



Bromley Homeseekers User Guide

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How the scheme works

If you are accepted onto the housing register we will:

- Give you a registration and pin number so that you can begin bidding.
- Tell you what band you have been placed into.
- Tell you the date that your band priority is effective from.
- Tell you what size of property you can bid on

You must keep us informed about any changes in your circumstances e.g. changes to your household size, medical condition or housing situation. This is very important as it could result in a change to your band or your eligibility for certain types of properties. If you don't tell us about any changes in your circumstances you may miss out on an offer of a home, have your application cancelled or be prosecuted for knowingly withholding information.

Using Bromley Homeseekers

Available homes are advertised every week on the **Bromley Homeseekers** website from 6pm every Wednesday and you can register your interest (bid) on the available properties up until 4pm the following Monday. This is known as the **Bidding Cycle**.

You are able to bid on **up to two properties** during each bidding cycle. However, you should only bid on properties that you would consider moving into and, where possible, that you meet the advert preference for.

You can bid on properties in the following ways:

- Free online at www.bromleyhomeseekers.co.uk
- By telephone to **0845 863 0625**

'Bidding' means expressing an interest in the properties you wish to be considered for.

If you don't have access to the internet at home you can visit your local Library, Community Learning Shop or the Council Offices where you can use a computer free of charge in order to place a bid.

Adverts

Property adverts will give information about each available property. The property adverts will include:

- The Landlords logo or a photograph of the property (this may be of a similar property and not the one available).
- The property advert number.
- The address of the property.
- The number of bedrooms in the property.
- The maximum number of people permitted to live in the property.
- Details of any adaptations.
- Details of what type of tenancy is being offered.
- The property type i.e. whether it is a flat, house or maisonette.
- If it is a flat or maisonette the floor level it is on.
- The weekly rent and any service charges.
- Whether or not pets are accepted at the property.
- Details of whether it is close to public transport links.
- Details of whether or not it has a garden.
- Details of any age restrictions.
- Details of any advert preferences (see giving preference to different groups).

Giving Preference to Different Groups



Sometimes we may give **preference in our adverts** to certain groups of applicants, for example:

- You won't normally be considered for properties that have been adapted or specially designed to meet the needs of people with disabilities, unless you have been assessed as having those needs.
- We manage the Housing Register in conjunction with our partner Housing Associations. We use advert preferences to ensure that all categories of applicant have the opportunity to be successful in securing accommodation in line with our annual lettings plan. For example in the advert it may state priority will be given to those holding an assured tenancy with Affinity Sutton Housing Association. Any bidders who were not assured tenants of Affinity Sutton would have their bids bypassed in the first instance.

Occasionally, we may use local lettings policies to restrict the type of household moving into a particular neighbourhood. This is to try and build sustainable communities. Any special conditions or restrictions will be clearly stated in the property advert.

If no bidders meet the specified advert preference then we may either use the property for a direct offer or offer it to the bidder who otherwise placed highest on the bid list.

Example of a Typical Advert

Place Bid	
	
See More	
 <p style="text-align: center;">Approximate Map</p>	
Detailed Map	
Local Area InfofromUpMyStreet.com	
Notes	<p>A one bedroom 1st floor flat, suitable for up two people. Initially offered on a starter tenancy</p> <p>No pets allowed. Close to shops and with good transport links.</p> <p>Preference will be given to applicants in Bands 1 and 2 who do not hold an assured tenancy with Affinity Sutton Housing Association.</p>
Property Advert Number	123456
Address / Postcode	Flat 1, High Street, Bromley, BR1 6XT
Area	Central Bromley
Landlord / Tenure	Hyde Housing HA / AST
Total Number of Bedrooms	1
Property Type	Flat
Floor Level of Flats	First floor
Lift(Communal)	N
Garden	N
Transport Near By	Bus
Rent	£96.35 Details
Opening-Closing Date	05/01/2012-10/01/2012
Heating Type	Central Heating
Accessible Housing Category	

The Offer

Once the **Bidding Cycle** has closed, we put the bids received in priority order to produce a shortlist of eligible applicants for each property.

