

Applying for a home in South Northamptonshire



information booklet

Housing Division



South Northamptonshire Council

23

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Introduction

This booklet is to help you with your application for housing within the District of South Northamptonshire Council. The guidance notes include general guidelines about applying for a home, and give you other information about transfers, exchanges, priority bands and how applicants are selected for empty properties.

Please read this booklet carefully and keep it in a safe place as you may wish to refer to it in the future.

A copy of the full allocation scheme is available on request.

How do I apply for housing?

All applicants who wish to apply for housing in the District of South Northamptonshire Council must complete an application form. You may request a form:

- In writing, or;
- By telephone, or;
- By email, or;
- In person at the office.

If for any reason you have difficulty making an application, please let us know and we will help you to complete the form.

Who can apply for housing?

Anyone aged 16 or over is able to apply to us for accommodation, with the exception of a few people excluded by law.

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Who are the exceptions?

You will not be accepted onto the housing list if you:

- Are covered by immigration control rules, which say you cannot get housing assistance.
- Do not normally live in the UK.
- Have been found guilty of unacceptable behaviour, which is considered so serious that the Council thinks you will be unsuitable as a tenant.

If you are treated as ineligible for the Housing Register you can make a fresh application if:

- Your immigration status has changed, or;
- You can demonstrate good behaviour for at least a year.
- If 12 months have lapsed since the applicant or any member of their household gave false information to obtain a tenancy.

If we have decided you are ineligible for an allocation of housing you will be informed of this decision and the reasons for it. You have a right to request a review of this decision.

Local connections

If you have a local connection with our district, this gives you some priority over applicants without a local connection. You have a local connection if you:

- Have lived in the district for the last 6 months, or;
- Have permanent employment in the district, or;
- Have previously lived in the district for a period of at least 5 years, or;
- Have close relatives such as parents, grandparents, children living in the district for a period of 5 years, or;
- Have a special reason for needing to live in the district.

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Who has priority?

The law sets out certain groups of people who must be given reasonable preference for accommodation. These groups are:

- People who are homeless.
- People owed a duty under homelessness legislation.
- People occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions.
- People who need to move on medical or social grounds.
- People who need to move to a particular locality in the district, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship.

These groups are reflected within the priority bands.

Priority Bands

We have adopted a system of priority bands to establish your place on the Housing Register. Your application will be placed in one of four bands according to your housing need. The four bands are:

- Urgent.
- High.
- Medium.
- Low.

Applicants are classified using four headings: They are:

- General Needs.
- Transfers.
- Homeless.
- Key Workers.

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If you are in the High, Medium or Low band and satisfy 3 or more criteria in that band, you will be moved up to the next band. If you have a local connection you will always have priority over those without a local connection within the same band. The table below sets out the reasons taken into account when deciding which band you are placed in.

Band	General Needs	Transfer	Homeless
Urgent	Severe harassment Severe health needs Social needs grounds Property unfit for habitation Move on accommodation Key worker Non succession cases where inappropriately housed but have had long period of residency	Severe harassment Severe health needs Statutory overcrowding Management grounds Succession where move to alternative Accommodation Required Under occupation	Severe health grounds Severe social grounds Domestic violence
High	Considerable health Needs Agricultural tenancy Armed Forces with discharge date Family separated due to inappropriate housing Lacking amenities Statutory overcrowded	Considerable health needs Overcrowding	Accepted homeless applicants in priority Need Considerable health Needs
Medium	Moderate health needs Living with relatives/friends and sharing amenities Insecurity of tenure	Need to be nearer to supportive relatives Moderate health needs Families in flats above ground floor	Statutory homeless applicants not in priority Need. Moderate health needs

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Band	General Needs	Transfer	Homeless
Medium (continued)	Insecurity of tenure and sharing amenities Sharing amenities Overcrowding Families in flats above ground floor Under occupation of property Need to be nearer relatives to offer / receive support.		
Low	Minor medical need Adequately housed Sufficient financial resources to secure alternative or more appropriate Accommodation	Adequately housed Minor medical need	Intentionally homeless, but review after 6 Months

Processing of applications

Providing all relevant information is provided at the point of application, we will aim to notify you of your priority band within 19 working days. Your date of application is either the date we receive the completed form or the date a telephone application is made.

If you have only partially completed your application or have withheld information that has been reasonably requested your application will be suspended.

If your application is being assessed, you will not be placed in a band until your application has been fully processed.

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Review of applications

In order to keep your application details up to date, your application will be subject to a review on the anniversary of the date of your application. If you fail to respond to the review letter your application will be cancelled.

Council and other tenants

All tenants, whether Council, private, Housing Association or other can apply for accommodation within the District of South Northamptonshire Council. You will be expected to have complied with the terms of your tenancy agreement and maintained your property in a satisfactory manner. If a term of your tenancy agreement has been broken, it will have to be remedied before an offer of rehousing is made. Very occasionally, exceptions may be made at our discretion.

