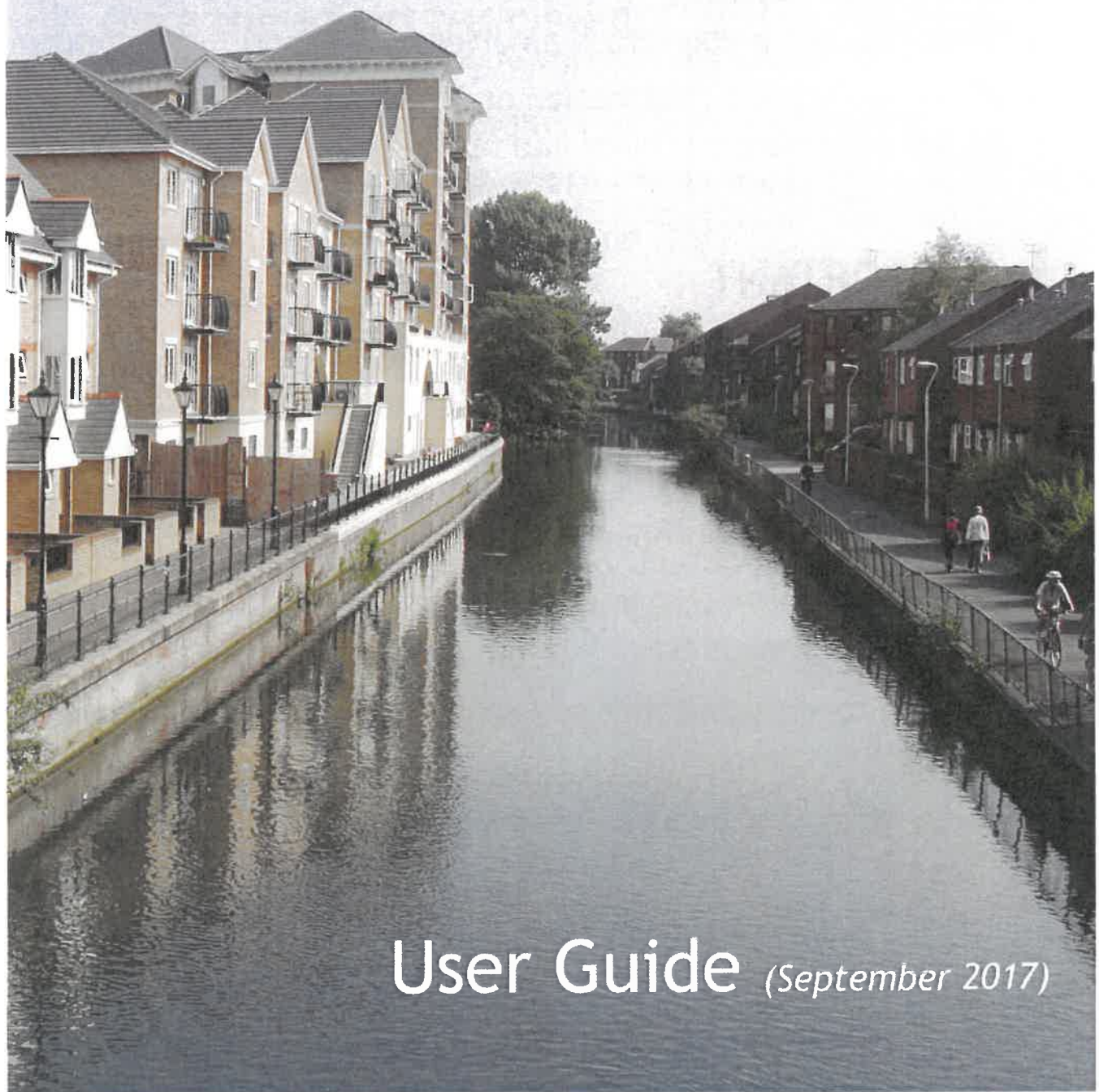


Housing



Reading
Borough Council
Working better with you

Homechoice at Reading



User Guide *(September 2017)*

Welcome to Homechoice at Reading

Now you are registered with Homechoice you can begin bidding for a Council or registered provider home.

