

Homesearch

your home, your choice

Membership Information Guide

Your guide to the
WDH lettings service



Membership Information Guide

Contents

What you need to know	3
Finding a home of your choice with WDH Homesearch	4
Section 1 - Your questions answered	6
Section 2 - Homesearch membership restrictions	14
Section 3 - Homesearch bandings	17
Section 4 - Where you can view available properties	28
Section 5 - How you can place an expression of interest	29

What you need to know...

WDH let their properties through Homesearch.

The scheme gives applicants more say in where they want to live. WDH properties that are available will be widely advertised on a weekly basis on www.wdhomesearch.co.uk, at service access points (SAPs) and other local outlets.

Applicants need to become members of Homesearch before they can start applying for properties.

All members will be put into a specific group, known as a band, based on their housing needs. Members will be sent a letter with a membership number and their band.

Members can express an interest in up to three different properties a week where they meet the advertised local lettings conditions. However, there are guidelines which may mean that some people will not be able to participate in the scheme. For example, if they are subject to enforcement action for their current home. We will write and advise them of this and what needs to be done before they can take part.

This leaflet is intended to be a simple guide to the scheme. The policy can be found on www.wdhomesearch.co.uk.

Now turn the page for the simple steps to finding a home through Homesearch.

Finding a home of your choice with WDH Homesearch

The Homesearch scheme is easy to use. By following these steps you can look for a home.

1. Apply to join Homesearch

Complete an application form. You will become a member of Homesearch from the date your completed form is received by Homesearch.

2. Search for properties

Every week we will advertise all available properties. The advertisement will include details of each property and who is eligible to apply for it (Letting Conditions).

You can see our available properties:

- on www.wdhomeSearch.co.uk; and
- at our SAPs and other local outlets.

3. Express an interest for a property

You can express an interest in up to three properties that you are eligible for in each weekly cycle:

- on www.wdhomeSearch.co.uk;
- at a SAP; or
- by phoning 0344 9 020202.

If you are successful, we will contact you as soon as possible after the advertising cycle's closing date (advertising cycle is explained on page 9). If not you should continue searching during the following week.

Once you have accepted a property your Homesearch membership will be cancelled.

Applicants should make sure they only express an interest in properties they would like to live in. WDH will suspend membership where two reasonable offers of accommodation have been refused within a 12 month period.

Want to know more? Read on to have your questions about Homesearch answered.

Section 1 - Your questions answered

What is Homesearch?

Homesearch is how properties, owned and managed by WDH, are let in the WDH areas. Other housing providers also advertise some of their properties through Homesearch.

Where are properties advertised?

Available properties will be advertised in the following ways:

- on www.wdhomeSearch.co.uk; and
- at SAPs and other local outlets.

Once you are a member of the scheme, you will only be considered for properties you have expressed an interest in.

Will all of your available properties be let through Homesearch?

Occasionally there may be reasons where we need to do a direct let on other properties, but the majority of our properties will be advertised through Homesearch.

What is a direct let?

This is when a property is not let through Homesearch because it is required for one of the following reasons:

- emergency accommodation;
- transit / decant accommodation;
- a WDH tenant who is in a property in a redevelopment or regeneration area;
- to meet the partnership working arrangements agreed with Wakefield Council;
- to resolve a management issue; or
- to meet a special housing need.

Do I need to belong to the scheme to express an interest in a property?

Yes, the scheme is only open to members. To be eligible to join you must be:

- over 16 and requiring family type accommodation;
- over 17;
- single and 16 or over who are looked after or are owed a statutory duty by Wakefield Council; or
- deemed to be eligible or qualifying person as set out in Section 12 of the Homesearch Policy.

You must complete a membership form, which will enable us to assess if you are eligible to join the scheme.

It is important that you let us know if you are related to any Board member, or WDH employee on your application form.

If eligible, you will be sent a membership number and you will be able to view and express an interest for any advertised properties where you meet the required letting conditions.

What if I have difficulty completing the membership form?

We can provide assistance to people who need help completing the form or who have language or literacy difficulties. A home visit may also be arranged for people with a disability or severe medical condition.

Is everyone allowed to join the scheme?

There are guidelines which may mean that some people will not be able to join or participate in the scheme. Further details are shown in the next section of this guide, 'Homesearch Membership Restrictions'.

Can I be considered for any properties that are advertised?

Once you become a member you will be placed in a band based on your housing need, which, along with the Local Lettings Strategy (LLS), tells you which properties you can apply for (see what other restrictions there are on page 9).

