

# CHOICE CBL BASED LETTINGS in Oxford

## User Guide

For easy reference, complete your details below

My housing register number:

My band:

My registration date:

**REMEMBER!** You need your application number,  
your date of birth and the property reference number to bid

### Contact details

Website: [www.oxfordshirehomechoice.org.uk](http://www.oxfordshirehomechoice.org.uk)

Bidding line: **T: 0800 027 7889**

Text: **T: 07781 486969**

Oxford City Council (Housing Needs Team): **T: 01865 252858**



# How to Use this Guide

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## Jargon buster

### Choice based lettings

A way of letting social housing by advertising vacant properties.

### General register

The waiting list held by Oxford City Council for people over the age of 16 who are not current tenants of Oxford City Council or one of our partner RSLs and who are eligible for an allocation of social housing. This includes people to whom Oxford City Council owes a duty under the homelessness legislation.

### Transfer register

The waiting list for people living in the city who want to move home and who are secure or introductory tenants of Oxford City Council or assured or starter tenants of one of its partner housing associations.

### Statutory homeless

Someone who the council has accepted as homeless under the terms of the Housing Act 1996 and who has been placed in temporary accommodation.

### Eligible

Entitled to be offered social housing.

### Housing association

Housing associations, housing cooperatives and housing companies that are registered with the Tenant Services Agency (TSA).

### Social Housing

Low cost housing that you rent or part rent/part buy from a council, housing association, charity or faith organisation.

### ORAH

Social housing in the City owned by the Council and its partner housing associations is let through the Oxford Register for Affordable Housing (ORAH). It is administered by Oxford City Council and managed by Oxford City Council and its partners.

### Mutual exchange

A way of social housing tenants swapping homes. Any proposed mutual exchange has to be approved by both landlords.

### Bidding

The way you tell us you are interested in a property. You must be eligible for that type of property. It is not a money bid.

### Registration date

The date your application was received.

### Sub-regional lettings

A selection of vacancies in areas outside Oxford City that you can also bid for without having to register again for that area.

### Local connection

Most housing vacancies will be advertised as giving priority to those applicants with a local connection to the district. A district connection is allowed when one or more of the following is true:

- You are a permanent resident in Oxford City and you chose the accommodation
- You were previously a resident of Oxford City as a matter of choice and this was:
  - At least six out of the last twelve months or
  - Three out of the last five years.
- You are permanently employed in the district for a minimum of fifteen hours a week. Proof of employment must be provided.
- You have close family ties with Oxford City and your relatives have lived in the city for at least five years.

### Sub-regional connection

For some vacancies equal priority will be given to applicants registered in the Oxfordshire sub-region (Oxford, Vale of White Horse, Cherwell and South Oxfordshire).

# Welcome to Oxfordshire Homechoice

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*Oxfordshire Homechoice helps you look for social housing for rent, affordable housing for sale, and homes available to exchange. Properties available to let will be advertised, and rather than the Council deciding which housing to offer you, you can choose the properties you're interested in.*

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## Where can I see properties advertised?

- On the internet at [www.oxfordshirehomechoice.org.uk](http://www.oxfordshirehomechoice.org.uk)
- In a free newsletter, "Direction Home", published fortnightly that you can pick up throughout the City. There should be a list with this guide

## Who can bid for properties?

- Anyone on the general housing register (**General Register applicant**)
- Anyone who has been accepted as statutorily homeless by Oxford City Council (**Homeless applicant**)
- Any social housing tenant of Oxford City Council or its partner housing associations on the Oxford Register for Affordable Housing who wants to move home (**Transfer applicant**)
- Applicants registered with neighbouring councils in Oxfordshire, for selected properties only

## How can I bid for a property?

- Online using the [website](#)
- Using our automated **24 hour phone bidline**
- By sending us a **text message**
- **In person** at an Oxford City Council or partner Housing Association office (if you are unable to use any of the other ways of bidding)

# How to use the scheme

## Step 1: Register with Oxford City Council

### How To Register *(if you have not already done so)*

For details of who can register, contact us, or look at the Allocations Scheme at [www.oxford.gov.uk](http://www.oxford.gov.uk)

You will need to complete an application form, which you can pick up from Oxford City Council and ORAH partnership landlords in Oxford or you can request a form by contacting the Housing Needs Team. Use an application form to apply for a:

- Council or Housing Association rented home
- shared ownership property

You will be asked to provide proof of your identity for yourself and any other members of your household, and any other proofs necessary to verify your circumstances.