If you are a tenant of a registered social landlord, you will be treated as a transfer applicant and your landlord will be requested to confirm that you have complied fully with the terms of your tenancy agreement.

All transfer applicants will also be encouraged to register for a mutual exchange under our local mutual exchange scheme and/or the national HOMESWAP scheme.

Owner occupiers

If you own or jointly own residential accommodation (either freehold, under mortgage, shared ownership or leasehold) you can apply for housing. If you demonstrate a need for alternative accommodation and have insufficient resources to secure that alternative accommodation you will be placed in the band appropriate to your housing need. Otherwise you will be placed in the lowest band.

Persons under 18 years

If you are 16 or 17 years old, you will be placed in a band according to housing need where either of the following applies:

- You have been accepted as statutorily homeless and in priority need.

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- You are over the age of 16 and a referral for assistance has been made by Social Services.

In either case, the Council will seek to undertake a joint assessment with Social Services of your housing, care and support needs to ensure that adequate support is available.

Armed forces personnel

If you are in the Armed Forces and you have an established local connection with South Northamptonshire Council you will be placed in the high band. If you meet our criteria, you will be given high priority subject to confirmation of a discharge date.

Agricultural workers

If you are a displaced agricultural worker, you will be placed in the high band subject to:

- The home where you are living is needed to accommodate another agricultural worker.
- The farmer cannot provide suitable alternative accommodation for you.
- You need rehousing in the interests of efficient agriculture.

The Council will take advice from the Agricultural Dwelling-House Advisory Committee (ADHAC) on these matters.

Key Workers

There has been much concern raised in recent years over attracting and retaining Key Workers, including public sector workers, in areas where there is a limited supply of affordable housing. We are committed to meeting the housing needs of such applicants and therefore 5% of all offers will be made to Key Workers. To facilitate this Key Workers will be placed in the urgent band.

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Rent and mortgage arrears

In order to receive an offer of accommodation, you will normally be expected to have no outstanding rent or mortgage arrears from their last settled accommodation. Exceptions to this may be made in certain very limited circumstances.

To streamline your application process, references will normally be sought after you have been placed on the Housing Register. The timing of the request for such references will depend upon your position on the Housing Register and the likelihood of an offer being made.

Once accepted as statutorily homeless, applicants will not be assessed separately for rent/mortgage arrears.

Medical or Social needs

Priority will only be given where it can be demonstrated that the condition or location of your accommodation is having a direct impact and that rehousing will improve the situation.

If your application indicates medical grounds for rehousing, an assessment will be carried out to determine your level of priority and the affect of your current housing upon your health.

Prior to an offer of accommodation being made, we will assess any support or care needs and if appropriate, will liaise with Social Services or other relevant agencies to ensure that support is made available.

Overcrowding

An assessment will be made from the information you supply on your application form as to whether you are living in overcrowded conditions.

Lacking amenities

If you are living in a property, which does not have some amenities such as inside WC, bathroom or shower facilities, this will be reflected in your priority band.

Sharing amenities

If you are sharing facilities such as kitchen, bathroom or WC this will be reflected in the priority given to your application.

Change of circumstances

Where you notify us of a change of circumstances, we will reassess your application based on your new circumstances. If, as a consequence, your priority changes to a higher band, your effective date of application will be the date you notified us of your change in circumstances. If you move down a band, you will keep your previous application date.

If you notify us of a change of circumstance, you must either complete and sign a 'change of circumstances form' or have a signed letter placed on file. If your change of circumstances involves a move to a new address, you will be required to complete a new application form.

Transfer Incentive Scheme

We are keen to reduce under-occupation of council property. If you are under-occupying a property of two bedrooms or larger and accept a transfer to smaller more suitable accommodation we will provide a grant as an incentive to move.

If your application is approved under this scheme your rent account will be reviewed and your property inspected.

You may qualify for consideration if:

- You are a tenant or a joint tenant of South Northamptonshire Council.
- You are a single person or couple without dependant children and of pensionable age or disabled.
- You are living in a Council owned family sized house with two or more bedrooms.
- You are willing to move to a smaller bed-sit, one or two bedroom flat or bungalow

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The grant will be paid to you once you have moved from the property, handed in the keys in to the Council and a final inspection of your property has been carried out.

- If you owe any rent arrears, we will use part or all of the grant to ensure your rent arrears are reduced or cleared.
- Once you have vacated your home and we have inspected the property any cost of putting right repairs, damage or removal of rubbish, which are your responsibility, will also be deducted from the grant.

Please note the scheme may be over subscribed and applications may be placed on a waiting list.

Offers

When a vacancy arises in the Council's housing stock an offer will be made to the applicant in the highest band, who has been waiting the longest and who is eligible for that property type. Applicants within each band, who have a local connection, will be given priority over those without a local connection.

You will normally only receive up to three reasonable offers of accommodation.

All applicants are divided into one of the following categories- general needs, transfer and homeless; each category will be allocated a target proportion of all lettings as outlined below.

