

HOME SEARCH INFORMATION BOOKLET

Your home, your choice.



INFORMATION BOOKLET

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1.

WHAT IS CHOICE BASED LETTINGS?

One Vision Housing lets its properties and other Partner Registered Social Landlord's properties through a Choice Based Lettings System.

This system:

- Gives you the chance to express an interest (put in a bid) for homes you really wish to live in
- Is easy to understand
- Reduces the number of offers which are turned down
- Helps to develop sustainable communities, as applicants will only express an interest (put in a bid) for homes where they want to live and wish to stay.

All available properties will be advertised on a weekly basis and those who are registered with Home Search can express an interest (put in a bid) for up to three properties per week.

After the adverts closing date all expressions of interest (bids) will be placed in order of priority. The property will then be offered to the person with the highest priority and longest registration date that meets the advertised criteria.

The Home Search Team will provide information on each home advertised on the Internet, in the local press and in the OVH Neighbourhood Offices.

2.

WHO DO WE WORK WITH?

We work in close partnership with Sefton Council managing the waiting list of people who want accommodation in Sefton. We also manage the waiting list and 100% of nominations for accommodation for Arena.

We also work in partnership with other Registered Social Landlords including:

Abbeyfield HA

Adactus

Anchor

Arena

Beech HA Ltd

Carrgomm

Cosmopolitan HA

Crosby HA Ltd

Equity HG

Gingerbread

Hornby Homes

Habinteg HA Ltd

Jephson HA Group

Johnnie Johnson Housing Ltd

Liverpool HT

Maritime HA

Pierhead HA Ltd

The Riverside HG

Sefton Council

Servite HA

3.

HOW CAN YOU APPLY AND WHO CAN GO ON THE HOME SEARCH LIST?

If you are interested in renting a home from One Vision Housing, Arena, or any of the other organisations listed on page 3 you will need to register with Home Search.

We aim to assess your form and provide you with a registration number within 10 working days of receipt of your application. If there is an urgent need we will try to process your application within two working days.

You can register:

- By completing the registration form included in the application pack
- By visiting our website www.ovh.org.uk and downloading the registration form.

You can receive help or advice in completing the registration form by contacting us in any of the following ways:

- By emailing Home Search homesearch@ovh.org.uk
- By telephoning **0300 365 1111**
- By visiting one of our Neighbourhood Offices.

Who can go on the list?

You can register if you are 16 years or older, but we will not offer you a Tenancy until you are 18 years old.

Some 16 or 17 year olds can be accepted if referred through a Joint Protocol Arrangement with Sefton Council.

One Vision Housing is committed to tackling discrimination and to promoting equality of opportunity in the provision of its services.

One Vision Housing will ensure that no person or group applying for housing services will be treated less favourably than any other person or group because of their race, colour, ethnic origin, nationality, religion, cultural background, sex, sexual orientation, domestic circumstances, age, disability or illness.

Please help us to achieve this by completing the **Equality and diversity section** of the application form (section 13).

4.

WHAT BAND WILL YOU GO IN?

Once your application has been received you will be given a bidding reference number and placed in one of three bands, depending upon housing need. Each band will be organised in date order based on the date you applied to us.

Those within the Band 1 category will get a Priority Band date. This is the date we assessed your need and gave you Band 1 priority. Applicants with the longest Priority Band 1 date will be placed at the top of Band 1.

Band 1 - Urgent priority need

Applicants will be placed in this band under the following circumstances:

Homeless: Where the local authority has accepted a duty to re-house including those who have been placed in temporary or bed and breakfast accommodation.

Medical/Social/Welfare: Where circumstances are such that there is a severe risk to health or wellbeing if applicants remain in their current accommodation and re-housing is therefore essential within six months.

Home Search staff will assess each factor alone and in combination before making any decisions.

Disrepair/Demolition/Disposal: Where the applicants' property is in a state of disrepair or subject to demolition due to redevelopment and a scheme to empty the property has been authorised by the Board.

Those placed in Band 1 will only be allowed to remain in this band for a maximum of six months. If during this six month period offers of accommodation are refused or no expressions of interest (bids) are made, priority will be removed and applications placed in Band 2.

Band 2 - Housing need

You will be placed in Band 2 if you are living in:

- Shared accommodation
- Insecure accommodation
- Accommodation that is overcrowded or insanitary
- You need to move to a particular area for the giving or receiving of support.