See the Contacts Sheet for how to contact us – it gives office addresses and phone numbers.

When you register we will tell you:

- Your housing application number
- Your band
- Your registration date
- Whether you have a local connection
- The size of property you can bid for

### How are applications put in order of priority?

General and transfer register applications for rented accommodation will be assessed and placed in one of five bands (see page 6). Within each band applications will be placed in date order, with the application with the oldest date having the highest priority. The date that is used is usually the date you registered unless you have been placed in Band 1, when the date used is the date you qualified to be in that band.

### Time Limited Priority

If your application is given priority because of an assessment of your accommodation by the council's Environmental Health team, or for health or welfare or other exceptional need, there may be a limit on the length of time you can remain in your higher band. At the end of the time allowed your application will be reviewed to decide if your time in the higher band should be extended or your priority should be reduced.

## Step 2: Choosing properties

### How are properties advertised?

Properties are advertised each fortnight

- on the website at [www.oxfordshirehomechoice.org.uk](http://www.oxfordshirehomechoice.org.uk)
- in the "Direction Home" newsletter that is available in a variety of locations (see the list)

Properties appear on the website on Wednesday, and are displayed for 13 days, normally ending on Monday at midnight. The closing date will always be shown at the top of the property newsletter and on the web site.

If you do not have access to the internet and are not able to pick up a newsletter (because you have mobility problems and have difficulty leaving your home, for example) please contact us for some help. We can even post a newsletter to you in exceptional cases.

### The adverts

The adverts tell you:

- the name of the landlord
- the address (the website has a link to a map)
- the property size and type
- the rent and any other charges
- other features of the property such as parking, gardens or adaptations.

The advert also tells you if there are any requirements applicants must have, such as:

- minimum age
- which band or type of applicant has priority
- their level of disability.

## Step 3: Expressing your interest in a property or “bidding”

Bidding isn't about money. All it means is that you want to be offered the property or properties we are advertising.

You can only bid for properties where you match what the advert asks for. For example, if the property advert gives a minimum age. If you try to bid and you are below the minimum age it will not be accepted.

In order to bid you will need:

- Your housing register reference number
- The date of birth of the main applicant for your housing application (for security)
- The property reference number of any property you want

You will be allowed three bids for social rented properties plus any number of shared ownership homes. If you change your mind you can go back later and change them.

### How to bid on the website

*On the web site you can search for properties being offered and see full details about those properties. You can also make your bids, withdraw bids, find out if you are allowed to bid and what your queue position is.*

How to bid on the website

#### Step 1

Type [www.oxfordshirehomechoice.org.uk](http://www.oxfordshirehomechoice.org.uk) in to the address bar of your Internet browser then click on Oxford City Council.

#### Step 2

Click the **'Login/My Account'** option and enter your reference number and date of birth. Your login will be confirmed and details of any bids made will be shown.

#### Step 3

Choose a search option from the **'Actions'** box. Select your search criteria from the **'Property Search'** page (for example you may wish to search for a particular size of property).

#### Step 4

A list of properties matching your search will be displayed. If you are able to bid for a property then an **'Apply Now'** button will be displayed. When you bid your current queue position will be shown but note that this can change as other people bid. If you are not eligible, then the reason you are not eligible will be shown.

#### Step 5

If you want to be offered a property, click **'Apply now'**. You will see the property details and be asked to confirm your bid. When you confirm your bid, you will be told that your bid has been recorded.

### How to bid using a text message

*You can bid for properties using SMS (text) messages using a mobile phone.*

**Charges:** SMS charges vary depending on who your mobile phone provider is.

In this example the registration number is 12345, the date of birth is 16th March 1975, the first property ref. number is 336699 and the second property ref. number is 445566.

#### Step 1

Start a new text message on a mobile phone.

#### Step 2

Type: Your housing register reference number followed by a space  
**12345**

#### Step 3

Type: Your date of birth (using forward slashes as shown and all four digits for the year) followed by a space  
**12345 16/3/1975**

#### Step 4

Type: The first property reference number followed by a space  
**12345 16/3/1975 336699**

#### Step 5

Type: The second property reference number followed by a space  
**12345 16/3/1975 336699 445566**

#### Step 6

Send the SMS (text) message to  
**07781 486969**

#### Step 7

You will receive a text message confirming that your bid(s) have been made or telling you that your bid has failed.