This guide explains:

- How Homechoice works (*page 3*)
- How to find details about properties becoming vacant (*page 4*)
- How to bid on the properties you are interested in (*page 6*)
- How we offer properties to successful bidders (*page 8*)
- What happens if you refuse an offer (*page 9*) and
- Where we publish information on lettings so you can see our allocations process is open and fair (*page 3*)



IMPORTANT

In Reading, as in most other parts of the country, the number of people waiting for social housing is far greater than the number of properties becoming available - this means there is a lot of competition for every property we advertise.

We cannot guarantee that you will make a successful bid or offer any advice on timescales.

We strongly recommend that you continue to look at your other housing options (*see page 10*).

For information or help with bidding call 0118 937 2172

How Homechoice works

1. When we know a property is becoming available:

- We advertise it on the Homechoice website straight away
 - properties may be added every day
- Bidding opens straight away and stays open for 7 days
- You can bid on this property anytime during this period

2. Once the advert has closed:

We prioritise the list of bidders for that property by:

- priority band (highest priority first) then
- time in this band (longest time first).

3. Allocating the property:

If the Council owns the property:

- We will invite the top 3 bidders to view the property.
- We will offer the property to the top bidder. If they refuse, we offer it to the 2nd bidder, then the 3rd and so on until someone accepts.

Other housing providers:

- Registered providers usually interview the bidders before deciding whether to arrange a viewing or make an offer.

4. Reporting back:

We publish details of lettings on the Homechoice website so you can see the process is open and fair.

Finding a property

Where are properties advertised?

All properties are advertised on the Homechoice website:

www.reading.gov.uk/choicebasedlettings

(you need your PIN number)

You can access the internet FREE at your local library or at our Civic Offices (Bridge Street, Reading RG1 2LU) and support is available if you need it.

Daily printouts are available from the Civic Offices - but we will always encourage and support you to go online.

Can I bid on any property advertised?

No. We can only consider you for properties you are eligible for to avoid disappointment:

- **DON'T BID** for properties that are larger or smaller than you need - your eligibility is based on our bedroom standard:

Single applicant	Studio/1 bed flat
Couple	1 bed flat
Anyone needing a separate room for medical reasons	+ 1 bed
Each additional adult or couple 18 years and over	+ 1 bed
1 or 2 children under 10 years - either sex	+ 1 bed
2 children opposite sexes - 1 or both over 10 years	+ 2 bed
2 children of the same sex over 10 to 17 years	+ 1 bed



PLEASE NOTE: *You won't be eligible for bedrooms for children unless you are their main carer.*

