



Berwickshire Housing Association Guide



Welcome to Berwickshire Housing Association

Homehunt Common Housing Register

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Berwickshire Housing Association

Welcome to Homehunt Common Housing Register

Berwickshire Housing Association (BHA), one of the major landlords in the Scottish Borders, has joined with other Scottish social landlords to introduce Homehunt.info.

Homehunt is a Choice-Based Lettings partnership, which has been designed to give you improved access to affordable rented properties across Scotland. All of the partners share the same housing register and you will be able to apply for all properties advertised by the Homehunt Partners. By offering more choice we hope to create more settled communities and give you more say in where you are housed. This is a simple and straightforward way of letting homes.

Anyone aged 16 or over can register. All you need to do is complete an application form, which can be completed online, downloaded from the Homehunt website or requested from Berwickshire Housing Association.

BHA properties available for rent are advertised each week at our Duns and Eyemouth offices, at www.homehunt.info, our website and on our Facebook page BHAThrivingCommunities.

Generally more than one person applies for a vacant house or flat, so there are some simple rules to help us decide who should receive the first offer of the property. BHA allocates homes within the Berwickshire region of the Scottish Borders area.



Helen Forsyth
Chief Executive
Berwickshire Housing Association

How to Register

You need to register with us before you can apply for a property. The simplest way is to apply online at www.homehunt.info

Registration can also be completed at BHA offices, or you can contact us to have an application posted to you.

You will be asked every year to review your registration and confirm you wish to remain registered.

Once you are registered, depending on your circumstances, you may qualify for priority. The online system will suggest priority forms for completion which you can complete along with your registration. However priority will not be assessed until the registration process is complete.

The priority assessment process will take longer if you request contact by mail, as we will post the appropriate priority forms for you to complete and return.

Applying for Properties

When you have a live registration you can apply for any advertised property as long as the property is suitable e.g. it would not result in overcrowding or there are no restrictions on who can apply stated in the advertisement, such as sheltered housing which is normally reserved for those aged 60 and over.

All available properties are advertised online at www.homehunt.info and you can place your bid by logging into your registration. You can also do this in person at either of our offices in Duns or Eyemouth or by telephone, **but you must do this before the closing date and time specified in the advert.** If you have priority this will be recognised automatically if the property you are registering interest in meets your pass criteria.

You can bid for a *maximum of three* properties at any one time. However, if you qualify for more than one offer at the same time we will assume that the property you bid for first is your first choice, and so on. If you qualify for an offer on one property we will disregard any later applications you have made.

If there are no suitable properties advertised or perhaps it is not a convenient time for you to move, there is no need to bid. However, if you have a Priority Pass and you don't bid for suitable properties you risk losing your priority pass.

Offers of Property

HOW WE ALLOCATE A PROPERTY

1. The applicant(s) who would make 'best use' of the property – for example, by using disabled adaptations or by using all the available bedrooms will be considered first.
2. If there is more than one applicant who would make 'best use' of the property we will offer it to the person with the highest level of priority.
3. If there is more than one person with the same level of priority then the offer will go to the person who has been in priority need longest (date of priority award).
4. If there is more than one applicant with the same level and date of priority - or if there is more than one applicant applying and no-one with priority, then the offer will go to the person who registered with Homehunt first.

There are some exceptional circumstances when this may not apply – if you would like more information about this please ask for a full copy of our policy.

BHA will normally contact the successful applicant within 48 hours of the closing date. If you do not hear from us within this timescale you have probably been unsuccessful on this occasion and you should keep on applying for properties which suit your needs.

When you are provisionally offered a property by BHA your registration will be placed on hold. We will request references at this point (any unsatisfactory reference may result in the offer being retracted). While you are considering the offer you will be unable to bid for any other properties. If you do not contact us within 48 hours of the provisional offer we will assume that you wish to refuse the offer. You are requested to complete and return the appropriate page of the provisional offer to BHA whether you are refusing or accepting.

You will be able to view the property before signing a tenancy agreement.

If you refuse two offers without having reasonable cause, your registration could be suspended and you will not be able to apply for properties for a period of six months.

Applying for Priority

Priority is awarded to registered applicants who have a 'significant housing need.' This means that the majority of applicants won't actually be eligible for priority and we expect to offer many of our properties to people without this.