## Bidding on the phone

Call our 24hr automated bid line number 0800 027 7889. You will not be charged for this call if you are calling from a landline, but if you call from a mobile this rate will vary depending on your service provider.

You can make bids, withdraw a bid, find out if you are able to bid and what your current queue position is.

Bidding using the telephone system is done using the number keypad on your telephone. As well as using the numbers on the number keypad you will also need to use the # key (found below 9 on most phones).

**Start by calling the bidding line on 0800 027 7889** and follow the instructions you hear

### What to do

Press the number on the keypad to choose the language that you want (e.g. press **1** for English)

Press **1** on the keypad to confirm

Enter your six digit housing register reference followed by **#**

Press **1** on the keypad to confirm

Enter the day of the month when you were born followed by **#**

- For example if you were born on 15th May 1952 you would enter **1** **5** **#**

Then enter the month you were born followed by **#**

- If you were born in May you would enter **0** **5** **#**

Then enter the year you were born followed by **#**

- For example **1** **9** **5** **2** **#**

### Then choose what you want to do:

To make a bid press **1**

To review and / or cancel bids that you have already made press **2**

To exit press **3**

### To make a bid

Enter the reference number of the property that you want to bid for followed by **#**. The number is on the property advert.

The reference number that you entered will be read back to you. If you are not allowed to bid you will be told why, if you are allowed you will be told your queue position.

Press **1** to confirm your bid, press **2** to change the property reference number

You can then make further bids, review your bids **2** or exit **3**

### Reviewing your bids

If you want to cancel or review a bid enter **1**, **2** or **3** depending on which property you want to go to. The property reference number and queue position for this property will be read out to you.

Press **1** on the keypad to cancel your bid

To review or cancel another bid press **1**

Press **2** on the keypad to exit

If you need help with bidding, contact us by phone or come into a council office or ORAH partner office.

## Step 4: what happens when bidding closes?

### Priority order

- All bids received will be put in priority order (band order) to produce a list of applicants for each property.
- When there is more than one bidder from the same band, people with local connection to Oxford will normally be given priority over people with no local connection in the same band. This does not apply if the property is advertised across the sub-region.

We also choose between people in the same band by putting them in date order.

### Landlord checks

The landlord of the property may carry out any outstanding checks, (e.g. rent account, household circumstances).

If your name is at the top of the priority list, you will normally be invited to view the property, unless there are reasons why you cannot be offered the property, for example:

- you have rent arrears
- the Council or your Landlord is taking legal action against you for breaking your tenancy conditions
- there are lettings targets affecting that property.

You will be told the reason. If we cannot offer the property to the top of the list, we will move to the next applicant and so on.

## Step 6: Feedback

We publish information about the outcome for each shortlist.

- the number of applicants that bid
- the band and date of the top applicants
- the type of applicant bidding

This information is published in the newsletter and is in the Short List Results page on the website.

This information can give you a better idea of how popular a particular property or area is and how long you would normally have to wait. You can then decide whether to look for other types of property or areas where you may not have to wait as long, or look at other housing options.

## Step 5: Offers, viewings and tenancies

### Offers

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

If you are at the top of more than one list, we will decide which property to nominate you for. You are likely to be offered the property which will be ready to let at the earliest date. We will make every effort to discuss this with you first.

### Viewings

A viewing will be arranged soon after the end of the bidding round, so make sure that you will be available and that we have up to date contact details for you. You will be shown round by a member of the Landlord's staff, who will be able to answer your questions about the property and the organisation.

Some landlords may invite more than one applicant to view a property at the same time, but the property will always be offered first to the applicant with the highest priority.

### Signing the tenancy agreement and moving in

If you accept the property you will be told when you can move in. The Landlord will give you an appointment to sign the tenancy agreement and collect the keys a few days before the tenancy starts.

### Refusals

If you refuse an offer, it may affect other applicants. There is a shortage of social housing in Oxford and we cannot offer housing to everyone who requests it. Viewing a property you have no intention of accepting wastes time and will increase the wait for other people who are interested in being offered the property.