What are the bands?

Details of the bands are shown in the section 'Homesearch Bandings' which begins on page 17 of this guide.

How will members who express an interest be placed in order?

Our simple banding system reflects the housing needs of the members in each band. Within the band, members will be placed in date order of membership. If your circumstances change and you move up into a higher priority, your band date will be the date that your higher priority was awarded. Any preference to certain members is then applied, as set out in the property advert and LLS.

Where will Homesearch advertise available properties?

Vacant properties will be advertised in weekly cycles on our website. For more details, please see the section 'Where You Can View Available Properties' on page 28 of this guide.

What is the advertising cycle?

It is the period of time when properties are advertised and members can submit their expressions of interest. The advertising cycle will begin on Wednesday at 10.05 am when the properties have been advertised and will end at 10 am the following Wednesday. Additional properties may be added to the cycle up to 4.30 pm on Fridays.

What rent will I pay?

In our advertisements we include the rent for the property which is the target or affordable rent. If you are a WDH Assured Protected Tenant and are successful in your expression of interest in another WDH property, any target rent may be reduced.

What other restrictions are there?

Other restrictions used are the Letting Conditions. They will let members know who will be able to express an interest in the property. The Letting Conditions are based on the LLS, which have been developed locally to make the best use of the housing stock for their communities. When a property becomes available the LLS will be used to set the Letting Conditions for the advert. This will include the band, the type and size of family who can apply and any preferencing. There may be other restrictions depending on the type of property such as age restriction.

What if I see more than one property I'm interested in?

As a member you will be able to make up to three expressions of interest in each advertising cycle for properties, but you must meet the letting conditions. You will need to place them in order of preference - first, second and third choice.

How does the Homesearch Team decide who has been successful?

Once the advertising cycle has closed, a list will be prepared for each property which will show details of all the members who expressed an interest in it. The list will place members initially in band order and then date order, starting with the earliest membership start date or priority award date. For further details on priority awards see page 17. Any preference set out in the property advert and LLS will then be applied.

Next to each member will be their order of preference for that property. If you are the successful member on more than one property then we will use your order of preference to decide which property to allocate to you.

How will I know if I have been successful?

If you have been successful, a member of the Homesearch Team will contact you as soon as possible after the advertising cycle has closed. You should continue making expressions of interest for properties you are interested in during the following advertising cycles if you are not contacted. Before we offer you a property, certain checks will need to be carried out.

What checks will be carried out?

Before any offer of accommodation is made, applicants and their partners will be checked to make sure that they are considered eligible, that they still qualify to be a member of the scheme, and that they meet WDH's charitable objectives. Before any offer of a property is made checks will be carried out on your:

- conduct in your present and previous accommodation,
- housing history,
- ability to sustain a tenancy; and
- potential support requirements.

A home visit may also be made. Where a home visit is not practical, references, information, or an office based interview may be requested. You will be asked to verify information contained in your Homesearch application. If a member does not meet the requirements of these checks they will not be considered for allocation of a property.

Will I be able to view the property before making up my mind?

Yes, as soon as the keys are available for WDH properties we will arrange for a WDH employee to show you around the property. If you wish to accept it then we will arrange for you to sign the Tenancy Agreement.

What if I don't like the property once I've been to view it?

If you consider the property unsuitable once you have seen it, just let the landlord know and they will withdraw the offer. You will then be able to make expressions of interest on other properties you are eligible for, provided your membership is not suspended due to refusing two reasonable offers in a 12 month period.

How long will I be waiting to be housed?

Once a WDH tenancy has been accepted the results will be published. We also publish the average waiting times. This will give you an idea of how popular an area is and how long you may have to wait. This information will help you decide how to use your expressions of interest in future advertising cycles.

Will I have to renew my membership?

If you have not expressed an interest in any properties for six months we will contact you to ask if you still want to be a member of the scheme. If you do not contact us after a further three months, we will cancel your membership. You will be sent a letter to your last known address advising you of this.

What if my circumstances change?

If your circumstances change you should inform us straight away. You must contact your nearest SAP or the Homesearch Team immediately, as this may affect the band you are in. If you do not tell WDH of any changes, it may result in your Homesearch application being cancelled.

If the change of circumstances means that you move into a priority band, your new band start date will change to become the date the priority was awarded. If the change means that you move out of a priority band, your membership start date will return to the date you originally joined Homesearch.

What if I give false information?