Priority is given in the following areas, at either Platinum, Gold, Silver or Bronze level. The table below shows which levels may be awarded:

| Priority Pass Type | Platinum | Gold | Silver | Bronze |
|---|----------|------|--------|--------|
| Domestic Abuse | ✓ | | | |
| Harassment (including serious ASB) | ✓ | | | |
| Homelessness/Relationship Breakdown (BHA Tenant) | | ✓ | | |
| Health | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Sustainable Housing on Release for Everyone (SHORE) | | ✓ | | |
| Armed Forces & Veterans | | ✓ | | |
| Through Care After Care | | ✓ | | |
| Prevention of Homelessness | | | ✓ | |
| Overcrowding | | | ✓ | |
| Under-occupancy | | | ✓ | |
| Unsuitable Housing | | | ✓ | |
| Kinship Carers, Foster Carers and Those Adopting | | | ✓ | |
| First Affordable Home/Separated Households | | | | ✓ |
| Flat to House | | | | ✓ |
| Specific Need to be in the Community | | | | ✓ |

Priority is awarded for six months. If you are awarded priority and do not bid for **all** suitable properties advertised which meet your needs, at the end of the six months your priority will be removed. If no suitable properties have been advertised, or you have applied for all suitable properties but were unsuccessful, your priority will be renewed automatically.

Silver priority for under-occupation has no expiry date and so will remain active until you are housed whether it is used for every suitable property or not.

How to Apply for Priority

If you fall into one of the following groups, you can apply for priority to be awarded to your registration.

- Are you **homeless**, about to become homeless within 56 days, or experiencing harassment, including domestic violence which prevents you from returning to your home? Or are you having to leave your current home due to a relationship breakdown or other valid reason preventing you continuing to live there? **If you are about to become homeless, contact Scottish Borders Council Homelessness Department (01896 661385).**
- Is your **health** affected by your current housing situation?
- Is your accommodation **overcrowded** - do you need a bigger property?
- If you are a tenant of a social landlord in the Scottish Borders and you are **under-occupying** your current home, ie. is it too big for you and you are not using all the bedrooms?
- Is your **property unsuitable** because of its condition or lack of amenities or for any other reason?
- Is there a reason why you need to reside within a **specific community**, eg. to provide/receive care or support to/from someone?

Please complete the relevant priority application form online by logging into your homehunt registration, or request the relevant priority form to be sent out to you from Berwickshire Housing Association and you can return it by post or in person to either of our offices.

Priority Pass Awards

If you are awarded a Priority Pass it may only apply for a specific area or areas or to a particular type of property, eg. ground floor. In some cases you can decide your priority limits but certain limits are decided by BHA, or by Scottish Borders Council who assess Homelessness. See tables below.

Your priority will only be valid for properties that meet your pass limits. You can still apply for properties which do not meet your pass limits, however, your priority will not be recognised. Pass limits include areas, property features and property types.

Please only complete the priority application forms which you think you may qualify for. There is no need to fill in any details or return any of the other priority forms if they do not apply to your circumstances.

You can only qualify for priority from one priority group. If you think that you qualify for priority in more than one group please complete all the forms that apply and we will award the highest level of priority.

Who can limit priority passes in towns/villages/areas

| Priority Pass Area | Applicant | BHA | Scottish Borders Council |
|---|------------------|------------|---------------------------------|
| Domestic Abuse | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Harassment (including serious ASB) | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Homelessness/Relationship Breakdown (BHA Tenant) | | ✓ | |
| Health | | ✓ | |
| Sustainable Housing on Release for Everyone (SHORE) | | | ✓ |
| Armed Forces & Veterans | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Through Care After Care | | | ✓ |
| Prevention of Homelessness | | ✓ | |
| Overcrowding | ✓ | | |
| Under-occupancy | ✓ | | |
| Unsuitable Housing | ✓ | | |
| Kinship Carers, Foster Carers and Those Adopting | | ✓ | ✓ |
| First Affordable Home/Separated Households | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Flat to House | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Specific Need to be in the Community | ✓ | ✓ | |

Who can limit priority passes to property features

| Priority Feature | Applicant | BHA |
|--|------------------|------------|
| Property Type (eg. bungalow, flat, house etc.) | | ✓ |
| Ground Floor Accommodation | ✓ | ✓ |
| Wheelchair Access | ✓ | ✓ |
| Fully Wheelchair Adapted | ✓ | ✓ |
| Level Access Shower | | ✓ |
| Walk in Shower (cubicle) | | ✓ |
| Sheltered Housing | ✓ | ✓ |

Assessment and Timeframes

We will aim to assess all priority applications within 10 working days from receipt of all required information.

When Priority is not awarded

If you decide to move and the move worsens your housing circumstances, you may not be awarded priority for these circumstances for six months even if you would normally qualify for this in your new home.