Band 3 - No housing need

If you are a council or Registered Social Landlord/Housing Association tenant and your property is not overcrowded you will be placed in Band 3.

If you are an owner or owner-occupier you will also be placed in Band 3 and we will carry out a financial assessment to take account of any equity that you may have.

5.

WHO MAY BE EXCLUDED FROM REHOUSING?

Anyone guilty of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable to be a tenant, may be excluded from being let a property.

Unacceptable behaviour includes neighbour nuisance, anti-social behaviour and non-payment of rent.

The following applicants may also be excluded from rehousing:

- Applicants with debts over £450 to One Vision Housing
- Applicants who have had action taken against them for anti-social behaviour
- Applicants convicted of offences involving firearms or supplying drugs
- Applicants who have been evicted from a previous tenancy
- Applicants with debts owing to previous landlords
- Applicants who have misrepresented circumstances to obtain a tenancy.

How would I be excluded?

If you have a successful bid we will carry out reference checks and verification checks before you are offered the property. If the results of these are unsatisfactory you will not be offered the property and you will be excluded from further bids for the duration of a suspension period.

You will remain on the list throughout this period.

6.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE AN URGENT NEED FOR HOUSING?

If you feel you have an urgent need to be rehoused please complete the **Additional information section** of the application form (section 12).

If you have Urgent priority a Needs assessment will be carried out and you may be put into Band 1. This will only be awarded for six months and you must bid actively for all property that you meet the criteria for within that time.

Listed below are some of the reasons why you may be assessed as having an urgent priority. In some instances evidence from a professional agency will be required to support your application, including:

Medical need

This is only awarded if there is a severe risk to your health which is made worse by your current home and/or your medical condition means that your current home is unsuitable, e.g. you cannot manage the stairs up to the bedroom or bathroom.

Social/welfare priority

This will only be awarded where rehousing is required because:

- You need to be discharged from a hospital or institution
- You are someone who has been in care and are setting up home for the first time
- You are at serious risk of violence/abuse and the Police support rehousing
- You need to move due to fear or risk of violence, or harassment (supporting evidence will be required). Examples of supporting evidence include victim support letter or police reports referral has been received from Sefton Council's Homelessness Team

7.

WHERE SHOULD YOU LOOK FOR AVAILABLE PROPERTIES?

Available properties are advertised every week in the following locations:

- Neighbourhood Offices
- Public Libraries (using internet access)
- Bootle Times
- Southport Visitor
- Crosby Herald
- Maghull and Aintree Star
- Home Search website at **www.ovh.org.uk**
- Merton House Housing Options (SMBC).

The advertisements will show:

- Gross rent
- A summary of the property details, e.g. the number of bedrooms and type of heating system
- How the property will be allocated according to the number of residents e.g. single person, families 3 and over, couple over 55 etc.
- The date by which expressions of interest (bids) must be received
- Properties are available from 12 noon each Wednesday to 12 noon the following Monday.

If you have difficulty accessing any of these sources, please contact the Customer Services Team on **0300 365 1111** who will be happy to assist.

- You are experiencing serious problems with anti-social behaviour in the area where you live. Priority will only be awarded in these circumstances if the Anti-Social Behaviour Team has been unable to resolve the problem and it is dangerous for you to remain in the property
- Your property is in disrepair, and a Compulsory Purchase Order, Closing Order or Hazard warning notice has been issued (evidence will be required)
- Home Search staff will assess each case individually and examine all factors before making any decisions.

You will be informed in writing of the outcome of your housing need assessment.

If an urgent priority is given you must express interest in **all** suitable available homes in the borough. Urgent priority is not given for a particular location.

Priority can be removed if you fail to bid for a suitable property or refuse the offer of a suitable property.

8.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU SEE A PROPERTY THAT YOU ARE INTERESTED IN

Your application pack includes a section asking you to show areas where you would like to live. This information helps us to assess your choices and helps us plan for the future. You do not have to restrict yourself to these areas when you express an interest (make a bid) in any properties.

Expressions of interest (bids) can be made on up to three individual properties per week.

