



# Herts Choice Homes Newsletter

**ISSUE 3**

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**This is the third edition of the Herts Choice Homes Newsletter which is designed to keep you up to date with important news regarding the choice based lettings scheme.**

Have you noticed a change to the feedback you are receiving on your bids? Although we previously only gave your position if you came within the top 20 bids, you will in future be shown where your bid was placed if it is within the top 100.

This change came about as a result of the request of scheme users who attended our most recent meeting at Borehamwood and is another example of how you can make a difference to Herts Choice Homes - see page 3 for details of the next meeting including how to register your interest.

The Newsletter will be updated as new affordable housing developments come through and other news is added. Please look out for future updates and let us know if there is anything you would like to see included – contact details on page 8.

## **Important Notice** **No Bidding at the end of the Bank Holiday week**

**There will be no homes advertised from Friday 8<sup>th</sup> June to Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> June 2012.**

**After Friday 1<sup>st</sup> June 2012 the next date on which properties will be available for bids will be Friday 15<sup>th</sup> June 2012.**



## Bidding Tips

Before you place a bid, do your homework! Make full use of the property adverts and do not just be drawn to a property because of a photograph or its location. Although you have the right to refuse a property after having made a successful bid, this can cause wasted time and money for other users, councils and Housing Associations.

Here are a few tips to help with your bidding;

- Look at the rent and other charges and consider carefully whether you can afford them
- Use the symbols at the top of the adverts – the key for them is on page 1 of the listings. These will often tell you whether you are eligible for the property and if it is suitable for your needs
- Consider all the features of the property. For example, is it near enough to local facilities? Is the heating type suitable? Can you take your pet? If offered on a fixed term tenancy, is this acceptable?
- If there is reference to a 'Local Lettings Plan', read this carefully – it will give more information on who is eligible and what additional factors will be taken into account when the property is to be offered
- If you can, make sure that the area is acceptable to you. If it is nearby, why not have a look around first? Only bid for areas that you want to live in
- Remember that you do not have to use your 3 bids every week
- Take time to consider your choices. It does not matter when you place your bid as long as they are made before 12 noon on the following Tuesday. Shortlists are not drawn up until after this deadline and are ordered by the band and priority date of all bidders regardless of when they expressed interest
- Make use of the 'Feedback Report' at the end of each week's listing. Look at the number of bids made in each district and consider being flexible with where you would be prepared to live

Many applicants do not express an interest in any properties. If you are having difficulties with bidding or do not understand any aspect of the scheme, please refer to the Scheme Guide on the Herts Choice Homes website. If this does not help, then contact the council with which you are registered – see page 8 of this newsletter for details.

## New Housing Developments

### Croxley Green, Rickmansworth:

**Shared Ownership Properties:** 2 and 3 bed shared ownership houses available now, contact Hightown Homes. Link: <http://www.hertschoicetohomes.org.uk/uploads/MerchantTaylorsPlace.pdf>

**3 Intermediate properties will be advertised on Lea Valley website** [www.leavalleyhomes.co.uk](http://www.leavalleyhomes.co.uk)

Out of those 3 properties, 1 property will be advertised in May 2012 and the other 2 will be advertised in June 2012.

**Rented Properties:** 11 properties are scheduled to be advertised for bidding in May 2012.

### Watford:

New Development in Watford near Watford Town Centre, Tesco & Watford High Street Station will be available soon. Link: <http://www.hertschoicetohomes.org.uk/uploads/rainbow.pdf>



# User Group Meeting

The next Herts Choice Homes User Group Meeting will be held on 13th June 2012 at Holiday Inn Hotel, Borehamwood, Barnet By Pass, M25 Jct 23, WD6 5PU, from 18:00 to 20:00

The Scheme User Group meets 4 times a year. They have already helped to shape how the scheme has developed and suggested what can be done to make it more informative and understandable. Two elected members from the user group sit on the Herts Choice Homes Management Board and act as the User Group's voice at this policy making, decision taking forum.



Would you like to?

- Understand more about how the Herts Choice Homes scheme works
- Voice your opinion and express your ideas
- Influence changes that are made
- Meet other members of the scheme and hear about their views and experiences.

Light refreshments will be provided and your reasonable transport expenses will be reimbursed.

Numbers are limited and places will be allocated on a 'first come first served' basis. Members who have attended previous meetings will be given priority.

We would like to boost the numbers attending so if you are interested please contact Minaxi Makwana email ([minaxi.makwana@threerivers.gov.uk](mailto:minaxi.makwana@threerivers.gov.uk)) or telephone (01923 776611).



## Cross-partner Lettings

One of the advantages of a group of councils working together in a lettings scheme like Herts Choice Homes is that we can offer moves over a wider geographical area. This may help people who need to move for work, education, to be near family or simply because they prefer another town or village.

