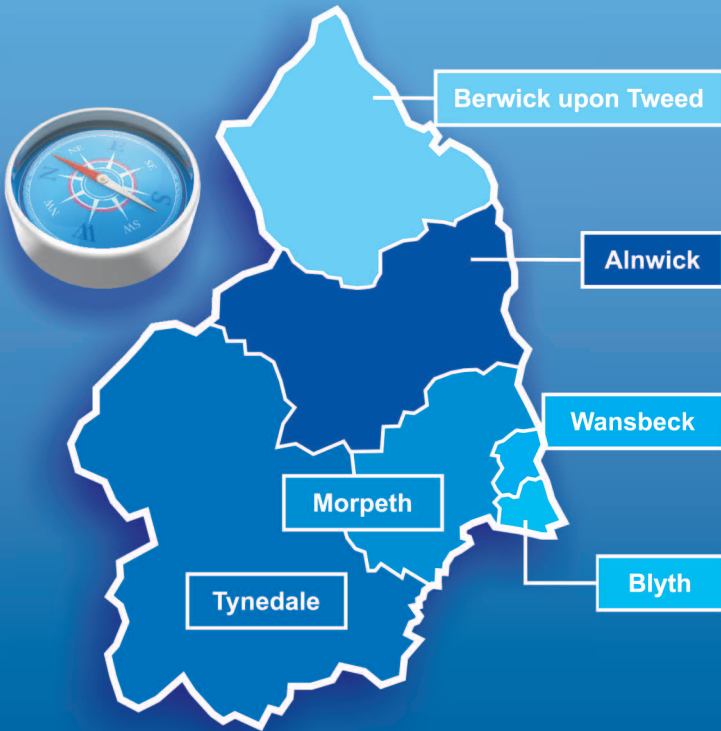




Northumberland

# Homefinder

## YOUR GUIDE TO THE NORTHUMBERLAND HOMEFINDER LETTING SERVICE



## Index

Introduction .....	2
Providing services fairly.....	2
How to apply .....	3
How we assess your application.....	5
Appealing against a decision .....	6
How to find out about available properties .....	7
How to tell us you are interested in available properties.....	7
The offer process .....	11
Housing options and advice.....	14
How to contact us .....	16
Other housing providers.....	18

## Introduction

Northumberland Homefinder is Northumberland County Council's housing allocations service, delivered in partnership with Bernicia, Four Housing, Homes for Northumberland and Isos Housing.

All council owned homes, and homes owned by our partners, will be let through this service. We will also let homes from other housing associations and private landlords and offer homes that are available for shared ownership.

Homes let through Northumberland Homefinder will be let in accordance with our Common Allocation Policy. A copy of this policy is available from the Northumberland County Council website or on request from any of our offices.

## Providing services fairly

We aim to ensure that all our customers can use our services regardless of age, race, sex, disability, religion or sexuality.

If you need assistance to use this service our staff can:

- Help you fill in Northumberland Homefinder forms
- Provide information, on request, in different formats
- Take account of any special needs you have

## How do I apply?

In order to apply for homes through Northumberland Homefinder first you must apply to join the scheme by completing an application form. The application form tells you who to send it to once you have filled it in. You can obtain an application form from any of our offices, from any Council Information Centre or from our website:

**[www.northumberlandhomefinder.org.uk](http://www.northumberlandhomefinder.org.uk)**

You can also apply online at the website.

## Who can apply?

You can apply to join the Housing Register if you are 16 years or over. Although some landlords participating in the scheme might not allocate to applicants under 18 you can still apply to join the register.

## Can you refuse my application?

We can refuse to accept your application if:

- You are from abroad and are subject to immigration control
- You or a member of your household is guilty of unacceptable behaviour e.g. being involved in anti-social behaviour or owing rent or your behaviour has resulted in a breach of your tenancy agreement
- You are not in housing need and you have no connection to Northumberland.
- You are not in housing need and your household has an annual income of more than £60,000

In some instances we may only reduce your priority. If we refuse your application we will write to you to tell you why.

## How will I know if you have accepted my application?

We will write to you to confirm that we have accepted your application. We will provide you with a unique reference number and a personal identification number (PIN). You should keep these details safe as you will need them to apply for properties.

## What happens once I have submitted my application?

When you submit your application to join Northumberland Homefinder first we will ensure that you are eligible to join. We may ask you to provide proof of your and any joint applicant's identity.

When applying you must tell us where you have lived in the last 5 years and whether you have any unspent criminal convictions. If you do not provide this information we will not be able to process your application.