If you knowingly or recklessly give false information, or withhold information in connection with your application for housing, you could be fined up to £5,000 and / or your application could be cancelled. If WDH give you a tenancy because of this information we can also take you to court to take the tenancy away from you.

What if I'm homeless or threatened with homelessness?

If you are homeless or threatened with homelessness you can contact Wakefield Council's Vulnerable Adults Service on 01924 304360 or 01924 304362.

What if I'm disabled or have health problems which mean I need to be re-housed?

A person or household can apply for a priority move on grounds of Special Needs Rehousing if they have a disability or a long-term medical condition that prevents them from performing everyday tasks such as bathing and climbing the stairs and if a different property more suited to their needs will help the problem. If you wish to apply please contact WDH for an application for Special Needs Rehousing.

Full details of the criteria and procedure for special needs rehousing are available at www.wdh.co.uk in our publications library or from any of our SAPs (see page 29).

Section 2 - Homesearch membership restrictions

Who will not be allowed to join the scheme?

There are certain groups of people who will not be eligible to join the scheme. These are people defined by the government as ineligible due to their immigration status or habitual residence in the UK.

We also have the discretion to disqualify other people from becoming members of the scheme if, for example, they have a history of antisocial behaviour.

Homesearch may class the following issues (amongst others) as preventing someone qualifying to be a member of the scheme:

- Anyone evicted for breach of tenancy by a council, housing association or other registered housing provider.
- If we feel someone could be a threat to a local community because they could re-offend or have been convicted of offences like:
 - dealing in illegal substances;
 - using WDH's properties for storing stolen goods;
 - burglary from WDH's properties;
 - violent behaviour towards WDH's tenants or employees; or
 - racial or other hate crime attacks.

In some circumstances applicants may be allowed to join the scheme but restrictions may be placed on what properties they can be considered for. WDH may also insist on a probationary tenancy.

Other housing providers have their own conditions of who is eligible for allocation of their properties.

Financial eligibility

WDH is a registered charity so we are normally only able to help people who are in the greatest need. Some people who have the financial means to obtain suitable accommodation for themselves may not be eligible for accommodation with WDH. Therefore a financial assessment based on the member's (and their partner's income) may take place before an offer of a property is made and if the member could financially afford to purchase or rent similar properties in the area then we may not be able to make them an offer. A financial assessment will not be needed for members who are aged 60 or over and wanting accommodation on one level, or who are disabled or chronically sick and are being offered accommodation to meet their needs.

Can I become a member if I owe money to WDH?

If you apply and you or your partner owe current rent arrears or other debts to WDH you can become a member of the scheme but you will need to make a debt agreement for any outstanding debts. Unless there are exceptional circumstances your application will be bypassed at the allocation stage until the debt agreement has been complied with in full.

Are there any other instances where my application can be suspended?

Memberships may also be suspended for other reasons such as:

- refusal of two reasonable offers within a 12 month period;
- while we are investigating a member's (or anyone moving with the member) eligibility or qualification to join or remain a member of the scheme; or
- a change in housing circumstances where a new form advising us of the change has not been received and processed.

Independent living properties

WDH advertise properties that are for people who need some extra support to help them manage their daily tasks or just need some additional support or contact. To be considered for a property that has been advertised as independent living a member must pass the Independent Living Assessment.

Section 3 - Homesearch bandings

Band A

These are:

Statutory homeless

This will be awarded to members who are nominated by Wakefield Council.

See Homesearch Policy for homeless definition.

Members who are still seeking accommodation three months after the priority is awarded will undergo an assessment to determine whether the priority should be removed or extended for a further three months.

Key worker status

Members who live outside of the Wakefield district and have obtained permanent employment, which is classed as conferring key worker status, and have been nominated by Wakefield Council.

Members who are still seeking accommodation three months after the priority is awarded will undergo an assessment to determine whether the priority should be removed or extended for a further three months.

Urgent social need

The awarding of the urgent social need priority is intended to help those applicants who are in 'genuine urgent need' as quickly as possible. This priority can be awarded in-line with the scheme of delegation in two ways:

- to resolve local lettings issues by the Area Manager or New Tenancy Manager; and
- to resolve urgent housing needs by an appropriate WDH employee or Wakefield Council's Housing Needs Panel.

Under occupation

This priority will be awarded to WDH tenants or social housing tenants who reside in the district who are under-occupying a house and are requesting a move to a property which has at least two fewer bedrooms than their current property, when the bedroom standard is applied.