At the end of the weekly listings of available homes, you will see the 'Cross Partner' section. This includes 5% of each council's vacancies which are randomly selected and available for all eligible scheme members to bid on, regardless of which of the councils you are registered with. It also includes vacancies which have been put in because of special circumstances, e.g. elderly persons' homes for

which there may be very limited demand or homes adapted for people with disabilities.

The underlying principle governing this feature of the scheme is that no council will end up with either a significant loss or gain in their vacancies. In other words, the number of people moving away from each council area must be kept roughly the same as the number moving in. You may have noticed that we recently had to adjust the numbers advertised for a while as they had become very imbalanced.

We are currently considering whether to change the number of homes placed here each week. Some research on the effects of these lettings to date

will shortly be carried out and the results will be shown in this newsletter in a few weeks.

In the meantime, we would like to know your views;

- Do you bid for cross partner homes and if so, for what reason?
- Would you like to see a greater or smaller percentage of vacancies selected each week?
- Do you have any other views on this matter?

Please email your thoughts to: [minaxi.makwana@threerivers.gov.uk](mailto:minaxi.makwana@threerivers.gov.uk) so that we can take your opinions into account before making any changes.



## Important Changes to the Scheme

The Government has recently introduced new legislation which will have a significant impact on vacant homes which are advertised and let by Housing Associations and councils.

### **Length of tenancy**

Traditionally, tenancies are granted for as long as a tenant wishes to stay there ('lifetime' tenancies).

In future, a new form of fixed term or 'flexible' tenancy will be offered to some tenants. The term will be decided by the landlord but this is most unlikely to be for a period less than 5 years and may be longer in some cases. Landlords are still able to grant lifetime tenancies and may continue to do so for tenants who are considered to need them.

Towards the end of the fixed term, a review of the tenants' circumstances will be carried out and a decision will be taken on whether a further fixed term tenancy of the property will be offered.

Existing tenancies are not affected but those with a lifetime tenancy who successfully bid for a vacant home will need to check with their landlord on how their tenancy term and rent level (see below) will be affected.

This change is intended to make allocations fairer by not automatically granting all new tenants a tenancy for life, but instead giving them a home only for as long as they are considered to be in need of it and where no other reasonable options exist.

### **Rents**

The Government's changes will allow some landlords to charge rents on new lettings at up to 80% of market rent levels. These are known as 'affordable' rents but despite this term, these may be considerably higher than existing 'social' rents.

The intention of this change is to enable landlords to raise more money which can then be re-invested in the provision of more affordable housing.

Existing tenants will continue to pay social rents for as long as they live in their current home but those seeking to transfer will need to check their position with their landlord.

Not all landlords will raise their rents in this way and those who do may not apply affordable rent levels to all their vacancies.

The effect of this will be that you will gradually see a much wider range of rents being charged with quite different levels even between properties which are of the same type and size and in the same district.

Property adverts will continue to show the rent payable and will also indicate the length of tenancy likely to be offered.

## Homeless people

Currently, those who have been accepted for housing having made a homelessness application are placed in band B and then allowed a specific period of time in which to make their bids.

The Government will be permitting councils to offer accepted homeless people a tenancy in the private sector so long as this is suitable to their needs and for a period not less than 12 months. This is likely to be introduced around April 2012.

The five Herts Choice Homes councils are considering how best to use this new power and more information will be provided in due course.

## Councils' allocations policies

The same legislation has also introduced changes which have prompted the councils to review their approach to who is eligible to be accepted onto the housing register and how applicants are prioritised.

Although most of the main criteria which determine into which band an application is placed are the same for each of the councils, there are some differences. The councils are working together on this review but they will carry out consultation individually and may decide to introduce changes which apply only within their own area.

We will keep you updated on any changes made to the policies through this newsletter.

## Lettings During the Last 13 Months

Nearly 2,200 homes have been let through Herts Choice Homes over the year. The tables below show each local authority by property type and which band the new tenants came from.

Properties Let by Band: Year to date April 2011 to April 2012

Hertsmere Borough Council						
Type / Size	No. of Lets Band A	No. of Lets Band B	No. of Lets Band C	No. of Lets Band D	No. of Lets Band E	Total
Sheltered accomm.	0	0	5	7	19	31
Studio general needs	0	0	0	5	1	6
Studio bungalow	0	0	0	0	0	0
1-bed general needs	1	36	8	35	5	85
1-bed bungalow	0	2	3	7	0	12
2-bed flat or maisonette	3	67	14	8	6	98
2-bed house	1	17	5	4	1	28
2-bed bungalow	0	0	1	0	0	1
3-bed flat or maisonette	1	7	2	0	0	10
3-bed house	4	22	15	0	0	41
3-bed bungalow	0	0	0	0	0	0
4-bed	1	5	1	0	0	7
5-bed	0	0	0	0	0	0
					<b>Total</b>	<b>319</b>