Your **position in the bid list** is based firstly on the Band that you are in and secondly on the date that it was awarded. This means that bidders in Band 1 would be placed above bidders in Band 3. If more than one bidder in each band places a bid their position in the bid list is based upon the date that their banding was awarded. For example, **where no other advert preference is set** this may look as follows:

Band	Date Band Priority is Effective from	Position in Bid List
1R	12/05/2011	1 st
1T	18/09/2011	2 nd
2H	22/03/2009	3 rd
2H	01/04/2009	4 th
2T	13/05/2010	5 th
2R	12/05/2010	6 th
3H	02/02/2010	7 th
3T	11/12/2011	8 th

Where an advert preference is set, for example if we give preference to bidders in Band 2 the same bid list would be treated as follows:

Band	Date Band Priority is Effective from	Position in Bid List
1R	12/05/2011	5 th
1T	18/09/2011	6 th
2H	22/03/2009	1 st
2H	01/04/2009	2 nd
2T	13/05/2010	3 rd
2R	12/05/2010	4 th
3H	02/02/2010	7 th
3T	11/12/2011	8 th

It normally takes between 1-5 working days once the bidding cycle has closed for each bid list to be looked at.

If your bid is showing as **"Bid Under Consideration"** this means that bidding has closed and we are in the process of finalising the bidding shortlist. It does not mean that your bid is actively being considered.

If your bid is showing as **"Shortlisted"** this means that you will be contacted directly by the Housing Association that manages that property. This may be to request further information from you or to invite you to a viewing.

If your bid is showing as **"Properties Offered to Others"** this means that others above you on the bid list were shortlisted and that your bid was not successful.

If your bid is showing as **"Declined"** this means that you refused the property either before or after you had viewed it.

Any offer is subject to your application being verified (checked and approved) to confirm your circumstances. If your application cannot be verified, the offer may be made to another applicant.

If your name is at the top of the shortlist, and you meet any preferences outlined in the advert, you will normally be invited to view the property. If you refuse this property the next person will be invited to view it.

Some Housing Associations will undertake multiple viewings. This means that a number of people will view a property at the same time but that it will still be offered in order of the shortlist.

You can turn down **up to 2 properties** but will then be expected to accept the third property that is offered to you.

If you turn down 3 properties you will have your application reviewed and the following may apply:

- Your priority on the Housing Register may be reduced or withdrawn.
- Your application on the Housing Register may be cancelled.
- You may be made a direct offer in discharge of our duty to you.

Separate guidelines regarding refusals can be found on the Bromley Homeseekers website.

What Information is Available Once a Property is Let?

Feedback information will be available on our website once homes have been let. The feedback tells you how many households have bid for the property as well as the band and waiting time of the successful bidder.

This helps you to see how long successful bidders have been waiting for the homes that you have bid on and how long you may be likely to wait for a similar property.

It is not possible to notify you individually when your bids have been unsuccessful.

In order to promote openness and transparency in the allocations system we will provide feedback in relation to the banding priority of members who were successful for previous lets.

This will enable current bidders to assess their chances of and potential waiting time to be re-housed.

The feedback will not provide any personal details of the successful bidder, but will contain:

- The property address and advert reference number
- The number of bids received
- The band of the successful bidder
- The effective date (the date their banding was awarded) of the successful bidder

How can this information help you?

You may wish to use this information to influence how you make your bids in the future, for example:

- If an applicant has been offered a property and was in the same band, note how long they waited. This may give some indication of the length of time that you may be waiting for a property of this type, in a similar location.
- You could bid for properties of different types and in areas that attract fewer bidders. However, remember that you should only bid on properties that you would consider moving into, and where possible that you meet that advert preference for.