Suspensions/Held Applications/Bypassing

There are some circumstances where BHA may suspend a registration although we aim to keep these to a minimum. We will inform the applicant why they have been suspended, how long the suspension is in place for and any action the applicant can take to end the suspension. We will also inform the applicant how they can appeal any suspension. We will review suspensions once every three months. Registrations may be placed on hold/suspended for the following reasons:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Change in circumstances/incomplete information at Registration — we may need verification of the change or additional information |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Outstanding Tenancy Related Debt — where an applicant or member of their household has outstanding arrears or other tenancy-related debt (such as rechargeable repairs) which amounts to more than one twelfth of the annual rent, the registration will be placed on hold unless an agreement has been in place and adhered to for no less than three months. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anti-social Behaviour — where an applicant, or a proposed member of their household, has:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Acted in an anti-social manner or been responsible for harassment in the vicinity of the property• Caused extensive damage to a current or previous tenanted property• Behaved in a threatening or violent way towards our staff or tenants• Been responsible for using a former home for illegal purposes which are, or were likely to endanger or cause nuisance or harassment to neighbours (eg. drug dealing, prostitution, fire raising). <p>There must be documented evidence to support our reasons for suspending any application for these reasons. This can include a Police or Landlord report, history of criminal conviction, eviction from a former home, ASBO or where an applicant has a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy (or equivalent) due to Anti-social behaviour. If an applicant demonstrates there are valid reasons that their behaviour has changed and behaviour will not re-occur, we will remove the suspension. In any offer of tenancy a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy will be offered if this behaviour has been within the last three years.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Refusal of Offers—if an applicant makes two reasonable refusals of offers then they can be suspended for six months. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• On occasion, we may bypass an applicant for a property. Bypassing is where we do not make an offer of a property to an applicant who would have otherwise received a provisional offer. Examples of where this may be done are where we know the property does not meet a person’s assessed needs or if we know the applicant will refuse the offer. Should we bypass an offer we will keep a record of why this happened. |

BHA Tenant Transfer Criteria—should an applicant be in arrears (or tenancy-related debt) at point of offer, then the Association will expect the debt to be under one twelfth of the annual rental due and the applicant to have made payments for at least three months. If this is not the case then the applicant will be expected to clear the outstanding debt in order to be allocated a tenancy with us. In exceptional circumstances the Housing Manager may waive this condition.

References—where a reference is provided stating that a property is in poor condition or there is anti-social behaviour on hold (see Suspensions/Held Applications/Bypassing).

If you would like more information on the above, please contact us about your registration.

False Information

If you intentionally give false or misleading information in an attempt to secure an offer of property we will immediately withdraw any priority you have, and suspend your registration for six months. If a tenancy has started, we will immediately take steps to recover the property.

Lettings Feedback

A Lettings Feedback Report is available at www.homehunt.info. This gives information on how many bids there were for a vacancy and whether the successful applicant had priority. This gives everyone some idea of the demand for different properties and may help you to make realistic choices about where you want to live.

Where to go Homehunting

Our properties that are available for rent are advertised each week at our Duns and Eyemouth offices, at www.homehunt.info, on our website and on our facebook page BHAThrivingCommunities.

Finally, if you need any help or advice at any time or you have any comments you would like to make, please contact any BHA office or email: Lettings@berwickshirehousing.org.uk

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| <p>Berwickshire Housing Association 55 Newtown Street, Duns TD11 3AU Tel. 01361 884000</p> <p>38 Church Street, Eyemouth TD14 5DH Tel. 01890 750888</p> <p>www.berwickshirehousing.org.uk</p> |

***Please inform us of any changes to your personal information.
We will update these changes to keep your records up to date and accurate.***



Berwickshire Housing Association will produce this information, on request, in
Large Print and Community Languages.

To find out more, please telephone 01361 884000

BHA is a

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Scottish Charity

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Privacy and Data Protection:

Berwickshire Housing Association Limited (“the Association”, “we”, “us”, “our”) is the Data Controller and has its registered office at 55 Newtown Street, Duns TD11 3AU.

The information provided on this form and other additional related information, together with any that is obtained from a third party, will be held in our digital and manual filing systems and processed by us or our contracted data processors to deliver our services to you under the agreement between us. We will not use this information for any other purpose other than that specified and will not store the information for longer than we require to hold it.

The Association will process this information as detailed in our Privacy Policy and Fair Processing Notices which can be viewed on our website at www.berwickshirehousing.org.uk/gdpr or by writing to our Data Protection Officer at the address above. They can also be contacted by emailing data@berwickshirehousing.org.uk

Please inform us of any changes to your personal information. We will update these changes to keep your records up to date and accurate.

You have the right to see and receive a copy of any personal information that is held by the Association and to have any inaccuracies corrected. You can request this by contacting our Data Protection Officer.