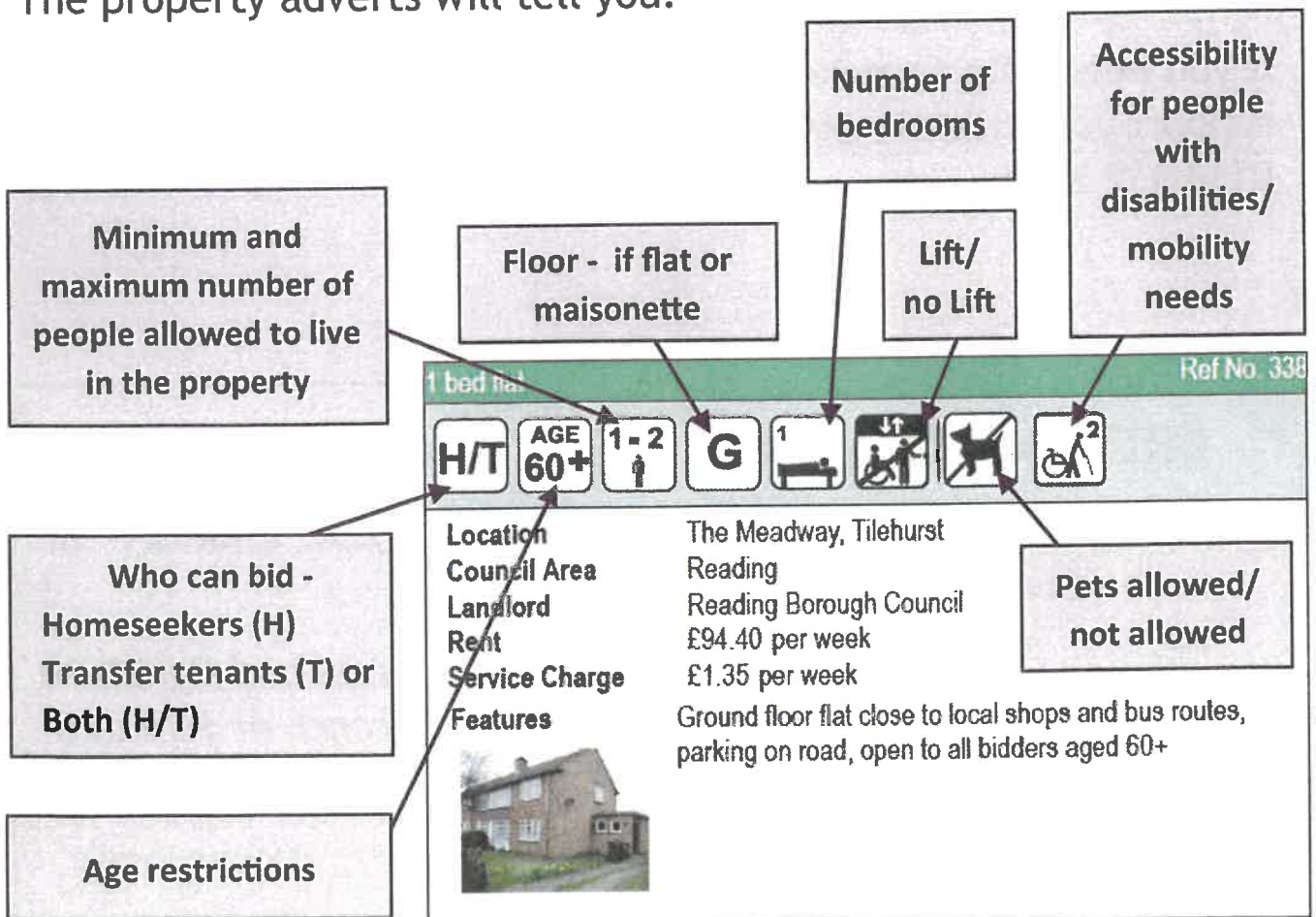


PLEASE NOTE: *If you are pregnant you can only bid for a 2 bed property 3 months before your due date - our system will update your eligibility if we have your EDD.*

- **DON'T BID** for properties that have been adapted or specially designed for people with disabilities unless you have been assessed as needing these facilities.
- **DON'T BID** for properties with age restrictions unless you qualify.
- **DON'T BID** for properties restricted to a specific type of household - like families without children or families with young children - unless your household qualifies (*we sometimes make restrictions to help build more balanced communities*)

How will I know what restrictions apply?

The property adverts will tell you:



Bidding for a home

How to bid:

You need your Personal Identification Number (PIN) - find this on your letter confirming you have been accepted on the Homechoice Register.

1: Go to

www.reading.gov.uk/choicebasedlettings

2: Log on & follow the online instructions

If you need help with bidding

If you need help to make a bid and don't have anyone who could support you with this please call the Voids and Lettings Team on 0118 937 2172.



FREE INTERNET ACCESS

You can use the **INTERNET FREE** at your **LOCAL LIBRARY*** or in the **CIVIC OFFICES**

**To join the library take proof of your address and signature (bank/store card/passport) to your local branch or join as a "Your Reading Passport" member.*

When can I bid?

You can bid on open properties any time - night or day

Please be aware:

- Properties may be added to the website any time - we post adverts as soon as we know a property is becoming available.
- Bidding on a property opens as soon as the advert is posted.
- Bidding stays open for 7 days from the day it is posted.
- You can't bid on a property once the bidding has closed.



NEVER MISS A PROPERTY AD!

Although new properties may be added daily they will always be advertised for 7 days. Log on to Homechoice on the **SAME DAY EACH WEEK** to avoid missing any adverts.

When you log on you can **set up a property email* alert** to receive email whenever a property suitable for you is added. **if you have an email account*

How many properties can I bid for?