Expressions of interest (bids) can be made in the following ways:

- Telephone on **0300 365 1111** (24 hour including bid line)
- Website at **www.ovh.org.uk**
- Emailing **homesearch@ovh.org.uk**
- In person at any Neighbourhood Office
- In writing to Home Search, One Vision Housing, Atlantic House, Dunning's Bridge Road, Bootle, Merseyside L30 4TH
- We offer a proxy bidding service that allows you to nominate someone to act on your behalf when placing bids. If you are classed as vulnerable or elderly and have no one to act for you we can place bids on your behalf. Please contact us for more details.

After the closing date, details of all the applicants who expressed an interest (put in bids) will be compiled and the applicant in the highest priority band, who has been waiting the longest and meets the selection criteria, will be offered the property (subject to references and verification checks).

Making you an offer

All offers are subject to you meeting the verification checks that are set out below. The Home Search Team will contact the successful person by phone, letter, text or email. Details of successful applicants will be published in the local press, on the website and in Neighbourhood Offices.

This will include:

- Rehousing band of the successful applicant
- Date of application or date of priority 1 Banding
- Number of applicants bidding for the property.

This will give you an idea of likely waiting times for the different properties and areas and will help you to make informed choices about any future bids you wish to make.

You are not limited to the number of offers you can receive, but if you are in Band 1 your priority may be affected if you refuse an offer. If you are in Band 1 and wish to refuse an offer please discuss this with a Home Search Officer/Customer Services Advisor.

If you have been made an offer, you will not be made any further offers for other property you bid for.

In addition to our waiting list review, we will now review all applicants who refuse three offers of accommodation. Therefore, to avoid disappointment please only bid for properties you meet the criteria for, in the areas you are interested in.

References and verification checks

If the verification checks are unsatisfactory, you will be suspended from making bids or from receiving offers and notified of the reason why. Verification checks will be carried out before you are made an offer.

You will have 48 hours to provide details of the following:

- Proof of Identification
- Suitable references from your current landlord.

We will check:

- Criminal offences
- Legal proceedings, e.g. for anti-social behaviour, arrears or injunctions
- Money owing to One Vision Housing or any other landlord
- If anyone has been evicted from a previous tenancy for anti-social behaviour.

If I am successful what will I have to sign?

All new tenants will have to sign a copy of a Tenancy Agreement and a Safer Estate Agreement (if there is one in place). You should also complete a Housing Benefit Form which will also contain a Housing Benefit Consent Form to allow One Vision Housing to exchange information with Sefton Council.

For all new or existing One Vision Housing tenants we offer a free and comprehensive Welfare Benefits advice service. Contact the Customer Services Team on **0300 365 1111** for more information.

9.

WHAT IF YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES CHANGE?

When you make an application you must provide information about your current housing situation. This is then used to assess which band you will be placed in and what type of property you are eligible for.

You must inform One Vision Housing of any changes in your circumstances straight away, for example if you move address, or if the people living with you move.

You can do this by:

- Telephoning **0300 365 1111** (24 hour including bid line)
- Emailing **homesearch@ovh.org.uk**
- Calling in person at any Neighbourhood Office
- Writing to Home Search, One Vision Housing, Atlantic House, Dunnings Bridge Road, Bootle, Merseyside L30 4TH.

Please quote your bidding reference number when contacting us. If you bid for a property and One Vision Housing later finds that the housing situation was different from the details provided when your application was made, the offer can be withdrawn.

10.

WHAT IF YOU PROVIDE FALSE INFORMATION?

Every applicant must sign a declaration to say that all of the information provided is true and correct. The information provided about current housing circumstances can affect your priority, what type of property you may be offered and how quickly this may happen. It is an offence for an applicant to provide information which he/she knows is untrue or not the whole truth (section 171 of 1996 Housing Act).

It is also an offence for an applicant to ask someone else to provide false information on their behalf. A person found guilty of an offence under this section may be fined up to £5000.

If an applicant is given a property based on false information One Vision Housing or partner RSL's may take steps to take possession of the tenancy.

11.

REVIEW AND CANCELLATION

One Vision Housing regularly reviews the applicants on the Home Search list to make sure that the details are correct. This is usually carried out every two years.

You must inform One Vision Housing if your circumstances have changed in any way. If you do not reply to a review your application will be cancelled and you will have to apply again if you want rehousing in the future.

Once you have been rehoused by One Vision Housing or by one of our partner RSL's your application will be cancelled.

12.

DO YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO APPEAL?