St Albans District Council						
Type / Size	No. of Lets Band A	No. of Lets Band B	No. of Lets Band C	No. of Lets Band D	No. of Lets Band E	Total
Sheltered accomm.	5	4	4	12	9	34
Studio general needs	0	1	1	4	0	6
Studio bungalow	0	0	0	0	0	0
1-bed general needs	5	57	20	26	1	109
1-bed bungalow	2	20	6	5	2	35
2-bed flat or maisonette	0	66	14	6	1	87
2-bed house	4	26	4	7	0	41
2-bed bungalow	0	2	2	0	0	4
3-bed flat or maisonette	0	0	0	1	0	1
3-bed house	3	26	28	10	0	67
3-bed bungalow	0	0	0	0	0	0
4-bed	0	2	4	2	1	9
5-bed	0	0	1	0	0	1
					<b>Total</b>	<b>394</b>

Three Rivers District Council						
Type / Size	No. of Lets Band A	No. of Lets Band B	No. of Lets Band C	No. of Lets Band D	No. of Lets Band E	Total
Sheltered accomm.	0	2	10	17	12	41
Studio general needs	0	1	8	6	0	15
Studio bungalow	0	2	1	2	0	5
1-bed general needs	3	55	29	18	10	115
1-bed bungalow	0	4	3	2	0	9
2-bed flat or maisonette	0	15	24	2	0	41
2-bed house	0	25	10	0	1	36
2-bed bungalow	0	3	3	0	0	6
3-bed flat or maisonette	0	2	1	2	0	5
3-bed house	4	20	31	4	0	59
3-bed bungalow	0	0	1	0	0	1
4-bed	0	0	0	1	0	1
5-bed	0	0	0	0	0	0
					<b>Total</b>	<b>334</b>

Watford Borough Council						
Type / Size	No. of Lets Band A	No. of Lets Band B	No. of Lets Band C	No. of Lets Band D	No. of Lets Band E	Total
Sheltered accomm.	1	4	4	14	40	63
Studio general needs	0	1	0	10	0	11
Studio bungalow	0	0	0	0	0	0
1-bed general needs	6	29	6	17	4	62
1-bed bungalow	0	0	1	1	1	3
2-bed flat or maisonette	0	102	10	2	1	115
2-bed house	3	17	4	6	1	31
2-bed bungalow	0	1	0	0	0	1
3-bed flat or maisonette	0	3	0	0	0	3
3-bed house	0	25	15	15	0	55
3-bed bungalow	0	0	1	0	0	1
4-bed	0	1	3	3	0	7
5-bed	0	0	0	0	0	0
					<b>Total</b>	<b>352</b>

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council						
Type / Size	No. of Lets Band A	No. of Lets Band B	No. of Lets Band C	No. of Lets Band D	No. of Lets Band E	Total
Sheltered accomm.	19	17	45	37	51	169
Studio general needs	0	2	7	56	0	65
Studio bungalow	0	0	0	0	0	0
1-bed general needs	15	61	55	32	4	167
1-bed bungalow	1	1	1	2	0	5
2-bed flat or maisonette	2	69	42	3	5	121
2-bed house	6	40	11	0	0	57
2-bed bungalow	12	20	24	6	0	62
3-bed flat or maisonette	0	2	4	0	0	6
3-bed house	7	123	13	0	0	143
3-bed bungalow	0	0	0	0	0	0
4-bed	1	5	0	0	0	6
5-bed	0	0	0	0	0	0
					<b>Total</b>	<b>801</b>

Unfortunately, there continues to be a real shortage of affordable housing and, as you can see from the 'Feedback' section each week, most general needs homes (i.e. those not reserved for elderly people) attract a very high number of bids.

The number of these let to applicants from B and E is exceptionally low. All applicants, but especially those in bands D or E, are advised to explore other housing options and you can begin this by following the link below.

## Links:

### User Guide

<http://www.hertschoicetohomes.org.uk/uploads/SUG.pdf>

### Other Housing Options

<http://www.hertschoicetohomes.org.uk/HousingOptions.aspx>



## Is there something you want to tell us?

As your banding and, therefore, your prospects of being rehoused are dependent upon your circumstances, it is essential that you keep us up to date. If you don't, you may not be getting the priority your situation merits.

It may be some time since you applied for housing and things may well have changed in the meantime. Has someone joined or left your household? Has there been a significant change in your medical condition? You may even have changed address and forgotten to let us know!

If you do need to update your application, please contact the council with which you are registered.

If you want to find out more about anything in this newsletter or any other aspect of the scheme, please contact the council with which you are registered.

## Contacts

Hertsmere Borough Council	0208 207 7420
St. Albans City and District Council	01727 866100
Three Rivers District Council	01923 776611
Watford Borough Council	01923 226400
Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council	01707 357618

Herts Choice Homes Suggestion for this newsletter and attendance at the User Group Meeting either please call 01923 727337 or Email: [Minaxi.makwana@threerivers.gov.uk](mailto:Minaxi.makwana@threerivers.gov.uk)