**Further details** relating to this can be found in the Council's full Allocation Scheme

# Priority scheme – who qualifies?

## BAND 1

- 1.1 Exceptional circumstances, where there is an immediate risk to health and safety, complex needs, 'place of safety' cases or other emergency needs
- 1.2 Council or housing association tenants in the sub-region under-occupying by two or more bedrooms
- 1.3 Decants and other housing management moves
- 1.4 Successor tenants who need to move to a more suitable property
- 1.5 A Prohibition/demolition notice has been issued by the Environmental Health department
- 1.6 Households where the level of overcrowding exceeds the statutory limit

## BAND 2

- 2.1 Urgent social or welfare needs
- 2.2 Urgent health or disability needs
- 2.3 Council or housing association tenants in the sub-region under-occupying by one bedroom
- 2.4 Applicants who have been assessed as ready to move on from supported accommodation
- 2.5 Applicants found to be homeless, in a priority need group and a duty to offer housing has been accepted
- 2.6 Families assessed as being 2 or more bedrooms short of their needs
- 2.7 Any applicant with two or more compoundable categories in Band 3

## BAND 3

- 3.1 Significant social or welfare needs
- 3.2 Significant health or disability needs
- 3.3 Applicants living in unsatisfactory housing: Level 1
- 3.4 Families assessed as being one bedroom short of their needs
- 3.5 Insecure tied accommodation
- 3.6 Insecure private rented accommodation
- 3.7 Homeless and not in a priority group\*
- 3.8 Any applicant who qualifies for at least two categories in Band 4

## BAND 4

- 4.1 Moderate social or welfare needs
- 4.2 Moderate health or disability needs
- 4.3 Applicants living in unsatisfactory housing: Level 2

## BAND 5

- 5.1 Applicants who are adequately housed
- 5.2 Applicants who have sufficient income or other financial resources
- 5.3 Nil priority (Applicants who are the subject of sanctions because of their behaviour)

**For further details see the full allocation scheme, available on the internet or from our offices (for a small charge).**

*\*This category is not compoundable*

(The details listed above are only intended as a guide. If you require further advice or would like to view the full Allocations Policy contact the Housing Needs Team).

## Advert Icon guide and description


The number of bedrooms in the property.

-  Studio Flat
-  One Bed
-  Two Bed
-  Three Bed
-  Three Bed Parlour House
-  Four Bed

 This property has a **garage**.


 This property has a **driveway** or other **off street parking**.

 There is no parking at all at this property.

 This property is fitted with a **personal assistance alarm**.

 There is **controlled entry** to this property.

 This property has no **gas supply**.


 This property has **exclusive use of a garden**, and you will be responsible for its maintenance.

 The **garden** at this property is **shared** with other households.

 The **garden** at this property is **shared with a neighbouring household**.


 This property has **no garden**.


 **Pets may be allowed** at this property, subject to the Landlord's permission.


 **Pets are not normally allowed** at this property. Contact the landlord to find out whether small pets may be accommodated.


### Mobility symbols


*These symbols tell you about adaptations to help disabled people live in the property.*

 There is **level access into and throughout** the property.

 This property has **wide door ways and the electric switches** have been placed to suit a disabled person.

 This property has **some disabled adaptations**. This can include a level access shower, or a stair lift, or a walk in bath. You should check the further details on the web-site advert or ask the landlord about the adaptations.

 This property has been **purpose built or fully adapted** for someone who uses a wheelchair indoors and outside.

 There is either a **lift** in this property or, there is a **communal lift** in the block.

Please check property details.


 Property has **stairs** (for adapted properties).

### Household symbols


*These symbols tell you about the people who can live in the property.*


 This is the **maximum age** of the eldest occupant.

 This is the **minimum age** of the youngest occupant.


 Preference will be given to **applicants of this age or older**.

### Sheltered housing

 **Sheltered housing:** for older people who have been assessed as having a support need.


 **Extra care sheltered housing:** for older people who have been assessed as having a need for extra care sheltered housing.


### Supported housing

 **Supported Housing:** for people who have been assessed as having a need for extra support.


### Bidding restrictions

*These symbols tell you about who will be given preference for properties advertised with these icons.*

 Preference will be given to applicants from the **band** shown.

 Preference will be given to **social housing tenants who have registered for a transfer**.

 Preference will be given to **applicants from the general waiting list**.

 Preference will be given to applicants who have been accepted as **statutorily homeless**.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## When can I bid?

