

LONDON BOROUGH OF RICHMOND UPON THAMES

Applying for housing

- a guide for housing applicants



June 2017

This authority is under a duty to protect the public funds it administers, and to this end may use the information you provide for the prevention and detection of fraud. It may also share this information with other public bodies responsible for auditing or administering public funds for these purposes.

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Introduction

This booklet provides information for those who are interested in applying for social housing in the London Borough of Richmond Upon Thames. The council does not own any properties, so if you are offered a property, it will be one managed by a registered social landlord (RSL). They will offer you accommodation if the council nominates you (ie giving your details and asking them to make you an offer).

Your chances of being offered social housing in Richmond will depend on whether you are eligible and qualify for social housing. It also depends on the supply of and demand for, homes in the area and the priority awarded to your application.

Richmond is a popular place to live and it may be easier or more convenient to find somewhere to live in other parts of the country. You can apply directly to any housing authority in the country. However, if you do not meet their qualification criteria your application may not be registered.

This booklet also contains information about a number of schemes through which we may be able to help you move to other areas.

We are committed to the promotion of equal opportunities and aim to ensure that homes are let fairly to all sections of the community.

When we refer to the council, it means Richmond council, unless stated otherwise.

Housing in Richmond

On average, the council is able to offer approximately 250-300 homes provided by RSLs for rent each year. This means only those applicants with urgent and or high housing need will be considered for a nomination.

Who may apply: eligibility and qualification for social housing in Richmond

Any person may apply to the council for housing. However, housing will only be offered to applicants who are registered on the council's housing queues for social housing. To be registered an applicant must be:

- (a) eligible for social housing in England (that is, not ineligible due to their immigration status); and
- (b) a qualifying person for social housing in Richmond (as determined by the following provisions of the housing allocation scheme).
- (c) be 18 years old or over, unless applying under the homeless, supported, social care queues. Applicants will not usually be offered a tenancy until they are at least 18 years of age.

Reasonable preference groups

This scheme has been framed to give reasonable preference to those groups identified within the Housing Act 1996 S166A(3). These are:

- (a) people who are homeless (within the meaning of Part VII);
- (b) people who are owed a duty by any local housing authority under section 190(2), 193(2) or 195(2) (or under section 65(2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985) or who are occupying accommodation secured by any such authority under section 192(3);
- (c) people occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions;
- (d) people who need to move on medical or welfare grounds (including any grounds relating to a disability); and
- (e) people who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or to others).

If, upon assessment, you do not fall within one of the reasonable preference categories you will not be a qualifying person.

Who is not a qualifying person

The following will be considered as not a “qualifying person”.

Persons who have refused an offer or nomination of suitable accommodation

You will not qualify for social housing in the borough and be (or remain) registered on the council's housing queues, if you have refused any nomination of suitable accommodation within the last two years, made or arranged by the council, and there has been no material change in your circumstances, so as to make the earlier nomination clearly unsuitable in the light of your changed circumstances.

Persons with no recognised housing need

You will not qualify for social housing and be (or remain) registered on the council's housing queues if the council is satisfied, once the application has been assessed that you are suitably rehoused, that is, you have no recognised housing need under the Housing Allocation Scheme.

Persons who do not qualify on the grounds of behaviour

You will not qualify for social housing in the borough and be (or remain) registered on the council's housing queues if, following assessment, any of the following circumstances apply:

- (a) The council is satisfied you have, within the preceding 10 years, obtained or attempted to obtain housing or other housing related services/welfare benefits /public funds, from any public body in the UK, by making a false or misleading statement or withholding information, or encouraging someone else to do so on your behalf;
- (b) The council is satisfied that you have become intentionally homeless (as defined in the Housing Act 1996 S191) from your last home subject to an individual assessment;
- (c) The council is satisfied that you are unlikely to satisfactorily manage the tenancy and /or pay your rent because, for example:

- (i) You have been evicted due to anti-social behaviour (including domestic violence and abuse and noise nuisance) or rent arrears;
- (ii) you have been served, within the last year, with a notice for breach of your tenancy conditions;
- (iii) another person who shared a property occupied by you left because of your violence/abuse or threats of violence/abuse against them or a person associated with them;
- (iv) you or a member of your household have a history of anti-social behaviour (including domestic violence/abuse and noise nuisance);
- (v) you have a record of failure to pay rent;
- (vi) you have outstanding debt liabilities to the council and are not making satisfactory arrangements to repay those debts.