Remember how long you wait for a property will depend on a number of factors, including which band you are in, how long you have been on the housing register and the availability of properties within your chosen areas. You may want to look at other housing options in order to gain a quicker move.

Other Housing Options

The demand for housing in Bromley is much greater than the number of properties available each year, so you may have a long wait for housing. Here are some other housing options for you to consider:

Mutual Exchange

If you are already a Council or Housing Association tenant you can swap (exchange) your home with another tenant. Contact your landlord to find out which exchange service they subscribe to (this normally means you'll be able to use it free of charge). Most subscribe to one of the following services:

www.homeswapper.co.uk

www.houseexchange.org.uk

Private Rented Housing

You can look in local newspapers and local shop windows at adverts for private rented housing or flat shares. You can also visit websites such as:

www.rightmove.co.uk

www.gumtree.co.uk

www.findaproperty.co.uk

www.spareroom.co.uk

We may be able to offer additional assistance to some applicants in order to secure private rented housing. If you need assistance on how to access the private rented sector please contact the **Housing Needs Helpline** on **0208 313 4098**.

Shared Ownership

These schemes are intended to target people who can access and afford a mortgage but are struggling to get a foot on the property ladder. Properties are made available at discounted rates, typically around 30% below the market value. You can find out more by searching for shared ownership schemes on the internet and by visiting websites such as:

www.firststepslondon.org

How to Contact us

Help and Assistance

If you have any questions about how the scheme applies to you or about bidding for or refusing properties, there are fully trained staff available to support you, please telephone the **Housing Needs Helpline** on **0208 313 4098** or email the team using the WIM, detailed below or contact us at www.bromleyhomeseekers.co.uk

Web Internal Messages (WIM)

There is a functionality within the Bromley Homeseekers website that allows you to receive, send and save messages to the Homeseekers Team. This is called a Web Internal Message or a WIM for short.

When you log into your Homeseekers account if you have any WIM messages these will appear in your inbox, as shown below:

Select where it says **Inbox** and this will then take you to your personal message inbox.

Where it says **Inbox**, it will also show how many message you have in your inbox

The screenshot shows the Bromley Homeseekers website interface. The top right corner features the logo and navigation links for 'languages', 'about us', and 'contact us'. The main content area displays user information: 'You are logged in as: Test4 Applicant', 'Priority: A, 09/10/2007', 'Applicant Status: Registered', 'Bedsize / Bedspaces: 2 / 3', and 'Date of birth: 01/01/1960'. Below this, there is a 'When you are finished using this site you must log out' message and buttons for 'Contact Info' and 'View Properties'. At the bottom, there are links for 'My Current Bids', 'View Previous Bid Results', and a dropdown menu set to 'Show all in last month'. On the left side, a vertical menu contains links for 'Properties', 'Logout', 'Return to My Details', 'Housing Options', 'This week's advert and results hyperlink', and 'Inbox (2)'. A callout box points to the 'Inbox (2)' link, and another callout box points to the 'Inbox' text in the main content area.

Once you select Inbox, you will be taken to the following page. You have 3 tabs: **Compose, Inbox and Sent Items**

Select the **Inbox** tab to view any messages

Messages will appear in date order. You have the option to delete and refresh messages. To delete a message select the box next to the message and a tick will appear in the box. Then select the delete option

Some messages that are sent to you will be for information only and you will not be able to reply to them. If you are able to reply to a message directly you will see the reply option when you go into the message:

