assessment form indicating the type of support that is required.

If I am successful, what happens next?

The top three successful bidders will be contacted and advised of their position. They will then be asked to produce all the documentation to support their applications within two working days – this will need to be presented to an officer at the Civic Offices who will verify they are correct.

If the information is not produced within the required time scale, or the information produced does not provide the evidence required, the application will not be taken forward and you will be bypassed. The next bidder on the list will then be asked to produce their documents.

Once your documents are verified your details will be sent over to a Housing Officer who will arrange for viewings of the property.

I have been invited to a viewing – what happens next?

If you are one of the three shortlisted applicants you may be invited to view the property. If so, an officer will contact you, usually by telephone to advise you of the viewing date.

You will need to meet the officer at the property at the agreed time and you will need to take some photo identification with you e.g. passport or driving licence.

The officer may arrange for all three top bidders to view the property at the same time but the offer will be made in the order of the shortlist. This means that if you are the 2nd or 3rd bidder, even though you view the property it may not be offered to you.

Non Thurrock Council tenants will also be required to pay the first 4 weeks rent in advance for Thurrock Council properties – this will be collected from you at the viewing and should be paid either with a debit or credit card – cash cannot be taken. You will also be asked to set up a direct debit at the viewing so that your rent is paid direct from your bank account to the Council.

If you are already receiving Housing Benefit for your current property you will only be expected to pay any shortfall and water rates in advance.

You can check your eligibility for Housing benefit on the Direct Government website at <https://www.gov.uk/housing-benefit>

If you attend the viewing and are offered the property but cannot pay the 4 weeks rent, water rates or shortfall in advance you will not be able to sign up for the tenancy and this will be counted as a refusal.

Therefore – it is essential that you make sure you have a debit or credit card available for use at the viewing with access to the required funds.

Registered Providers may also require applicants to complete their own application form and to pay rent in advance. If this is the case the Registered Provider will advise you. It is important that you complete and return the application forms immediately to avoid the Registered Provider moving on to the next bidder on the shortlist.

If you are offered a property you will be encouraged to make a decision regarding whether to accept or refuse the offer at the time of viewing. In order to minimise void periods for properties, a maximum period of 24 hours will be allowed for an applicant to make the decision, although exceptionally a longer period will be given.

If you accept the offer and pay the required sum in advance, a tenancy agreement will be signed with an agreed tenancy start date - usually the Monday following the viewing but a reasonable period of time will be allowed for you to move in.

The tenancy agreement is a legally binding contract.

What happens if the property is not ready for me to move into yet?

Thurrock Council and some Registered Providers may invite you to view a property which is not quite ready for letting. In such circumstances you can still view the property and sign a tenancy agreement but the start date of the tenancy will be agreed later and the agreement will be updated accordingly.

Advanced viewings allow you more time to prepare for the move and to discuss any works that will subsequently be carried out at the property before the tenancy starts.

This will also allow you more time to give notice on any current home.

Can I join the transfer list once I am a tenant?

When the tenancy starts the current application for housing will end. Should you decide that you want to transfer to another property, a transfer application will need to be completed and the whole application process will start again with a new application date.

This can be done immediately but it is your responsibility to complete a new on line transfer application – it will not automatically happen.

New Council tenants are awarded an introductory tenancy which becomes a secure tenancy after one year, provided they have maintained their tenancy in a satisfactory way.

However, introductory tenants will not be allowed to transfer to another property until the introductory tenancy becomes a secure tenancy, so although you can register a transfer immediately, if you were successful in bidding before the first year you would be bypassed.

In limited circumstances a transfer applicant may be awarded their old application date but this is only the case where an applicant has been limited on their choice of area and/or property type. An applicant will be advised if this is the case when their priority is awarded.

Why have I been bypassed for a property?

Being the top bidder for a property does not automatically guarantee that the property will be offered to you. It is still the responsibility of the Council to make a final judgment on whether or not it is appropriate to allocate a certain property, to a particular applicant.

There are a number of reasons why an applicant could be bypassed for a property even though s/he is the top bidder. These include the following:-

- **The applicant is not eligible or does not qualify for the offer**

The TCH team will check on the bidders' eligibility for the property at the short-listing stage and request the applicants to produce the supporting evidence for their application within 2 working days.

Where these criteria are not met or original documentation not produced in time to support the application, the applicant will be bypassed.

- **Rent arrears owed to a current landlord**

Where an applicant owes money for rent on a current Council, Registered Provider or Private tenancy, then an offer of accommodation will not usually be made until the debt is cleared or in the case of a private tenant, an arrangement has been made with the landlord and kept to for 6 months.

Applicants will be expected to provide evidence of a clear rent account with their current landlord when they bring in their supporting documents to be verified.

Where applicants have arrears they will usually be placed in Band 5 until the arrears are cleared and a clear rent account is maintained for at least 3

months, or an arrangement with the Landlord has been agreed and kept to for at least 6 months.

In exceptional circumstances (for cases with a high priority) it may be possible for an offer to be made where applicants do have arrears but these will be assessed on a case-by-case basis and the applicant will be expected to make a commitment to clear the arrears as soon as possible.