	Family	Elderly	Singles/Couples
Transfers	30%	50%	20%
General needs	32%	50%	78%
Homeless	35%	—	—
Key Workers	3%	—	2%

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Giving choice

You can choose as many areas as you wish from a list covering the whole of South Northamptonshire Council. Your choice includes:

- Any number of areas within the District.
- Specifying the street or more precise location where you wish to live.
- 3 reasonable offers of accommodation.
- Allowing you to express preference over your specific housing requirements.
- Your need to be near to schools, medical facilities or family members.

Please note that when you limit your choice of area and type of property, you also limit our ability to help you.

Type and Size of Property Offered

Due to the limited amount of accommodation which becomes available it is necessary for the Council to ensure that offers are made of the size and type most appropriate to the applicant's needs and which make the most efficient use of the housing stock, whilst at the same time giving priority to those in the most need.

As a general rule, applicants over 60 will only be considered for sheltered accommodation. In the case of joint applications, only one party need be over 60 years of age to qualify for sheltered accommodation. In the case of sole applications, the applicant must be at least 60.

If applicants over the age of 60 express a desire to be considered for non-sheltered accommodation, every endeavour will be made to meet their wishes, subject to their priority on the Housing Register.

Properties designed or adapted to wheelchair standard or with special facilities, will only be offered to applicants where a member of the household needs these facilities. In exceptional cases, where there are no suitable applicants on the

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Housing Register, we reserve the right to allocate such properties to applicants without any special need.

The following table is a guide to enable you to match property types and sizes to your circumstances and to provide sufficient flexibility to give you reasonable choice.

Type and size of property	Household size
Bed-sit	Single person
Sheltered bed-sit	Single person over 60
1 or 2 bedroom flat	Single person or couple
1 or 2 bedroom sheltered flat	Single person or couple where one of the applicants is over 60
3 bedroom maisonette	Household with up to 3 children
1 bedroom bungalow	Single person or couple
2 bedroom bungalow	Single person, couple or household with one child
1 or 2 bedroom sheltered bungalow	Single person or couple where one of the applicants is over 60
2 bedroom house	Household with up to two children
3 bedroom house	Household with up to four children
4 bedroom house	Household with up to 6 children

Local Lettings Schemes

We are keen to take account of factors, which contribute to sustaining rural communities.

On the initial letting of properties on new social housing developments which are not rural exception sites, a target of 50% of all lettings will be to applicants who have a local connection with the village and have been assessed as having at least a medium level of housing need.

Local connection with a specific village is defined as:

- Living in the village for at least the previous five years; or
- Having permanent employment in the village; or
- Having at least ten years previous residence in the village if not currently residing there; or
- Applicants over 60 or with a disability requiring support on medical grounds from relatives currently living in that village.
- Have close relatives living in the village for a period of at least five years.

On the reletting of existing social housing properties in the villages at least one in three will be to applicants who have a local connection and have been assessed as having at least a medium level of housing need.

If you have a strong connection with a particular village or town, we will ask you to state this on your application. This will enable you to be actively considered for any housing development, which takes place where you have such a connection, and to be considered under any established local letting scheme.

Removing applicants from the housing register

You will be removed from the Housing Register if:

- You are found to be ineligible for housing.
- You request your removal in writing.

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- You fail to renew your application at the annual review.
- You fail to respond to requests for information where we have stated that failure to respond will result in an assumption that you no longer wish to be on the Register.
- You refuse three reasonable offers of accommodation
- You are guilty of an offence such as giving false information to the Council.

Right to information

You have the right to request information about how your application is likely to be treated under the allocation scheme, and an indication of when accommodation may be available to you.

Confidentiality

Any information provided as part of your application process will be treated in the strictest confidence and in accordance with current data protection legislation.

Appeals

If you feel that your application has been dealt with unfairly or incorrectly, please ask for a review of your application in writing setting out your reasons. The Council will decide the outcome of your appeal within 21 days and you will be informed in writing of the decision and the reasons for it. If you are still not satisfied with the outcome, you may consider a complaint to the Chief Executive or to the Local Government Ombudsman.

Equal opportunities

The Council is committed to providing equal access to its housing regardless of race, colour, ethnic origin, gender, religion or disability.

A copy of our equal opportunities policy is available on request.

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Ethnic monitoring

South Northamptonshire Council has accepted the Code of Practice in Rented Housing published by the Commission for Racial Equality to ensure that every person receives equal treatment.

In order to assist us in checking that our policy is fully carried out, and for no other reason, we ask you to complete the ethnic origin of you and your family on pages 3 and 4 of the application form.

White

British	1A
Irish	2A
Any other white background	3A

Mixed

White and black Caribbean	1B
White and black African	2B
White and Asian	3B
Any other mixed background	4B

Asian or Asian British

Indian	1C
Pakistani	2C
Bangladeshi	3C
Any other Asian background	4C

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Black or Black British

Caribbean	1D
African	2D
Any other black background	3D

Chinese or other ethnic group

Chinese	1E
Any other	2E
Question refused	1F

**Translations to other languages and audio cassette,
large print or braille versions are available on request.**

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