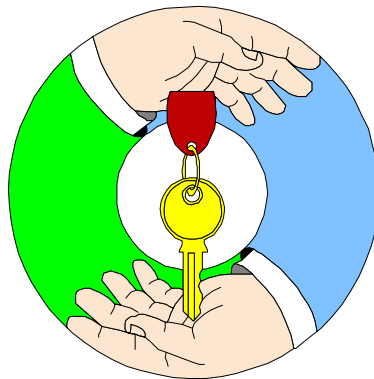


A GUIDE TO:

Keyways

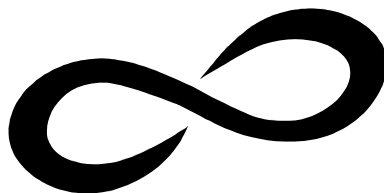
CHOICE BASED LETTINGS SCHEME

For People with Learning Disabilities



by

**Northamptonshire Community
Housing & Support Network**



Plain English Version

Date:- 5th April 2011

HOW THE SCHEME WORKS

Keyways Choice Based Lettings Scheme

Choice based lettings is a new approach that Local Housing Authorities use to allocate their social housing properties for rent. Rather than local council's deciding which housing to offer you can choose which properties you are interested in yourself.

Of the 7 Local Housing Authorities in Northamptonshire 6 operate Choice Based Lettings schemes, that's all of them other than South Northants District Council.

The Choice Based Lettings Schemes operating in Northamptonshire are:-

- ❖ Keyways – Covering Corby, Wellingborough and Kettering areas
- ❖ HomeChoice-Link – covering Northampton and Daventry areas
- ❖ Nene Valley Home Choice – covering East Northants area

How Choice Based Lettings works

On such schemes available properties are advertised each week and people can tell the scheme which properties they would like to be considered for. This is known as bidding. People may only 'bid for a property after they have registered with their local council for housing. Once their housing application has been accepted then they are able to bid.

Advertising Properties

Properties are advertised each week in various ways. On the Keyways scheme they use:-

- the internet,
- local customer service centres, and
- local Libraries

The Keyways Scheme covers Kettering, Corby and Wellingborough Areas and any body wanting to live in these areas can apply.

The Housing Keyways Can Help to Find

Keyways can help you to find 3 different sorts of housing, these are

- (a) Social rented housing

- (b) Private rented housing
- (c) Low cost home ownership – or shared ownership

Choice based lettings schemes mostly have social housing to rent available but some, like Keyways, also offer other sorts as shown above.

Some schemes also offer specialist housing such as Sheltered Housing. This is usually only available to people over 55 years, and there are often restrictions on pets in these properties.

How Keyways Decides who to help

When people apply Keyways decide whose housing need is the most urgent and who to help first. This is known ‘prioritising’. To help them decide whose need is the highest Keyways apply a banding to each person’s application. Banding is where applications are split into different groups depending on the level of applicant’s housing need.

Keyways have 4 bands, these are:-

Band A	For people who have an emergency housing need , for example people may:- have lost their home due to fire or flood; be living in an over crowded home; be leaving hospital or residential care; or leaving supported housing and are ready for independent living.
Band B	For people whose housing need is urgent , such as; those with children inappropriately sharing; those with a permanent medical condition which is badly affected by their present housing; the landlord has asked a person to leave; people are under occupying a social rented home; those who are intentionally homeless
Band C	People with non urgent housing need such as, those with at least one dependant; sharing a home with other people; those with not enough bedrooms for their household; those who split up from their partner but are still living together; those needing to give or receive non essential care or support; those who have a house in poor condition and wish to move
Band D	People with No Current Housing Need such as those living with family or friends who have their own room

Time to Find a New home

The amount of time it takes to find a new home will depend on the band people are in and the date they applied for housing. In deciding who should be prioritised Keyways will first look at the band then at how long they have been registered on the scheme. For those in band A, the scheme aims to help them to find a home within 8 weeks, for every other band it's as fast as possible but may be a long time, particularly for those in band D.

The Type of Social Housing you can apply for

The type of property you can 'bid' for depends on your household's size. At present people who are single can apply for :-

- Bedsits
- 1 bedroom bungalows
- 1 bedroom flats
- 1 bedroom houses
- 2 bedroom bungalows
- 2 bedroom flats (without a garden)

Registering with Keyways

To join Keyways you need to register with the scheme. To do this you can :-

- (a) complete a paper application form or
- (b) apply on line via the internet – at www.keyways.org.uk
- (c) or apply over the telephone

Once you apply your application will be:-

- (1) Banded
- (2) the date of application noted and
- (3) you will be notified about the type of properties they can apply for

Bidding Rules

Once you are notified that your application is accepted you will be able to start bidding. You can do this by:-

- (a) going to the local council office or
- (b) going to the website
- (c) or phoning the office

Keyways put new properties on the website each week, usually just for 1 week. Properties go on at 12 midnight on a Wednesday night and are removed from the website on the following Tuesday night. This allows 6 days for people to bid for homes.

You can only make 2 bids per week. And how successful you are depends how far down the list you are. When bidding on the website, applicants are able to see what number their bid is against a particular home. If the bid is a long way down the list you may choose to remove the bid and have a go for something else.

Help with Bidding

If you need help to place a bid, or to even apply, scheme staff at the local council offices will help. You can be supported to bid, or they could be nominated to bid on your behalf if you choose.

Other Sorts of Homes Applicants can apply for via Keyways

Most of the housing Keyways allocate is social housing, these are homes offered for rent by local councils or housing associations. The Keyways scheme also lets people apply for private rented housing or low cost home ownership properties.