If you are living, or have previously lived, in rented accommodation we may check that you have kept to your tenancy conditions, for example that you have paid your rent and have not behaved in an anti-social way.

We will then assess your housing need.

## How will my housing need be assessed?

We must give priority to people who are in most housing need. We cannot let our homes on a first come first served basis.

We will award you one of 5 priority need bands depending on your circumstances.

- **Band P** is awarded to applicants in urgent housing need, for example people who are homeless
- **Band 1** is awarded to applicants with a high housing need, for example those with a severe medical condition
- **Band 2** is awarded to applicants with a medium housing need, for example households who are overcrowded
- **Band 2R** is awarded to applicants whose priority has been reduced, for example because they own a home
- **Band 3** is awarded to applicants who are currently adequately housed

## How will I know what priority band I am in?

When we write to you to confirm we have accepted you onto the register we will tell you the priority band you have been awarded and the reason why we have awarded you this band.

## How long will I be in this band?

If you are awarded Band P you will keep this status for a maximum of 3 months. If you are awarded Band P because you are homeless you will be awarded this priority for 4 weeks. This is because we expect you to be able to find a home within this time period.

If you are awarded Bands 1, 2, 2R or 3 you will keep this priority until you are housed or your circumstances change.

## What if my circumstances change?

If your circumstances change you must contact us and let us know so that we can reassess your application.

## What if I don't agree with your decision?

If you don't agree with any of our decisions you can request a review. You will need to request a review within 21 days of the decision being made. We will aim to respond to your review request within 8 weeks.

## What if I am or may become homeless?

If you are homeless or threatened with homelessness contact our Housing Options Team on 0845 600 6400.

## What do I do next?

When we have provided you with a reference number, a PIN and have confirmed your priority band you are ready to start looking for a home.

## Where can I find out about homes that are available?

Every week from 00:01 on a Thursday until 23:59 the following Monday we will advertise all of the homes that are available to rent. They will be advertised:

- At [www.northumberlandhomefinder.org.uk](http://www.northumberlandhomefinder.org.uk)
- On our automated telephone line 0845 60 66 546
- In our offices
- In Northumberland County Council information centres
- In some public buildings such as Citizens Advice and libraries

Each advert has its own reference number. You will need this property reference number to apply for it.

## How do you know I am interested in a property?

To tell us that you are interested in a property you need to “bid”. This is the term we use to describe your expression of interest in a property. Bidding does not involve any money.



## How many bids can I place?

You can place up to 3 bids every week.

Demand for our properties is high. You will increase your chances of being rehoused if you are willing to consider a variety of areas where you will live.

We publish information about the priority band and the length of time that successful applicants have waited to be offered a home. Use this “recent lets” information to help you make choices about the properties you bid for. This information is available from our website.

## What type of property can I bid for?

The type and size of the property you can bid for depends on the make up of your household. We will allocate 1 bedroom each to:

- A couple
- A person in the household who is 16 or over
- Two children up to 16 who are the same sex
- Two children under 10 regardless of their sex
- Any unpaired child

We will tell you what type of property you can bid for. You will only be able to bid for the property types you are eligible for.

## How do I bid?

To bid for a property you will need your reference number, your PIN and the reference number of the property you are interested in. You can place bids:

- At [www.northumberlandhomefinder.org.uk](http://www.northumberlandhomefinder.org.uk)
- By calling 0845 270 1997
- At our offices (in person or by telephone)
- In Northumberland County Council information centres
- In some public buildings such as Citizens Advice and libraries

## How long do I have to make a bid?

Bids can only be placed during the advertising cycle so you can bid from 00:01 on a Thursday until 23:59 the following Monday.

## Bidding using the website

Go to **www.northumberlandhomefinder.org.uk** and click **Log in/My Account**. You will then need to enter your reference number and PIN.

Use the **Property Search** option to view available properties. You can view all of the available properties by clicking on **Show All** or you can search for a property using specific criteria such as area, or you can view only the properties that you are eligible to apply for.

If you find a property you are interested in and wish to bid, click **Apply Now**. When you have confirmed your bid you will receive a message that confirms your bid has been successfully placed.

## Bidding by telephone

To bid by telephone you will need your reference number, PIN and the property reference number.

Call **0845 270 1997** and follow the voice prompts to place your bid.

You will only be able to bid for the properties that you are eligible for.

Calls are charged at local rates. Calls from mobiles may be more depending on your service provider.

## Bidding in person

You can visit, or call, any of our offices to place a bid. You will need your reference number, PIN and the property reference number.