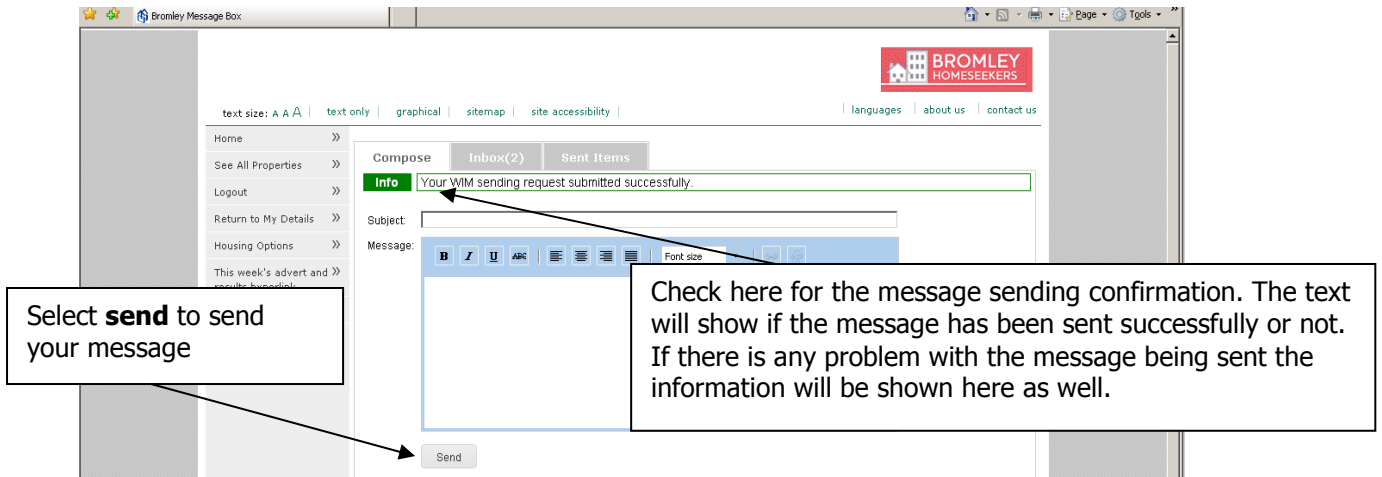
Select this option if you are replying to a WIM message. Not all messages will have the reply option available

To compose a message and send it to the Bromley Homeseekers Team, you should select the Compose tab. First enter the subject. This should be your full name and user_id.

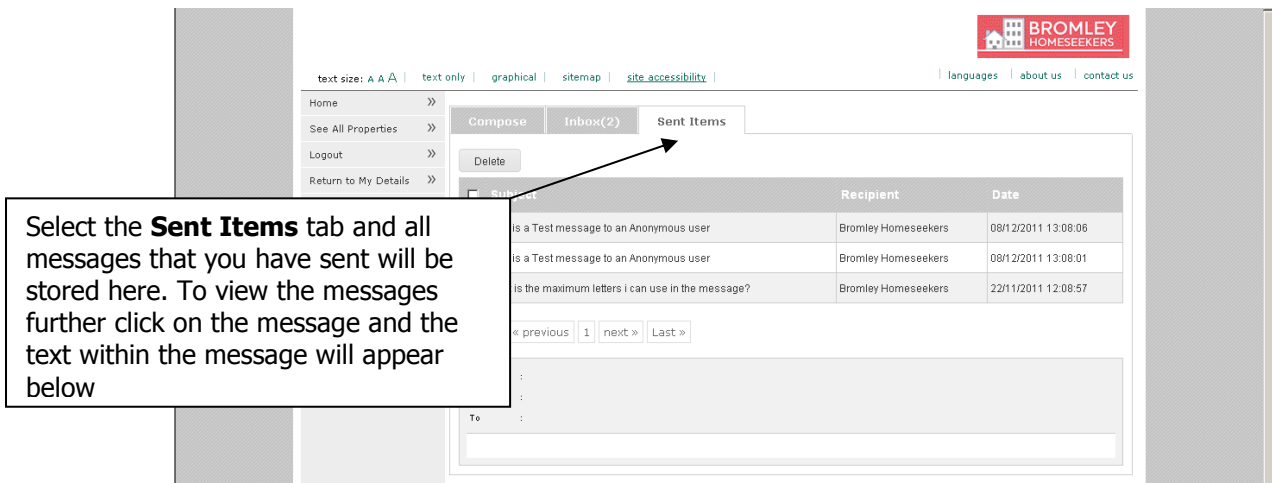
Make sure you enter your name and user_id details here. You **cannot** leave the subject field blank

Select **Compose** then the message box will appear. After completing the subject field then write your message in the message box

Once you have finished writing your message, select **Send** and then message will be sent to Bromley Homeseekers. You will receive a message to say that the message has been sent.