Welfare and medical needs

This recognises urgent medical need for members and is awarded by Wakefield Council's Housing Needs Panel or WDH's Health and Medical Rehousing Panel to:

- members (with a local connection or are WDH tenants) with disabilities whose current home is not suitable, or not able to be adapted to meet their needs, or it is inappropriate to do so and is resulting in extreme personal hardship for the disabled member; or
- serving, or former members, of HM Armed Forces or Reserve Forces who need to move because of a serious injury, illness or disability which is attributable (wholly or partly) to their service, who have a local connection to this district.

HM forces personnel

This priority will be awarded:

- to HM forces personnel in service quarters that are 12 weeks or less before their date of discharge as shown in their cessation documents; or
- to former members of HM regular armed forces who also meet the criteria for any of the following Band Bs, temporary accommodation, medical, rough sleeper, statutorily unfit properties, homeless prevention; or
- bereaved spouses and civil partners of members of the regular armed forces who are leaving or have recently left services family accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner, whose death is attributable (wholly or partly) to that service; and either
- they or their immediate close family lived in this district immediately before joining the forces; or
- they have a local connection to this district due to close family associations, paid employment or other special circumstances.

Band B

These are:

Medical priority

This priority recognises medical needs for members with a local connection or who are WDH tenants and is awarded by the WDH Health and Medical Panel or Wakefield Council's Housing Needs Panel. This priority is also awarded to serving or former members of HM Armed or Reserve Forces who do not have a local connection with the district but who need to move because of a serious injury, illness or disability which is attributable (wholly or partly) to their service.

Members who are still seeking accommodation 12 months after the priority is awarded will undergo an assessment to determine whether the priority should be removed or extended for a further 12 months.

Redevelopment and regeneration

Awarded once WDH's Board has agreed to a renewal or redevelopment scheme in a district which requires the tenants to move out into permanent accommodation to facilitate the work.

Members who are still seeking accommodation three months after the priority is awarded will undergo a review to determine whether the priority should be removed or extended for a further three months.

Homeless prevention

This priority may be awarded following nomination from the local authority to members.

- Where Wakefield Council have triggered a:
 - 1 Prevention Duty and the applicant's household do not fall into one of the household category outlined in Statutory Homeless duties Band A; or
 - 2 Relief Duty but the applicant is not in priority need.
- Homeless households who are owed an Intentionally Homeless duty.
- Homeless households who are in temporary accommodation accommodated under a Statutory Homeless Duty.
- Patients with a local connection who are expected to be an in-patient in hospital for more than 28 days and it has been identified by the hospital and verified by Wakefield Council that the applicant will be homeless on discharge.
- Who are tenants and due to financial hardship are in receipt of discretionary housing payment.
- Who are owner occupiers and have been assessed as being unable to sustain their mortgage payments due to financial hardship and where there is little or no equity once the mortgage obligation and any charges have been discharged.

If after three months the member has not been successful in securing accommodation, WDH will seek the decision of Wakefield Council to determine whether the priority should be removed or extended for a further three months.

Families in lodgings or rough sleepers

Families in lodgings - This priority will be awarded to members with a local connection to the Wakefield district and are sharing someone else's home. Members who fit this criteria and can be classified as lodgers are as follows:

- families with children with or without the use of a bedroom; and
- women who are pregnant and are 12 weeks before their confirmed due date.

Rough sleepers - This priority will be awarded following a nomination from Wakefield Council.

Members who are still seeking accommodation three months after the priority is awarded will undergo an assessment to determine whether the priority should be removed or extended for a further three months.

Overcrowding and unfit properties

Overcrowding - This priority may be awarded to (tenants or owners) who are members with a local connection to the Wakefield district (or who are WDH tenants) and are overcrowded in their current property when the bedroom standard is applied or those who are statutorily overcrowded in accordance with the Housing Act 1985.

The bedroom standard - This is based on the ages and composition of the family. A notional number of bedrooms are allocated to each household in accordance with its composition by age, sex and marital status and relationships of family members.

A separate bedroom is allocated to each of the following:

- married or cohabiting couple;
- adult aged 21 years or over;
- pair of adolescents aged 10 to 20 years of the same sex; or
- pair of children aged under 10 years regardless of sex.

Any unpaired person age 10 to 20 is paired, if possible with a child aged under 10 years of the same sex or, if this is not possible given a separate bedroom. The same applies to any child under 10 years. This means:

- two people under 21 of the same sex will be expected to share a bedroom; and
- two children under 10 will be expected to share a bedroom regardless of sex.

