

Empty homes, housing applications and lettings

Customer information

Overview

This guide explains how we manage empty homes, housing applications, offers and moving in. It covers general needs housing and independent living. We want to help people with the greatest housing need find a safe, affordable home that is right for them. We will treat you fairly, explain what happens next and make our information as clear as possible.

What you can expect from us

- We will give you clear information so you can make choices that are right for you.
- We will look at applications fairly and follow the law and any local lettings rules that apply.
- We will consider your housing need, any support you need and whether a home is suitable and affordable for you.
- We will help you with your application if you need support. We can also provide information in another language or format if you ask us to.
- If we cannot offer you housing, we will tell you why and, where we can, guide you to other housing or support options.
- We will treat customers with dignity and respect. We will also consider our duties under the Equality Act 2010.

If you are homeless or may become homeless

If you are homeless or worried you may become homeless, please tell us. With your consent, we will refer you to the right local authority housing advice or options team so they can give you specialist help.

How to apply

To apply for a home, complete a housing application through our Choice Based Lettings service on our website. If you need help to complete the application, please tell us. We may be able to support you by phone or arrange a home visit at a time that works for you.

Sometimes we need more information or evidence before we can continue. We will tell you what we need and when we need it. You will normally have 28 days to send it to us. If we do not receive it in time, we may cancel your application. If the evidence is about a change in your housing need, your application can stay active, but we will not reassess your priority until we receive it.

How to contact us

If you need any help, you can contact us using the contact form or phonelines on [Contact us | Sanctuary](#).

How we assess your application

- Your eligibility for housing, including right to rent checks for you and household members aged 18 or over. These are checks we are required to undertake by law to ensure you are able to live in Social Housing.
- Your housing need and any medical, disability, access, vulnerability or support needs.
- Whether you can keep to the conditions of a tenancy or licence, including paying the rent.
- References from current and former landlords where possible, covering the previous three years.
- Any housing-related debts, antisocial behaviour, offences, convictions or other tenancy breaches that are relevant to the application.
- Whether the home you apply for is suitable for your household and whether you can afford it.

A current or previous conviction does not automatically stop you joining the housing list. We will only look again at eligibility if there is a reason to believe someone may pose a risk to their household, neighbours, the wider community or our colleagues.

Medical, disability and support needs

If you have medical, disability or access needs, we may ask an independent occupational therapist to assess what type of home you need. We will prioritise accessible homes for households that need them. You can also bid for a home that is not already adapted. If you do, we will check whether it is reasonable and practical to make the changes you need.

We will check any support needs before we make an offer. If support is needed, we will make sure suitable support is in place before your tenancy starts. If you are offered a high-rise home and may not be able to leave safely in a fire or emergency, we may complete a person-centred fire risk assessment.

Applicants aged 16 or 17

We accept some applications from people aged 16 or 17, depending on the type of housing. If we offer you a home, you will need a trustee aged 18 or over. This could be a friend, relative or someone appointed by Social Services. You will still be responsible for paying the rent and keeping to the tenancy conditions. You will need a new tenancy agreement when you turn 18.

Housing-related debt

If you owe Sanctuary money from a previous tenancy, we will usually pause an external application until the debt is paid in full. If you are applying to transfer, your application may stay active, but we will not usually make an offer until the debt is paid.

We may make an exception in some situations. We will look at each case individually. If housing-related debt was caused directly by domestic abuse, we will not count it against your application or use it to stop you accessing suitable housing.

If you owe money to another current landlord, you will normally need to clear the debt. If you cannot do this, we may pause your application until you can show regular payments for at least six months. We will consider debts from the three years before your application, including how the debt happened and your payment history.

Antisocial behaviour and tenancy breaches

We may pause an application or refuse an offer if there is clear evidence of serious antisocial behaviour, live legal or tenancy action, property damage, neglect or another serious tenancy breach.

We will not consider antisocial behaviour action that ended two or more years before your application if everyone in the household has behaved satisfactorily since then.

How priority works

We assess each application and place it in one of four bands. Band A is the highest priority. Within each band, applications are usually prioritised by the date of the application or transfer request. We will contact you when your band has been confirmed.

Band	What it covers
A	Urgent cases, including management transfers, where someone needs to move because staying where they are would put them at serious or immediate risk, and moving is the only safe option. The urgent need to move would be assessed and considered independently from the application process.
B	Serious housing needs, such as domestic abuse, harassment or hate crime, needing a much larger or smaller home, moving on from supported housing, a child living in a bedsit, or a medical or disability need that moving could help with.
C	Other housing needs, such as unsecure housing, serious antisocial behaviour affecting you, needing a slightly larger or smaller home, unsuitable housing, overcrowding that affects adult family members, important welfare or social reasons.
D	Applications where there is no housing need under bands A, B or C, but you would still like to move.

Local connection

You do not usually need a local connection to apply. A local connection may be needed where it has been agreed as part of the planning application for the homes or where we have agreed this with the local authority in a local lettings plan. Armed Forces personnel will not be disadvantaged by local connection criteria.