Properties are advertised every two weeks starting on a Wednesday and ending at midnight on Monday two weeks later.

You can:

- bid for up to three rented properties at a time plus any number of shared ownership homes
- only bid for properties that you are eligible for
- change your bids anytime while the properties are being advertised

## Which properties can I bid for?

The symbols on the adverts show any rules about who is able to bid for a property. These are all shown in the icon guide on page 7.

## Minimum Age

For most properties, you have to be 18 to have a tenancy. Properties that have been designated for older people, will have age restrictions and these will be shown in the property details.

## What does Maximum Age mean?

A small number of supported housing properties have a maximum age limit (for example, projects for young people). This will be shown in the property advert.

## What are Disabled adapted properties?

Some homes have been adapted to make them suitable for people with physical disabilities. These properties are usually reserved for applicants where a member of the household has such a need. However, where there is nobody on the housing register with such a need, the property may be offered to the person with highest priority.

## Can I take my pet with me?

Some accommodation is not pet friendly and you should not bid if you have told us that you have a large pet or pets unless you can find another home for them. It is the decision of the landlord which pets are accepted.

## What is a direct match property?

Some properties are offered directly to applicants who

have very specific needs, for example for a high level of adaptations. We still show the property in the newsletter but no-one else can bid for it

## How do I know what size of property I can bid for?

When you register for housing you will be told the smallest and largest size of property you can bid for.

## Can I change my bid?

You can go back and check your queue position at any time during the two weeks. You can then decide whether to withdraw your bids and bid on other properties.

## How do I know where I am in the queue?

When you bid for a property, you can find out where you are in the shortlist for that property. This information is available on the website and telephone hotline. You then have the option to confirm or withdraw your bid.

## Is it better to bid early?

There is no advantage in placing your bid early. If you do make a bid early, be aware that your position in the queue may change if other people with higher priority bid after you.

## How many bids can I make?

You can bid for up to **three properties** for rent and any number of properties on the Housing Options list. You can withdraw bids and reuse them up to the end of that period.

## Contact ORAH Partners

### Oxford City Council

109- 113 St Aldate's, Oxford OX1 1DS  
T: 01865 252858

### A2 Dominion Housing Group

Godstow Court, 5 West Way, Botley,  
Oxford OX2 OGE  
T: 0800 432 0077

### Bromford Living Housing Group

Lloyd House, Sampson Road, Sparkbrook,  
Birmingham B11 1JZ  
T: 0845 6050604

### Catalyst Communities Housing Association

The Farmhouse, Nightingale Avenue,  
Blackbird Leys, Oxford OX4 7BU  
T: 01865 712244

### Home Group

Maxwell Hart Building, 612 Reading Road,  
Winnersh, Reading RG41 5HF  
T: 01189 777600

### Jephson Homes Housing Association

1 Warwick House, Edison Park, Hindle Way,  
Swindon SN3 3RB  
T: 01796 602 199

### Oxford Citizens Housing Association

244 Barns Road, Cowley, Oxford OX4 3RW  
T: 01865 773000

### Soha Housing

Royal Scot House, 99 Station Road,  
Didcot, Oxon OX11 7NN  
T: 01235 515900 F: 01235 515945

### Thames Valley Housing Association

Premier House, 52 London Road,  
Twickenham, London TW1 3RP  
T: 020 5607 0607

## Top tips for successful bidding!

### ■ Don't be afraid to ask for help

If you don't understand or want guidance, get in touch

### ■ Check the adverts every fortnight

### ■ Do not bid for properties you do not really want

### ■ Check your bids and change them if you are not high enough

### ■ Be realistic! Read the feedback table and use our information about where the properties are to help you decide

If you have questions about how the scheme applies to you, or about bidding for properties, you can contact staff at Oxford City Council, or your landlord if you are already a social housing tenant in Oxford. See the contacts sheet or click on 'Contact Us' on the website.

If you need a larger print copy,  
audiotape or other format of this  
publication, please contact us

Translations available

অনুবাদের ব্যবস্থা আছে  
提供有翻譯本  
तरजमे उपलब्ध हैं  
उत्तममे मिल सकते हन  
ترجمہ دستیاب ہے

www.oxford.gov.uk



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**Housing Needs Team**

St Aldates Chamber, St Aldates, OXFORD OX1 1DS

July 2009