You can bid for up to three properties advertised at any one time. Once you have bid on three properties you won't be able to bid on another property until:

- the 7 day bidding cycle for one of those properties ends OR
- you withdraw one of your bids



IF YOU DON'T BID YOU WON'T BE CONSIDERED FOR ACCOMMODATION!

Allocating properties

Once the bidding has closed we prioritise the list of bidders for each property by priority band and date accepted to that band. The top bidder for each property will be the applicant who has been in the highest priority band the longest.



IMPORTANT: You can only be the 'top bidder' for one property at a time. If you are the top bidder for more than one property we will ask you to choose which property you prefer and remove you from other lists.

Making an offer

Depending on who owns the property (the Council or a registered provider) you may be invited to a viewing or interview (*see page 3*). This may result in an offer of housing.

If you don't turn up at an viewing or interview (without good reason) we may count this as a refusal of an offer (*see penalties on page 9*). This applies even if someone supporting you (with your permission) has bid on the property on your behalf.



IMPORTANT: We can't make you an offer of housing until we have verified your situation. We will tell you what documents you must provide - if you don't provide these within 24 hours from the viewing you may be overlooked.

You have 24 hours to decide if you want to accept an offer of a property. If we don't hear from you we will withdraw the offer.

Once you accept an offer of housing

We won't consider any further bids and will treat you as a non-qualified applicant

Refusing an offer of housing

If you refuse an offer you can go usually get straight back into the bidding process without penalty. However, if you refuse 3 reasonable offers of housing in a 6 month period we will suspend you from the Homechoice Register and you won't be able to reapply for a year.



IMPORTANT: Different rules apply if you are STATUTORY HOMELESS or placed in PRIORITY BAND A because you need a Management Transfer - we will explain this to you in a letter. *See our Allocations Scheme: www.reading.gov.uk/homechoice*

Moving into your new home

If/when we make you an offer of housing we will give you a rough idea of when the property will be ready for you.

Once we give you a date for signing the tenancy you **MUST be ready to move quickly** as you will start paying rent straight away. We may only be able to give you a few days notice.

If possible, we will offer access in advance so you can measure up for carpets and curtains (these aren't provided in Council properties).

You must also provide your own white goods (fridge, cooker, washing machine etc.).

You will be responsible for arranging and paying for your move (including connecting gas appliances - if applicable).

You will be responsible for decorating your new home - depending on the condition of the property we may offer decorating vouchers to help with paint and essential equipment.



If you have a support worker they may be able to help you apply for grants to help with moving costs and/or finding furniture.

Other housing options

The demand for social housing in Reading is much greater than the number of properties available. We strongly recommend you consider other housing options - these may include:

Exchanging your home

If you are already a secure council tenant or an assured tenant with a registered housing provider tenant you can exchange your home with another Council or registered provider tenant anywhere in the country. Go to www.homeswapper.co.uk to register your details and find a match.

This service is free to all Reading Borough Council tenants and some registered provider tenants. However, you may have to pay a small fee if your registered provider has not signed up as a Homeswapper partner.

Buying an affordable home

Help to Buy South offers a number of different options for buying an affordable home including:

- Help to Buy Equity Loan - a scheme to help you buy a new build property. You must have a deposit of 5% and be able to get a mortgage for 75% of the value of the property. The Government will fund the rest.
- Help to buy shared ownership - a scheme can help you buy a new flat or house on a part-buy/part-rent basis through different housing providers. You can buy shares of between 25% to 75% of the home's value and you pay a low rent on the remaining share.

For more details visit www.helptobuysouth.co.uk

Buying with Help to Buy Mortgage Guarantee

The Help to Buy Mortgage Guarantee scheme can help you buy a home with a deposit as little as 5%. The Government offers lenders an option to purchase a guarantee on mortgage loans - because of this support lenders taking part in the scheme can offer home buyers up to 95% of the purchase price.

For more details and a list of participating lenders visit www.helptobuysouth.co.uk.

Looking for private rented accommodation

We can offer advice and assistance on accessing accommodation in the private sector and provide information on your rights as a private tenant.

Homefinder UK

National housing mobility scheme available to anyone willing to move away from the area.

Visit homefinderuk.org to register.

**This information can be made available in other formats
(Large Print, Braille, audio) or languages on request.
Contact the Voids & Lettings Team on 0118 937 2172**