You have the right to appeal against any decision made in relation to your application, including a decision to exclude you from the housing register, withdraw an offer, to remove or not award priority banding.

All appeals must be in writing within 21 days of any decision that we make. However, in some instances if this caused you a problem you may be able to submit your appeal in person.

Please contact our Customer Services Team on **0300 365 1111**.

13.

WHAT TYPE OF PROPERTIES DO WE HAVE AND WHO CAN HAVE THEM?

One Vision Housing provides a number of different types of property located across Sefton. Please see the table overleaf.

When allocating properties OVH reserves the right to withhold the advertisement of certain properties and allocate these properties in exceptional circumstances.

The term 'Family' applies to both single parent and two parent families. Preference will be given to those who have children under the age of 18 that reside with them on a permanent basis. Flats may be advertised with minimum age criteria where there is a requirement that we maintain established communities.

At offer stage you will need to provide proof of any children that reside with you. You will also need to provide evidence of any access arrangements.

Property type	
Sheltered accommodation	
Flats or bungalow schemes with communal lounge facilities. Scheme Managers, Lifeline alarms	Age 60 plus
Flats or bungalows with no communal lounge facilities but dedicated Scheme Manager and Lifeline alarms	Age 60 plus or aged 55 plus and registered disabled
Flats or bungalows with Lifeline alarms and a visiting Scheme Manager	As above, or any vulnerable applicant due to severe physical or mental disability or on risk assessment and requiring level accommodation and/or the community alarm system facilities
Flats	
1 bedroom ground floor	Single person or couple (preference given to applicants with a need for ground floor)
1 bedroom upper floor	Single person or couple
2 bedroom ground floor	Single person or couple, single person or couple with one child (preference given to applicants with a need for ground floor)
2 bedroom upper floor	Single person, couple or family with one older child, i.e. over 10 years
High rise	
1 bedroom	Single person or couple
2 and 3 bedroom	Single person, couple or family with older children, i.e. over 10 years
Houses	
2 bedroom	Families with one child or couple if no families meet the advert criteria
3 bedroom	Families with two or three children
4 bedroom	Families with four or more children (subject to not overcrowding property)

Local lettings policy

On certain estates/roads/localities OVH may apply a local letting policy which aims to maintain balanced and stable communities. This will be explained in the property advertisement where applicable.

14.



WHERE ARE OUR PROPERTIES?

On considering which areas you would like to live in, please remember that within certain areas of the borough, such as Southport, Formby, Maghull, Lydiate, Old Roan and Melling, One Vision Housing have relatively small numbers of accommodation.

The table shows the number of each type of property that we currently have in each area. It also shows how many of each type became available to let in a 12 month period. This will give you an idea as to whether you are likely to be successful in bidding for a certain property in a certain area.

Property type	Area details											
	Southport	Crosby	Orrell	Netherton	Litherland	Strand						
Houses												
2 bed	127	3	11	4	206	18	76	7	172	12	107	5
3 bed	542	10	720	24	1204	64	841	31	486	33	592	31
4 bed +	15	0	65	2	62	6	39	5	79	6	114	4
Flats												
1 bed	325	33	506	72	219	41	246	33	203	55	609	85
2 bed	105	15	523	65	87	11	541	86	388	66	595	43
3 bed	3	0	89	6	40	5	24	2	20	5	2	0
Bungalows												
1 bed	227	21	141	13	58	6	142	13	101	6	83	10
2 bed +	86	3	35	4	0	0	14	2	2	0	5	0
Other												
Maisonettes	7	0	0	0	0	0	24	2	2	0	0	0
Bedsits	0	0	0	0	8	2	12	6	6	0	22	3

Key:

-  Total number of this type of property owned by One Vision Housing on 31st October 2007
-  Number of vacancies from 31st October 2006 to 30th October 2007

15.

DO WE HAVE ANY SERVICE STANDARDS FOR HOME SEARCH?

Registration:

- A Home Search pack, including an application form and an information booklet, will be sent the same day as requested
- We will check your registration details and tell you if we need more information. When we receive all your information we will write within 10 working days and tell you if you qualify to join the Home Search list
- If requested, our Home Search Team will review decisions within 10 working days.

Bidding process:

- Properties will be advertised weekly in the local press, the Neighbourhood Housing Offices and on the One Vision Housing website
- Successful bids will be advertised weekly in the local press, the Neighbourhood Housing Offices and the One Vision Housing website
- Properties will be available for bidding purposes 24 hours a day, five days a week.