How homes are allocated

Available homes may be advertised through our Choice Based Lettings service so applicants can bid. We offer homes in priority order, starting with band A and then moving through bands B, C and D. Within each band, we use the banding date. Before we make an offer, we will complete final checks, confirm your details, consider affordability and make sure the home meets your assessed needs.

The size of home we may offer

We use these guidelines to work out the size of home your household may need:

- one bedroom for an adult couple

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- one bedroom for each other person aged 16 or over
- one bedroom for two children under 16 of the same sex
- one bedroom for two children under 10, whatever their sex
- one bedroom for each other child under 16

We only include children whose main home will be with you.

In some situations, we may consider an extra bedroom. This could be because of a medical need, medical equipment or an overnight carer. We may also consider an extra bedroom for some older applicants moving to independent living or age-designated housing.

If you are pregnant, we may consider an extra bedroom from two months before your baby is due.

We will consider affordability in all cases.

Offers and viewings

Where possible, we will offer you a viewing before you sign the tenancy. This may be in person or virtual. We will confirm any formal offer in writing.

You will have three calendar days to tell us your decision. While we wait for your response, we will not consider you for other homes. If you do not reply, we will treat this as a refusal.

If you turn down three offers that we believe were suitable for your needs, we may close your application. If this happens, you will usually need to wait 12 months before applying again, unless your circumstances change significantly. If you do not feel an offer was suitable, you can ask us to review the decision.

Your right to ask for a review

You can ask us to review some decisions about your application or an offer. This includes decisions about eligibility, suspension, cancellation, removal from the Choice Based Lettings service, banding, an offer, or facts used to decide an allocation. Where you have this right, you must ask for a review within 21 days. We will write to you with the outcome and explain our reasons.

If our original decision stays the same, we will not accept another application from you for six months from the review date unless your circumstances have changed substantially.

Keeping your application up to date

We'll check your application every 12 months to make sure your information is still up to date. When we contact you, please reply within 28 calendar days. If we do not hear from you, we may close your application.

Please also update your application through our system if anything changes. This includes who lives with you, pregnancy or a new baby, your health, your address, or anything else that could affect your housing need.

It's important that the information on your application is complete and correct. We may close your application if information is false, incomplete or wrong, or if you do not tell us about a change that means you can no longer apply.

If you are moving out of a Sanctuary home

If you're moving out, please give us written notice in line with your tenancy agreement. We cannot accept notice by phone or in person.

- Your notice period starts when we receive your written notice. You will need to keep paying rent until your tenancy ends.

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- If you have a joint tenancy, notice from one tenant can usually end the tenancy, unless your tenancy agreement says both tenants must agree.
- If you need to leave sooner because of domestic abuse, harassment or another serious reason, please tell us. We may be able to accept less than 28 days' notice, but we will still need written notice.
- We may charge you if we need to repair damage that is your responsibility. We will also contact you about any unpaid rent or other charges.
- We may ask to arrange viewings during your notice period. We will only do this with your consent.

If you change your mind after giving notice, please contact us as soon as possible. We may be able to accept this if your notice period has not ended, but this will need manager approval. Once your notice period has ended, your tenancy has ended and the notice cannot be withdrawn. We only extend notice periods in exceptional circumstances.

Starting your tenancy

At your sign-up appointment, we'll make sure you understand your tenancy and what you need to do before you move in.

- If you need any support for the appointment, please tell us. We can make reasonable adjustments, such as arranging translation, hearing support or information in a different format.
- You and anyone aged 18 or over who will live with you must show suitable proof of identity. We must complete any right to rent checks before you sign your tenancy.
- Before you sign, we'll explain the main tenancy terms, your rent and any support or community alarm charges.
- You will be asked to sign your agreement via Docusign or another approved method.
- Your tenancy agreement says rent must be paid in advance, usually each week. If you claim Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, you are still responsible for paying your rent and any shortfall while your claim is being processed.
- We'll give you copies of the agreements you sign, along with information to help you understand your home and tenancy.
- Before you move in, we'll give you the safety and energy certificates that apply to your home, such as gas, oil, electrical or Energy Performance certificates.
- We'll contact you in the first six to eight weeks to see how you are settling in. We can talk about repairs, rent, benefit claims or any support you may need.

Garages

Sanctuary customers get priority for garages before non-customers. You'll need to apply and be able to afford the licence fee. We will not usually offer a garage if you have unpaid rent or other debts, or if relevant antisocial behaviour or tenancy action is still being dealt with.

- Garage licence fees are paid in advance. You will need to pay at least one month's fee before signing the licence.
- You will usually need to pay by Direct Debit. If this is not possible, please tell us so we can talk through your options.
- You are responsible for arranging contents insurance for anything you keep in the garage.
- You can use a garage for one motor vehicle or other items allowed under the licence.
- For safety, you must not store dangerous items in the garage. This includes flammable, corrosive or explosive materials, pressurised containers, fuel, lubricating oil, waste or refuse.



- Non-Sanctuary customers pay VAT. Sanctuary customers do not pay VAT on their first garage, but VAT applies to any extra garages.

Information about your household

We may ask questions about your household for national social housing information. You do not have to answer these questions. We will explain why we ask, how we use the information and how we protect sensitive personal information.