- **Rent arrears owed to a former Landlord**

Where an applicant owes money for rent on a former Private, Council or Registered Provider tenancy, and the debt arose within the past six years, then an offer of accommodation will not usually be made until the debt is cleared or an arrangement has been made that has been kept to for at least the past 6 months.

Where applicants have arrears owing they will usually be placed in the Band 5 until the arrears are cleared or an arrangement with the Landlord has been agreed and kept to for at least 6 months.

In exceptional circumstances (for cases with a high priority) it may be possible for an offer to be made where tenants do have arrears but these will be assessed on a case-by-case basis and the applicant will be expected to make a commitment to clear the arrears as soon as possible.

- **Adequately Housed**

Where applicants are already housed in accommodation that meets their needs, both in terms of size, property type and cost, they will be deemed adequately housed. If an applicant disputes this, they will need to provide information regarding the size and cost of their accommodation and any other applicable information to enable the assessing officer to make a decision.

Adequately housed applicants will usually be placed in the Band 5 and are not likely to be housed unless there are no other eligible bidders for the property – e.g. “hard to let” properties

- **Unsuitability of property**

Where an applicant has been awarded a priority for a specific type of property and that property type is not met by the property on offer (e.g. an applicant awarded a medical priority for a level access property and the property type is a house with internal stairs), or if the property is deemed unsuitable on other grounds for example because its location is unsafe for this particular applicant, an offer will not be made. This includes where a property has been specified as being a disabled adapted property but the bidder does not require those adaptations.

Can I refuse the property offered?

All applicants in Bands 4 and 5 are entitled to three offers of accommodation. Should an applicant refuse a third offer their application will be cancelled.

Applicants in Bands 1, 2 and 3 will only be made one offer of suitable accommodation with the priority banding. Should the applicant refuse that offer, the priority will be removed and they will be placed back in Band 4 or 5 depending on their circumstances.

All offers are subject to suitability and reasonableness and if the applicant can show that the property was not suitable for their needs or it was unreasonable to accept, then the offer will not count.

Where an applicant in Bands 1, 2 or 3 is the successful bidder for two properties, an officer will contact the applicant to discuss which offer the applicant would prefer.

Where the priority awarded specified a certain type of property (e.g. level access property), and only one of the two successful bids meets the specified property type, only that property will be offered.

What type of tenancy will I be offered?

- **Joint Tenancies**

Where members of the same household have a long-term commitment to the home, the Council will usually grant a joint tenancy. This includes same sex partners, siblings, unpaid live-in carers and long-term friends.

This is subject to the eligibility and qualification of both applicants and both will need to apply as joint applicants.

However, the Council must ensure that there are no adverse implications to the good use of their housing stock. Whilst the Council prefers to give joint tenancies there may be circumstances where this is not appropriate. Where the Council refuses a joint tenancy clear written reasons will be given for the refusal.

All joint tenants need to be aware of the implications of a joint tenancy, including the following:

- Both tenants are jointly and severally liable for the full rent of the property
- Either tenant can end the tenancy on behalf of both tenants by giving notice to quit

Applicants are advised to seek further advice if they are uncertain about the legal implications of a joint tenancy.

- **Thurrock Council tenancies**

Applicants who accept a Council tenancy will be subject to the terms and conditions of the tenancy agreement signed. The tenancy will usually start as an introductory tenancy which will automatically become a secure tenancy after one year, provided the tenancy has been conducted in a satisfactory way. During the introductory tenancy you will not be permitted to transfer to another property except in exceptional circumstances, although you can join the transfer list immediately so that you can start to accumulate waiting time.

Certain property types may have restrictions with regards to pets and this will be advised in the tenancy agreement.

- **Registered Provider tenancies**

Where applicants are nominated to Registered Providers they will be subject to the letting criteria of the Registered Provider concerned. This can vary from Thurrock Councils scheme with regards to the number of people suitable for the property, and policies regarding pets. There may be other minor variations.

Nominees to Registered Provider tenancies are usually offered an assured tenancy; however, some Registered Providers offer a “starter” tenancy, which converts to an assured tenancy after one year, provided that the tenancy has been conducted in a proper manner.

Registered providers may also offer an alternative tenancy – for example an “affordable rent” tenancy or “market rent” tenancy – which may have a higher rent than assured tenancies and clauses in the tenancy agreement, which may affect the length of tenancy.

Where such tenancies are being offered, information will be found within the adverts for the property.

Do I have to give notice on my current tenancy?

Transfer applicants will be required to serve notice on their current tenancy as soon as they sign their new tenancy agreement. The amount of notice required will depend on the terms of their current tenancy agreement. This applies to both Council and Registered Provider tenants.

Non-social housing tenants will also be required to give notice to their current landlord where applicable. The type and amount of notice required will be determined by their tenancy agreement.

Where the applicant is offered a tenancy whilst they are still within the period of a fixed term tenancy, they may still be liable for the rent on the property for the rest of the term. Applicants should discuss this with their landlord before viewing the property to enable them to make an informed decision before signing up to the tenancy.