Persons who will be accorded lower priority

If your application falls into one of the reasonable preference groups (see above) and you do not satisfy the criteria set out below, your application will be placed into band D, or lowest available band for the relevant access queue as applicable, until you satisfy the criteria.

Residency

If you have not been resident within the borough for a continuous minimum period of three years immediately preceding your application.

Homeownership, high income or high savings

- (a) you own or jointly own accommodation (including shared ownership accommodation) in the UK or elsewhere, or have a legal right to occupy accommodation in the UK or elsewhere (other than as a tenant or licensee) unless you satisfy the council that it would not be possible and reasonable for you to:
 - (i) occupy the accommodation; or
 - (ii) sell or let the accommodation in order to obtain suitable accommodation; or
- (b) the council is satisfied that you have income* or savings that it would be possible and reasonable for you to use in order to obtain suitable accommodation.

*An applicant, or one of joint applicants, must have a household income

that is no greater than the household income threshold set by the GLA (Greater London Authority) for the 'First Steps to Homeownership in London' scheme and in place at the time the decision on qualification is made.

Social tenants making a transfer application to their landlord

You are a tenant of a registered provider of social housing and have not made a transfer application to your landlord. This applies unless the application to the council is for sheltered housing or your landlord does not maintain a housing waiting list.

Applicants placed in band D are highly unlikely to be made an offer of social housing. The onus is on you to contact the department when you satisfy the criteria and your application will be reassessed in accordance with the scheme.

Discretion to waive qualifying and/or relative priority criteria

In specific circumstances the qualifying and/or relative priority criteria maybe waived.

How to apply for social housing in Richmond

An application for the allocation of accommodation by the council must be made by accessing the online form at www.richmond.gov.uk/housing_apply

To complete the online form, you will need to provide the following information about yourself, your partner (if applicable) and any other household members:

- Information about your immigration status
- Names and dates of birth for everyone on the application.
- National Insurance numbers for everyone on the application over 16 years old .Current address and previous addresses over the last 5 years
- Details of any homes you have owned or have any interest in.
- Information about any mortgages you have previously had
- Total income and savings of everyone on your application including; earnings from employment, welfare benefits received, total savings and investments held.

Based on your circumstances, you may be advised that you do not qualify and are ineligible for housing.

We will contact you for further information and identification when required. Please note that when we ask for photographs, these will need to be recent and provided for all household members. Those aged 16 and over are required to provide their full name and signature on the back of the photograph.

Persons needing advice or practical assistance with making an application should contact the housing information and advice team. See page 23 for contact details.

Completing the application form

Who to include on your application

Generally, you should only include members of your immediate family who usually live with you, or could reasonably be expected to live with you.

Other people will only be accepted as part of your household if it is reasonable for that person to live with you. This will normally exclude any lodgers you may have but might include, for example, a foster child.

An adult applicant may not appear on more than one housing application.

Joint tenancies

Where two or more people apply jointly for housing, both applicants must be eligible for allocation and at least one of them must be a qualifying person (see pages 5 to 8).

If you and your spouse / partner apply for housing together, you will normally be offered a joint tenancy. We will also consider requests to create joint tenancies between other applicants. Decisions around tenancies can only be made by the receiving RSL in accordance with their tenancy policies.

Disability and medical conditions

You should inform us if you or anybody included on your application have medical conditions or disabilities which:

- (a) are made worse by your current accommodation; or
- (b) would affect the type of housing that we may offer you.