## What happens to my bid?

Once the advertising cycle has closed (at 23:59 on a Monday) all bids are sorted into order according to priority band and the date that your band was awarded (known as the effective date). This is a shortlist.

You can see your shortlist position at any time but please bear in mind that it can change at any time whilst the advertising cycle is still open. Your shortlist position does not guarantee that you will be offered a property as additional criteria may need to be applied.

## How will I know if my bid was successful?

If your bid is successful we will contact you. We will aim to contact you within one week of the advertising cycle closing. If we do not contact you, you have not been successful this time. Keep bidding for homes until we contact you.

## What are my chances of success?

There are many more applicants than homes available so you may have to wait before you are successful in your search for a home.

## What happens when we offer you a home?

First we will ask you to confirm that your circumstances have not changed since you submitted your application. We need to ensure that you are still eligible for the property you have bid for.

If we said in the advert that special criteria should be met, such as having a local connection to a particular area, we will check this with you.

If you are currently a tenant we will ask your landlord for references. We will not be able to offer you a home if you owe any rent or if you have a history of anti-social behaviour.

## Can I view the property before I decide if I want it?

If we make you an offer we will invite you to view the property.

Once you have seen it we will ask you to make your decision by the end of the next working day.

If you decide to accept it we will explain the tenancy conditions to you and ask you to sign a tenancy agreement.

We can withdraw an offer if we believe that your circumstances are different to those initially declared on your application form.

## What if I refuse the property?

You can refuse the property but we might say that it is unreasonable of you to do so. We will tell you straight away if we do consider your refusal to be unreasonable. We will also tell you why we think it is unreasonable to refuse.

If you refuse 3 properties and we consider all of those refusals to be unreasonable we will close your application and you will not be able to reapply for 12 months.

## Can I keep bidding once I have found a home?

No. Once you have accepted an offer we will cancel your application for housing. If you want to move in the future you will need to submit a new application.

## Other Housing Options

There are other housing options such as private rented properties and housing association properties. We can give you advice about your options.

## Housing Advice

We can also provide housing advice. Please contact Northumberland County Council on 0845 600 6400 or visit the Housing section of Northumberland County Council's website at:

**[www.northumberland.gov.uk](http://www.northumberland.gov.uk)**

Citizen's Advice is also able to advise you on a range of issues such as possession proceedings, housing benefit and illegal eviction.

## Our promise to you

We are committed to providing excellent services. We aim to:

- Write to you within 2 weeks of receiving your application to let you know if we have accepted it
- Return your call by the next working day if no-one is available to talk to you when you contact us
- Respond to any written correspondence within 10 days
- Let you know the outcome of any review within 8 weeks
- Make offers, where possible, within 5 working days of the advertising cycle ending.

## Improving our service

If you are not satisfied with our service or wish to make a complaint, please contact your local office. We also welcome any suggestions on how to improve our service.



## For more information, please contact us at:

Northumberland Homefinder  
Council Offices, Front Street West,  
Bedlington, NE22 5TU  
Tel: 0845 600 6400  
or via any Northumberland County Council Information Centre



If you are a tenant of Bernicia, Isos Housing or Four Housing (formerly Berwick Borough Housing), and wish to join Northumberland Homefinder you should contact your own landlord at:

Bernicia  
Oakwood Way, Ashwood Business Park,  
Ashington, NE63 0XF  
Tel: 0844 800 3800



Isos Housing  
1st Floor, Owen House  
Sanderson Arcade  
Morpeth, NE61 1NS



Or

Isos Housing  
Beaufront Park, Anick Road  
Hexham, NE46 4TU  
Tel: 0845 117 0020



Four Housing  
Unit 1, Windmill Way North  
Ramparts Business Park  
Berwick upon Tweed TD15 1TA  
Tel: 0800 046 1451



If you are a tenant of Homes for Northumberland and have a query about your application to move or you wish to apply to move please contact Northumberland Homefinder at the address above.



## Other Housing Providers

- Guinness Northern Counties 0845 605 9000
- Home Group 0845 606 3031
- Housing 21 0845 607 0272
- Johnnie Johnson Housing 0845 604 1095
- Riverside North East 0845 111 0000
- Places for People 0845 850 9571
- Railway Housing Association 01325 482125
- Two Castles Housing Association 01228 541161

**If you need this information in  
large print, Braille, audio or in  
another language please contact us:  
Telephone: 0845 600 6400  
Fax: 01670 511413  
Text phone: 01670 542521  
Typetalk: 018001 0845 600 6400  
Email: [ask@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:ask@northumberland.gov.uk)**



This information  
has been agreed  
with the help of  
our customers