If you apply for these homes via Keyways your application will not be banded as before. Instead the Council will collate all the 'bids' for private housing and send them to the Landlord who will then contact chosen applicant directly.

Keyways insist that all Private Landlords using their scheme must first be registered with the East Midlands Landlords Accreditation Scheme (EMLAS).

Getting a home via the Council Outside of Keyways

Some times where people have very complex needs local council's do offer an alternative way of helping people find housing. This may include directly requesting Housing Associations to develop specifically designed homes. In these cases priority is often given to people applying who have a local connection.

Hall & Wood, in their report of 2008, recommend that this should happen as well as people being enabled to use the Choice Based lettings scheme not instead. This is to ensure vulnerable people have access to the same housing choice as others and are not directed to just one particular type of housing, such as supported housing.

Guidance for People with Learning Disabilities When Registering and Using Choice Based Letting Schemes

Important

Always apply to the Local Council for housing even if you think they may not be able to help, or if you think your application will be in a low band. For even with the present banding arrangement if you receive help to apply your application may be placed in a higher band and you may get the type of home you wish for.

Some other important suggestions

When registering for housing with the Local Council it is important to:-

1. Clearly describe your full housing situation on the application form, and where you find this hard to do, to find help to support you to do this
2. Tell the Council about your disability and how this affects your life
3. Tell them about any care or support needs you have to help you live independently
4. speak to the scheme first before applying to let them know about your circumstances and that you may need help to apply

When using the Choice Based Lettings Scheme it is a good idea to:

- A. ask for help to use the process
- B. think about where, with whom & how you would like to live before starting to 'bid' for properties
- C. think about how much you can afford to pay for housing & how you'll be able to cover the running costs of your home – bills etc
- D. find out about Housing Benefit, if you will be able to qualify and how much money you might get to help you pay your rent
- E. Also think about the kind of help you think you might need to live happily & safely in your home

- F. Find out about possible people or organisations that may be able to help you with your care or support needs
- G. Ensure you have found someone to support you to go to viewings, if you need help with this

It is important you think about all of these things before you begin bidding. Because if you are successful and find a home you like, you will need to make these arrangements and move in very quickly.

About Housing Benefit

If you find some where to rent you may not have enough money coming in to cover the full cost of the home, this is known as 'rent money'. To help with this you can apply for Housing Benefit. This can be very complicated so you will probably need help to understand this and complete an application form.

If in any doubt seek help. Infact it I would recommend you do this as Housing Benefit forms and rules have stumped the best of us, and with the Government planning to change the rules over the next few years and months this will make it even more confusing.

Most Local Council's will provide extra help to explain how to apply if you tell them you need this. Some Council's will even send staff to your home to go through the whole process with you and your family or supporters. Indeed many Council's will also provide a home visit to help you apply for housing as well. Don't be afraid to seek all the help you need.

Local Housing Allowance is paid to people applying for Housing Benefit who are renting in the Private sector. The rules for this are different to those for general Housing Benefit which is paid to Council or Housing Association tenants.

Best wishes on your housing journey

Marion Turner
Learning Disability Housing Project Coordinator
5th April 2011

Appendix 1

Information about the Housing Allocation Scheme in South Northants

Both South Northants Homes (SNH) and South Northamptonshire Council operate separate housing registers and you can be considered for vacant properties via either. Under arrangements that South Northants Homes have with The Council, 75% of their vacant properties are allocated via the Council's waiting list and 25% are allocated via South Northants Homes own housing register.

To be eligible for rehousing you have to apply and be accepted onto either of the Housing Registers. Both the Council and South Northants Homes use a banding system to assess priority and housing need. Properties are then offered to households identified as having the greatest housing need.

As South Northants Homes make limited allocations via it's own housing register you are advised to apply to the Council. However if you are already a tenant of South Northants Homes and wish to move to another of their properties (i.e a transfer) you must apply directly to them and should only apply to the Council if you also wish to be considered for rehousing with another Registered Social Landlord within the district.

Application forms for both South Northants Homes and South Northamptonshire Council's housing registers can be obtained from the address below or by downloading from the website.

South Northants Homes

Wood Burcote House, Burcote Road,
Towcester, Northants, NN12 6TF

Tel: 08454 606 888

Fax: 08454 607 888 **Email:**

housing@southnorthantshomes.co.uk

Appendix 2 – List of Definitions (what words mean)

Sheltered Housing

Sheltered Housing is housing where people choose to live in a communal way and receive support, of a varying amount, to live. Some people live in separate homes that are very close to each other & others live in a block of flats or units and share some common facilities.

Intentionally homeless

This is where someone makes or causes themselves to become homeless. Those who become homeless because of someone else's actions or as a result of an accident are none as 'unintentionally homeless'

Under Occupying

Where a person or household has less people in their home than the number of bedrooms available, this is known as under occupying. Because of the high demand for housing many Council's and Housing Associations try to ensure this does not happen. Where it does they try to encourage people to think about moving to a home which is the right size for the household.

Independent living

This is where people choose to live in the community or local area in their own home which may be rented or bought, they may live alone or it can be shared with others. But part of it will be for their own use and no one is allowed in that part of the property without the person's permission.

Inappropriately sharing

This is where a family has children of different sexes. At a certain age Social Housing Landlords have guidelines about the age at which it is ok for children of opposite sexes to share their bedroom. When one or more children reach this age they are said to be 'inappropriately sharing' and the family can apply to the Council for re-housing if they are no other bedrooms available in their current home.