Thurrock Council tenants will also be required to pass a tenancy inspection before any new tenancy agreement is signed. Failure to pass the inspection will result in the offer being withdrawn.

Registered Provider tenants may also need to undergo an inspection and should advise their housing officer as soon as an offer is made.

Are members of the Armed Forces given any priority?

- **Backdating applications**

Former members of the Armed Forces, who have registered an application within one year of leaving the Force, will be entitled to have their effective date backdated for the number of years in which they served in the Forces – up to a maximum of ten years. Evidence of their service dates will be required.

- **Extra Priority**

Extra priority will be given to certain members and former members of the Armed Forces who meet the criteria for a priority in Band 3.

The priority applies to the following groups of people:

- A serving member of the armed forces who is suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is attributable (wholly or partly) to the persons service
- A former member of the armed forces
- A person who was living in accommodation provided by the ministry of defence, where the accommodation is no longer available to them because of the recent death of their spouse or civil partner, and that spouse or civil partner's death was attributable (wholly or partly) to their service in the armed forces
- A serving member or former member of the reserve forces who is suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is attributable (wholly or partly) to the persons service

Where the priority applies, the applicant will be moved into Band 2.

Applicants will be expected to provide evidence of their service.

Allocations to Thurrock Council Employees, Council Members and their families

The Housing Allocations Scheme is designed to ensure that Thurrock Council is fair and transparent when letting homes to all applicants and this includes staff or Council Members and their relatives.

The Allocations Scheme is open to any qualifying applicant and this includes Staff and Council Members and their relatives.

Such applicants will not be awarded any advantage or preferential treatment in the course of their application; neither will they be disadvantaged.

Procedures are in place to ensure that any offers to this group will be counter-signed by a senior officer.

Elected members are prohibited from taking part in any decisions on an individual allocation if the accommodation is in their electoral ward or if the person subject to the allocation decision has a sole or main residence in their electoral ward, however they can seek and obtain information on behalf of their constituents and participate in more general policy decisions that affect their wards.

Direct Offers

It may be necessary to make a direct offer of a property outside of the Thurrock Choice Homes scheme i.e. a property will be identified for a specific applicant and offered to them without being advertised through the bidding process.

Where properties are let via a direct offer, these will not be advertised, and the results will not be published, in the same manner as other properties. This is due to the nature of the cases requiring such moves and the need for confidentiality in many of those cases. However, the numbers of properties let in this manner will be made available in annual statistics to be produced.

Direct lets will be used in, but not limited to, the following Circumstances:

- **Priority cases with a risk of harm or delayed discharge from hospital**

Where a priority is awarded for circumstances where the applicant is at risk of harm if not moved immediately, or is a delayed discharge in hospital, due to the urgency of the need to move, applicants will be made a direct offer of suitable accommodation. This will speed up the moving process enabling a faster solution to the urgent housing need.

The accommodation offered would be whatever is available at the time when it is required but subject to suitability.

Once re-housed applicants may choose to register a transfer application and this will be awarded the date of the original application to recognise the fact that direct offers remove the choice element for applicants.

- **Extra Care properties**

Extra Care housing is provided at a number of locations within Thurrock, including the Thurrock Council schemes at Piggs Corner and Kynoch Court, and the Hanover scheme at Elizabeth Gardens.

People applying to Extra Care housing must meet certain criteria regarding their support needs and all cases are considered by the Extra Care Panel – a group of housing and social care officers

- Applicants must usually be aged 55 or over
- Applicants will require assistance with their daily living tasks, and/or their personal care. Care may be defined as formal - being delivered by a statutory agency – or informal – delivered by family or friends of the client. The person would require a minimum of 7 hours per week

- **Court order**

Where a Court orders the Council to offer an applicant a specific property, a direct offer of that property will be made to comply with the Court Order.

- **Multi Agency Public Protection Agreements (MAPPA)**

Applicants subject to MAPPA restrictions and in need of housing will not automatically be awarded a priority for Council accommodation and other options will be considered.

However there will be circumstances where the MAPPA group recommends that an applicant be housed in Council accommodation. In such circumstances the group will make recommendations on the best location of a property and when a suitable property is identified a direct offer will be made to the applicant, subject to suitability checks by the police etc.

- **Homeless Households**

Homeless applicants, who have been awarded a priority, will be given 4 weeks to bid for suitable properties. If the homeless applicant fails to bid for suitable properties within the priority time limit, the Thurrock Choice Homes team may make a direct offer of suitable accommodation in order to meet its statutory duty and to minimise the use of temporary accommodation.

- **Applicants living in housing with severe hazards**

Applicants, who have been awarded a priority because their current accommodation has severe hazards, will be given 4 weeks to bid for suitable properties. If the applicant fails to bid for suitable properties within the priority time limit, the Thurrock Choice Homes team may make a direct offer of suitable accommodation.

More Information

- **Thurrock Housing Services**

Website: <http://www.thurrock.gov.uk/housing>

Email: housing@thurrock.gov.uk

Telephone 01375 652652

- **Thurrock Choice Homes**

Website: www.thurrockchoicehomes.org.uk

Email: TCH@thurrock.gov.uk

Telephone 01375 652311