You can see any Sent messages by clicking onto the Sent tab and viewing the messages there.



Once you have finished using the WIM you can select any of the options in the left hand side menu to return to other areas of the Bromley Homeseekers website.

We will send you messages from time to time so remember to check your messages regularly.

Exclusions and Demotions

In certain circumstances applicants can be excluded from the Housing Register or have their priority reduced due to unacceptable behaviour or rent arrears. Anyone affected by this criteria will be written to and told the reason why.

Frequently Asked Questions

What can I bid for?

When you register for housing you will receive a registration letter telling you what band you are in and the type of property and how many bedrooms you are entitled to bid for. This will depend on the number of people and relationships within your household, including the age and gender of any children.

What if a home has an age restriction?

Some properties have a minimum age requirement, for example in some cases only people aged 55 or over will be able to place a bid. This will be clearly stated in the property advert.

What if a home is adapted?

We will advertise what adaptations a property has. You will be able to bid but we will give priority to those people whose needs we have assessed as matching the adaptations already in the property.

What if I have pets?

Pets are not allowed in some of the properties that we advertise because there are some properties that are not suitable for certain types of pets. Each of our Housing Association partners has different policies regarding pets and this will be clearly stated on the advert details.

What if I decide I am no longer interested in a home that I have bid for?

If you have made a bid but then change your mind, you can remove the bid on the website as long as the bidding cycle is still open. Please think carefully before bidding for properties and only bid for those properties that you would like to be considered for. If you bid for a property you don't really want and subsequently refuse it, it will count towards your refusal quota.

Why does my position on the bid list change during the bidding cycle?

Bidding does not work on a first come first served basis. Your position within the bid queue is dependent upon who else places a bid after you. For example anyone who places a bid (on that property) who is in a higher band than you will cause your bid position to reduce. For any bidders who hold the same priority banding as you, those who have held their priority for longer than you will be above you in a bid list and those who haven't had their priority as long as you will be below you in the bid list. People change their bidding preferences based on their own requirements and on what is available for them to bid on each week. Once the bidding cycle has closed your final bid position will be recorded and cannot be changed.

Why haven't I been invited to view a property?

If you have bid on a property but have not been invited to a viewing it may be because:

- You are not at the top of the shortlist.
- You do not meet the advert preference i.e. the property has been prioritised for an Affinity Sutton Tenant and you are a homeless household and vice versa.
- Your situation is awaiting assessment due to your behaviour (see Exclusions and Demotions).

What is an assured tenancy?

If a housing association offers you an assured tenancy it means that, as long as you maintain the terms set out in your tenancy agreement, you will be able to remain in your property indefinitely. You will normally be offered a starter tenancy for the first 12 months before being offered an assured tenancy. Rents on these properties are also often much lower than normal "market" rents.

What is a fixed term tenancy?

If a housing association offers you a fixed term tenancy it means that you will not be able to remain in that property indefinitely. Each housing association will offer different length tenancies and will review your circumstances at the end of each fixed term. If your circumstances alter and you no longer meet the criteria to remain in that property you may be asked to leave that accommodation or be offered a more suitable property as an alternative. Rents on these properties are slightly higher than social rents and are normally offered at around 80% of normal market rents. Each Housing Association will have its own policy regarding fixed term tenancies.

Why can't I bid for some properties?

You can only be considered for the type of properties that you have been assessed as being suitable for. For example, if you have been assessed as requiring 1 bedroom accommodation you will not be able to bid on a property with 2 bedrooms unless otherwise stated in the advert.