We may ask you to complete a medical assessment form.

You do not need to get a medical certificate or letter from your doctor or hospital.

We may seek advice on the relevance to current or future housing needs of you or your household member's medical condition(s)/disability from the council's medical adviser. If further information is required we will, with your consent, contact your medical professional.

Misleading information

If you try to obtain housing by making false or misleading statements, you may be prosecuted and have your application refused or cancelled on the basis that you do not qualify for social housing in Richmond.

Change of address and / or circumstances

If there are any changes in your circumstances, please notify the housing information and advice team as this may affect your chances of being offered housing. For example, tell us if:

- you move.
- you need to add someone to or remove someone from your application, for example if:
 - you become pregnant or have a child;
 - you want to add a new partner to your application; or
 - someone on your application will no longer be living with you.
- you, or anybody included on your application has medical conditions or disabilities which have changed since you last provided us with information about them and they:
 - are made worse by your current accommodation; or
 - would affect the type of housing that we may offer you.

In order that your application can be assessed in the light of changed circumstances or to check that information held is correct and up to date, you may be required to complete a new application form.

Assessment of applications for social housing

Your application for housing will be assessed under the council's housing allocation scheme according to the information provided by you and established from enquiries.

When we have received sufficient information and supporting evidence to enable us to assess the application you will be notified in writing which queue and band you have been placed in, as well as the number of points your application has been awarded. For points and banding information please see pages 13 and 14.

The assessment will be made in accordance with the bedroom entitlement rules applicable at the date of the application and if applicable, the nomination. RSLs may apply a different bedroom standard and therefore nominations will be made in accordance with the RSL's allocation scheme.

Eligibility and qualification

If we decide that you are not eligible for housing or do not qualify for social housing in Richmond we will notify you in writing of:

- (a) our decision and the reason(s) for it; and
- (b) your right to request a review of the decision and the timescales.

If your application is accepted, we will send you a registration letter.

How we allocate properties

Allocation plan

Each year, we estimate how many housing association properties are likely to become available for letting during the year. We also decide how many properties should be offered to applicants on each queue. This is known as the 'allocation plan'.

Banding system and points scheme

Within each queue, all eligible and qualifying applicants are placed within one of four bands, with band A being the highest and band D being the lowest, as set out in the table opposite.

The main points scheme (as set out in the table on page 14) is used to help determine applicants' priority within the general needs queue and the older person's queue.

Subject to suitability considerations and targets within the annual allocation plan, offers for each queue are made to whichever applicant is in the highest band and has been registered in that band for the longest (and, if there are no applicants in the highest band, to whichever applicant is in the second highest band and has been registered in that band for the longest, and so on). Therefore, even applicants registered in the highest band may have to wait some time for an nomination.

Band	Description of housing circumstances falling within band
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accepted homeless families with or expecting a child in bed and breakfast (unless matched to a private rented sector offer) • All assessed qualifying cases with 300 points or more • Cases awarded priority rehousing status • Under-occupying social housing tenants where two or more bedrooms would be released upon transfer • Urgent cases approved by senior management • Cases needing adapted housing due to physical disability where there is an urgent need to relocate
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All accepted homelessness cases in temporary accommodation provided by the council or in referring accommodation (unless matched to a private rented sector offer) • All other assessed qualifying cases with 150-299 points • Cases accepted onto the supported and/or social care housing queues • Under-occupying social housing tenants affected by the social sector size criteria where one bedroom would be released upon transfer • Under-occupying social housing tenants on the older persons queue where one bedroom would be released upon transfer • All other cases needing adapted housing due to physical disability • All Assessed, qualifying households accepted under the Armed Forces Scheme and ready to be made an offer of accommodation • Qualifying households where an offer of accommodation would prevent a statutory homeless duty • Cases moving under agreed housing mobility schemes including Housingmoves
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All other assessed qualifying cases with between 50 and 149 points • All other under-occupying social housing tenants • Other cases on the physical disability queue who are already in adapted housing
D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All other assessed cases including those with 1 to 49 points • All assessed qualifying cases who have not resided continuously within the Borough for a minimum period of 3 years immediately preceding their application. • All assessed cases whom do not satisfy the homeownership, high income and high savings criteria. • All assessed cases of social tenants who can apply to their landlord for a transfer but have not done so.
Order of offers	Time waiting - offers made to cases in date order from date of entry into this band, subject to suitability considerations and targets within annual Allocations Plan