Offers:

- Decisions and a first offer letter will be sent within two working days of the closing date.

Viewing:

- The Home Search Officer will show you around the property at a time suitable to all parties before you accept the offer.

You can help by:

- Letting us know within two working days of receiving the offer if you are interested in a viewing.

Lettings performance:

- We will continuously monitor performance on the quality of the Lettings service and publish performance figures quarterly.

16.

WHAT IF YOU WANT TO CHANGE PROPERTY IN THE FUTURE?

A mutual exchange is an arrangement whereby two or more tenants exchange properties with each other to their mutual advantage.

If you are a tenant of One Vision Housing, you can apply to exchange your property with:

- Another tenant of One Vision Housing
- A tenant of a local authority or another Registered Social Landlord.

With a mutual exchange you will be asked to accept the property in the condition it has been left by the last tenant. One Vision Housing will carry out routine repairs in accordance with the Tenancy Agreement, but it will be your responsibility to repair any damage caused by the previous tenant.

Homeswapper - Home Exchange Service

If you would like to exchange your home we can help through the Homeswapper website. This service is free of charge if you are currently a tenant of OVH or Arena Housing. If you are a tenant of a landlord which is not partnered with us there will be a charge. Please refer to the 'Finding a home' section of our website for up to date prices.

You can find lots of information about mutual exchanges in this part of our website, alternatively you can visit www.homeswapper.co.uk directly. You can register online and Homeswapper will check with OVH that your tenancy has been conducted in a satisfactory way (for example, that it is free of arrears etc.). Once your entry has been approved you will be able to access information about tenants in Sefton who also wish to exchange their homes, as well as details of those wishing to move to Sefton from across the country.

If you have any queries please call us on **0300 365 1111**, go to www.ovh.org.uk or visit your local Neighbourhood Office for more details.

How to apply for an exchange

You should apply in writing to your Neighbourhood Office. The person you wish to exchange with should also make an application to their own landlord.

You will then be visited by your Neighbourhood Officer who will discuss the exchange with you. You will be notified if your application has been approved within 42 days.

17.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Average rents for OVH properties (£)

Houses		
2 bed	3 bed	4 bed
70.59	77.85	83.20

Flats		
1 bed	2 bed	3 bed
37.21	44.76	49.61

Other properties			
1 bed bungalow	2 bed bungalow	Maisonettes	Bedsits
65.67	76.29	67.97	53.36

These figures represent the average rent a tenant would be expected to pay in 2008 - 2009. There may be additional service charges for some properties. Any additional charges for a property will be highlighted on the Home Search advert.

Average energy costs guidelines (£)

Property type	Bedrooms	Gas (kwh/yr)	2.2 kwh/£yr	Electric (kwh/yr)	8.6 kwh/£yr	Total cost per year
Flat	1	9,878	217	2,008	172	389
Flat	2	14,155	311	2,487	213	524
Flat	3	20,453	449	3,432	295	744
Mid terrace	2	14,092	310	2,530	217	527
Mid terrace	3	17,562	386	3,044	261	647
Semi-detached	2	22,080	485	2,981	256	741
Semi-detached	3	25,453	559	3,417	293	852
Semi-detached	4	29,106	640	3,941	338	978

These figures are only an estimate, and will depend on your particular usage and the supplier you are with. They represent the average energy consumption of OVH properties in 2008 - 2009.

Average Council Tax (£)

Band	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Charge	930.72	1085.83	1240.96	1396.08	1706.33	2016.56	2326.80	2792.16

These are the average Council Tax charges for 2008 - 2009. There are some additional charges for properties in some of Sefton's parishes.

If you are homeless please contact Sefton Council directly for homeless prevention and housing options advice at:

The Housing Advice Centre, Ground Floor, Merton House, Stanley Road, Bootle, Merseyside L20 3UU
 Opening hours: Monday - Thursday 10am - 4pm, Fridays 10am - 3pm
 Telephone number: 0151 934 3541

18.

MAP OF SEFTON

One Vision Housing has properties in areas across Sefton including:

- Southport - PR8/PR9
- Crosby - L23/L22
- Netherton - L21/L30
- Litherland - L21/L30
- Bootle (Strand and Orrell) - L20
- Park Lane - L20/L31