Any single person 21 or over will not be expected to share a bedroom.

Married or co-habiting couples will not be expected to share a bedroom with another member of their household.

All Homesearch applications are assessed against both the size of the current property and the family composition to determine application banding.

WDH will not allocate a property to an applicant that exceeds the bedroom standard.

Statutory unfit properties - This priority will be awarded following a nomination from Wakefield Council where a member who is a tenant occupying a property in the Wakefield district where Wakefield Council finds a Category One hazard, in accordance with the Housing Health and Safety Rating System and the tenant is assisting them with enforcement action against an uncooperative landlord.

Members who are still seeking accommodation three months after the priority is awarded will undergo an assessment to determine whether the priority should be removed or extended for a further three months.

Service tenants and armed forces

This priority will be awarded to service tenants who live in the district and are:

- 12 weeks before their date of retirement or leaving date as shown in their termination of employment letter; and
- have at least three years continuous service and must leave their present address when employment ends.

This priority will also be awarded to members who do not have a local connection with the district but are:

- former members of HM regular armed forces who would also meet the qualifying criteria for any of the following Band Bs, temporary accommodation, rough sleeper, statutory unfit properties, homeless prevention; or
- bereaved spouses and civil partners of members of HM regular armed forces leaving or have recently left services family accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner, whose death is attributable (wholly or partly) to that service.

Under occupation

This priority will be awarded to WDH tenants or social housing tenants who reside in the district, who when the bedroom standard is applied, are under-occupying a house and requesting to move to a property with one fewer bedroom than their current property.

Social need

The awarding of the social need priority is intended to assist those applicants who are in 'genuine need' as quickly as possible.

This priority can be awarded in accordance with the scheme of delegation to resolve housing needs by an appropriate WDH employee or the Housing Needs Panel.

This would relate to circumstances that are not deemed as urgent as those set out in Band A urgent social housing need.

Band C

Under occupation

This priority will be awarded to WDH tenants or social housing tenants who reside in the district, who when the bedroom standard is applied, are under-occupying a property other than a house and are requesting to move to a property with fewer bedrooms than their current property.

All other applicants who do not meet any of the criteria in Bands A, B and D.

Band D

No local connection

This priority will be awarded to members who have no local connection with the Wakefield district (and do not meet any of the other Bands).

Social housing tenants with no housing need

This priority will be awarded to members who are an existing tenant of a registered housing provider of social housing (including WDH) and do not meet any of the specific criteria set out in Bands A, B, or C.

What is a ‘local connection’?

To qualify as having a local connection with the Wakefield district a member must meet one of the following definitions:

- the member is, or was in the past, normally resident in the district, and the residence was of their own choice. Normal residence is residence for at least six months in the area during the previous 12 months, or for not less than three years during the previous five year period; or
- the member is presently employed in the district and the employment is paid and not of a casual nature; or
- the member has family associations with the district; or
- there are special circumstances which WDH considers as constituting a local connection

Further information on these definitions can be found in the Choice Based Lettings Policy.

Section 4 - Where you can view available properties

Website:

www.wdhomesearch.co.uk

Service access points (SAPs):

1 Horsefair, Pontefract

WDH Hub, 2 Bull Ring, Wakefield WF1 1HA

Libraries:

Throughout the district using the internet and visiting
www.wdhomesearch.co.uk

Wakefield Council's Vulnerable Adults Service:

Queens House, Queen Street, Wakefield

Section 5 - How you can place an expression of interest

There are several ways in which you can express an interest in a property, but whichever way you choose you will always need to have your membership number, date of birth and the details of the properties you wish to express an interest in.

Through the website

By going to www.wdhomesearch.co.uk, then click on 'search for a property'. Follow the instructions on screen and login.

In person

You can call into any of our SAPs (see the addresses on page 28 of this guide) and ask a OneCALL Advisor to make your expressions of interest for you.

By phone

You can call the Homesearch Team on 0344 9 020202 and ask them to make your expressions of interest for you.

Homesearch

your home, your choice

For more information you can contact Homesearch directly.

Phone: **0344 9 020202**

Email: **Homesearch@wdh.co.uk**

**If you need this document in another
format please contact us.**



0344 9 020202 - Text Relay calls are welcome.
(calls to Homesearch may be recorded for training purposes)



communications@wdh.co.uk



wdh