Points scheme

Overcrowding	For one bedroom lacking	50
	For two bedrooms lacking	150
	For three or more bedrooms lacking	200
Statutory overcrowding	Additional overcrowding points for households statutorily overcrowded	20
Unsanitary	Lacking a living room, kitchen, bathroom/WC	30
Sharing	Sharing a living room, kitchen or bathroom/internal WC with persons outside your household	15
Unsatisfactory Housing	Two or more children having to share bedroom with a parent or parents	25
	<i>Exception to the above points: single persons assessed as requiring a self-contained studio flat</i>	
Medical need	Diagnosed ill health or disability, but not of significance to current or future housing needs	0
	Diagnosed ill health or disability, with minor relevance to current or future housing needs	25
	Diagnosed ill health or disability, with moderate relevance to current or future housing needs	75
	Diagnosed ill health or disability, with major relevance to current or future housing needs	150
	<i>The above points award will be made in respect of the person in the household whose ill health has the greatest relevance to current or future housing needs. Five additional points may be added for each additional person within the household affected by diagnosed ill health or disability which is relevant to current or future housing needs.</i>	
Community Contribution	Awarded to households receiving points under any of the domain within this points scheme and where at least one member is making a significant contribution to the community. This could include volunteering a not for profit organisation for a minimum of 18 hours a month or organising activities for young people such as a youth club or recognised activity, such as scouts/guides. It would have to be for a minimum period two years prior to the time an offer was made. These points will not be awarded if working points apply.	25

Tenure	Households who are homeless, including rough sleepers, within the meaning of Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) excluding cases accepted within the 'Homeless Queue'	25
Hardship	Households with an established need to move to a particular locality within the borough where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or others)	10
Back Boiler	Additional points for overcrowded households who use the living room for sleeping purposes and a back boiler is located in this living room	25
Working Households	Households awarded points under any of the criteria above with at least one household member who is 16 years old or over and working 24 hours or more per week in paid employment	50

Which queue will my application be registered on?

General needs queue

Most applicants will, if accepted, be registered on the general needs queue. Applicants on this queue will be assessed under the main points scheme.

Under-occupiers moving under the sponsored moves scheme* (see page 20)

RSL tenants who are under-occupying have the opportunity to transfer to smaller accommodation more suited to their needs. The bedroom size will be agreed when an application is accepted. Nominations will be made in accordance with the RSL's bedroom standard

* terms and conditions apply.

Homeless queue

In the first instance, applicants who are homeless or worried about losing their home should contact the housing information and advice team.

If the council has accepted a duty to house you under current homelessness legislation your application will be placed on the homeless queue.

Supported queue**

This queue is for applicants with support needs who have been nominated by the housing and regeneration department, social services or other approved organisations.

Social care queue**

This queue is for families with children or other persons nominated by children's social services under referral arrangements to the housing and regeneration department.

Physical disability queue

This queue is for people seeking a specially designed or adapted property suitable for those who are physically disabled, including wheelchair users. Applications are subject to an assessment by, and recommendation from, the council's occupational therapy service or the children's occupational therapy service.

Eligible and qualifying applicants requiring specially designed or adapted sheltered housing will, if eligible, be registered on the older persons' housing queue.

Older persons housing queue

Anyone who is aged 55 years or over can apply for sheltered housing. A qualifying applicant will also be assessed if they are suitable for sheltered housing based on their ability to manage independently and without any risk to existing residents or staff. Based on the information submitted, it may also be decided which schemes would be appropriate.

Sheltered housing is designed to help residents maintain an independent and active lifestyle in a secure and friendly retirement community with the added security of an alarm service and sheltered housing officer for help and support.

Priority rehousing status

Under the Housing Allocation scheme, additional preference may be given to any application within any access queue which meets the criteria for 'priority rehousing' status. Priority rehousing status will usually be awarded to applications involving multiple needs and/ or where there is a serious and credible risk to the applicant's safety in their current accommodation.

**Applicants do not make direct applications to these queues

What size of property (number of bedrooms) do I require?

The size of property you are assessed as requiring will depend mainly upon the make up of your household e.g. how many people live in it, the number of children, their ages and gender.

The following will apply in assessing the number of bedrooms required by an applicant:

Property size guidelines

Single person households

Generally, single person households will be assessed as requiring self-contained studio flat accommodation. However, the following will be assessed as requiring self-contained one-bedroom accommodation:

- single people aged 60 or over.
- lone pregnant women and couples who are expecting their first child.
and
- single people with regular, established and demonstrable staying / visiting contact / access to their children following relationship breakdown, where it would be unreasonable to allocate a self-contained studio flat.

Other households

Thereafter one bedroom is required for:

- a couple.
- each unpartnered adult aged 21 years or more.
- each pair of adolescents aged 10-20 years of the same sex.
- each pair of children aged under 10 years regardless of sex.
- Where none of the above applies, a person aged 10-20 years will be paired with a child aged under 10 years of the same sex.
- Any remaining unpaired person will be allocated a separate bedroom.

These criteria may not be applied in specific circumstances where there are risk factors. Such decisions are taken by senior officers in the housing services team.

Notes

- (a) Other applicants requiring separate bedrooms for medical purposes (as recommended by the council's medical advisor) will be allocated separate bedrooms.
- (b) Where additional persons or family members are married or co-habiting they will be considered as a couple and assessed as requiring one bedroom more than the recorded needs of the main household.
- (c) A bathroom or shower room is defined as a separate room. A WC may be a room on its own or incorporated within a bathroom. Under the points scheme a maximum of 15 allocation points can be awarded for applicants sharing a bathroom and WC.
- (d) Single person households living in bedsit or studio accommodation are considered to be adequately housed unless they lack or share facilities.

Households requiring family-sized accommodation may be offered more than one unit of accommodation if the properties are so located as to enable the family to live together in practical terms.

Nominating your application for an offer of accommodation

An offer of accommodation which is made following a nomination to another landlord. A property in the private rented sector for homeless households or other agency counts as a final offer of accommodation and a discharge of the council's homeless duty.

Nominating your application for a property

Only one nomination will be made to you.

If we are considering nominating you to a RSL (otherwise known as a housing association) you may be visited or contacted by an officer to discuss and verify the information you have provided on your application form and any additional information you may have provided since. We may also need to see any original documents in support of your application. The nomination letter will set out details of the property, the rent and who the RSL landlord is. The RSL will contact you to arrange a viewing and/or interview.

Consequences of refusing a nomination

We aim, where possible, to meet applicants' area preferences and take into account any other relevant factors when we decide whether to nominate you but they may be overridden due to the supply and availability of accommodation.

You are advised to give the nomination serious consideration even if it is not in one of your preferred areas or does not fully meet your preferences. In accordance with the council's Housing Allocation scheme, **we will normally make applicants only one suitable nomination of housing and, if you refuse your application will be cancelled.** Any failure to view the property or attend an interview within the RSL's timescales may result in the nomination being withdrawn and classed as a refusal.

For applicants on the homeless queue, refusal of a suitable nomination may end the council's duty to provide temporary accommodation. Cancellation of temporary accommodation will result in applicants having to find their own accommodation.

Furthermore, for a period of two years following your refusal of any nomination of suitable accommodation, any application you make during that period to be registered on the council's housing queues will be refused unless there has been a material change in your circumstances so as to make the earlier nomination clearly unreasonable in the light of your changed circumstances.

Other housing options for housing association tenants

Mutual exchange scheme: swap with another tenant anywhere in the UK

This scheme helps existing housing association tenants move to another home by swapping their properties with each other. You can swap homes provided both households agree to move, and you have each received written consent from your landlord before you move, which can only be refused on certain grounds.

To find someone to swap homes with, you can register for free with www.homeswapper.co.uk. If your landlord is a partner of homeswapper the service is free, otherwise there is a small administration fee. RSL tenants should check with their landlords if they have partnered with other suppliers.

Sponsored moves scheme

If you are an RLS tenant living in a family sized home and would like to move to a smaller property, we may be able to help you. If you are eligible, you may be entitled to receive £2500 for each bedroom you release (up to £7500)*. We may also be able to arrange to pay for your removals and decorate the property. You can also choose where to live and also the type of property. You may also be entitled to incentives if you move under the Seaside and Country Homes Scheme (detailed below)

If you would like to complete the Sponsored Move form, please contact the housing information and advice team on 020 8891 7409.

* terms and conditions apply

Seaside and Country Homes scheme: tenants aged 60 plus

The Seaside & Country Homes offers older tenants of London's councils and RSL the opportunity to move away from the hustle and bustle of the city by moving to the coast or countryside .

You must be 60 years old or over, be capable of independent living, and meet the eligibility criteria. Priority is usually given to tenants giving up a larger home.

To apply, complete an online registration form at www.housingmoves.org. If you are a housing association tenant, please contact your landlord for assistance.

For further information about the Seaside and Country Homes scheme (including how to apply if you are unable to apply online) please contact your landlord for advice or the Greater London Authority (GLA) or visit their website at www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/housing-and-land/renting/seaside-country-homes

(08450 21 20 20, www.housingmoves.org)

Your rights

Your right to confidentiality

All information you provide will be treated in the strictest confidence and will only be disclosed to third parties (e.g. your doctor) if it assists your application.

Your right to information

Under the Data Protection Act 1998, you have the right to see any information we hold about you. There is a fee for this service.

Once you are registered, you have a right to be informed of any major policy change which affects the housing queues.

You also have a right to request a copy of the council's housing allocation scheme, which is also available on the council's website:
www.richmond.gov.uk .

In accordance with the Housing Act 1996 s166A(9) you have the right to request information to enable you to assess how your application is likely to be treated under the scheme including whether you fall within one or more of the groups entitled to reasonable preference and whether accommodation is likely to be allocated to you and, if so, how long this is likely to take.

You can also request that the council informs you of any decision about the facts of your application which is likely to be taken into account when considering whether to allocate accommodation.

Your right to request reviews

You have the right to request the council to review certain decisions made under the housing allocation scheme. These rights will be notified to you in any correspondence communicating a reviewable decision, with details of any timescales in which a review must be requested and the administrative arrangements for requesting a review.

Your right to complain

You have the right to be treated fairly, as do our staff. If you are not satisfied with the way your application has been handled, you have a right to complain. The council is committed to dealing with all complaints and as swiftly as possible in accordance with the council's complaints procedure.

Further information and contact details

Contacts

Housing Information and Advice Team

Postal address: Housing Information and Advice Team
Civic Centre
44 York Street
Twickenham
TW1 3BZ

Visiting: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday: 10am-4pm
Wednesday: 1-4pm

Housing assessment section

General enquiries regarding:

- General needs queue
- Homeless queue
- Homelessness prevention
- Finding private housing
- Older persons housing queue
- Sponsored moves (downsizing from a larger home)
- Physical disability queue
- Supported queue
- Social care queue

Phone: 020 8891 7409

Email: housingadvice@richmond.gov.uk

Information and leaflets are available on the website:

www.richmond.gov.uk/housing

