

## Local Social Housing: A Summary

The social housing in Stockbury is administered by Maidstone Borough Council in conjunction with housing associations such as The Riverside Group and English Rural. To be considered for social housing in the village, as and when properties become available, any person who wishes to apply must first meet the eligibility qualifications and be correctly registered. **Please note that this is unofficial collated/summarised data from a number of sources and should not be used in lieu of your local government sites/literature/guidance.** Here's a breakdown:

### Eligibility Qualifications & Requirements:

- You have to -
  - o Live in Stockbury or
  - o Work in Stockbury or
  - o Have a connection to Stockbury. (Eg: Having an immediate family member resident in Maidstone for 5 years is a valid connection, as is being in receipt of a job offer (providing it is >16hrs pw))
- You will need to -
  - o Be on the MBC Housing Register (And then Kent Homechoice) and
  - o Be on each of the Housing Associations' lists (i.e. Riverside <https://www.riverside.org.uk> & English Rural <https://englishrural.org.uk> 020 7820 7930)
  - o Be on the Parish Council's List

### Some Information:

- **What is the difference between Housing Associations and Council Housing?** Housing Associations, though heavily regulated, are privately owned by non-profits.
- **What if I'm an existing council or housing association tenant?** You can apply for a transfer. Most transfer applications are dealt with by the local authority, but some housing associations have their own transfer lists.
- Maidstone Council's scheme varies from some of the others in that they use a quota system for the number of properties advertised for each band. **The Housing Register's 4 Bands:**
  - o **C** - *Community Contribution and Homelessness Prevention*
  - o **H** - *Homeless*
  - o **M** - *Medical and Health Assistance*
  - o **R** - *Reasonable Preference*
- **Will they check my Credit History?** Yes, they may investigate your Credit History
- **Can I use a c/o address for correspondence?** The online application lets you supply care/of address details after filling in the initial address details, if you so require.
- **How long will it take for my application to process?** Approx 4 weeks. Please use the link below to register. <https://www.kenthomechoice.org.uk/choice/login.aspx#divRegister>.
- **What details will I need before Pre-assessment?**
  - o *The age of household members that you wish to move with you*
  - o *Your salary details from any employment*
  - o *The total amount of benefits that you receive including housing benefit*
  - o *Any other income including savings*
  - o *Money that you owe*
  - o *The total amount of any current or former rent arrears*
- **What if I'm in immediate danger of domestic abuse?** You must call 999. Domestic Abuse helpline: 08082000247 - or men's advice helpline: 0808 801 0327. If concerned about your housing situation, please call 01622 602440 to speak to a housing advisor.

- **I don't live in the area...** Applicants from any area of the UK can access Maidstone Borough Council's Housing Register as long as they meet the two criteria of 1. Local Connection and 2. Housing Need.
- **I am on a neighbouring borough's register, can I apply?** Applicants on Swale Housing's Register would not be eligible for Stockbury properties as these properties are located in the Borough of Maidstone. To be eligible, Applicants would need to be registered with MBC and meet the Local Connection and Housing Need criteria under the Council's Allocation Scheme.
- **Can I be on more than one housing register at the same time?** Yes. Applicants can be on more than one Housing Register at the same time, again as long as they meet the respective Local Authority's Allocation Scheme criteria.
- **Do I need to register elsewhere?** In addition to being on the MBC register, it is also necessary for persons to be registered on the housing lists for each of the village housing associations that the applicant may wish to apply for.
- **I didn't supply my documents/proofs within the time provided, do I have to reapply?** Yes, you would have received a letter or email from us telling you which documents you would have needed to provide and if your application has been refused as they were not received in time.
- **I have previously been removed or refused entry to the housing register. Can I reapply?** Yes, you can reapply by completing an on-line application form. However, if you were previously refused and your circumstances have not significantly changed, it is unlikely that you will be accepted.
- **What happens if my circumstances change?**
  - You will need to update MBC and your Kent Home Choice Account.
  - The changes may require a reassessment of whether you still meet the council's eligibility criteria
  - If you have supplied all the necessary proofs and evidence your application will normally be updated in 2-4 weeks.
- **What if I'm unable to supply a specific proof in time?** Let the housing association and the council know before the deadline given so that your application isn't refused.
- **Why can't I see all the available properties?** You will only see properties associated with the Band you're placed in and the size of the property you require.
- **My Kent Homechoice Account states that I am in the top 5 in the bidding. Will I be offered the property?** If you are successful, the Housing Provider will contact you directly, usually within 2 weeks.
- **How long will it take to get a property?** There is a limited supply of social housing within the borough and the supply is always much less than the need. How long you will wait will depend on several factors including your household size, the band you are placed in, any specific needs your household may have and how many areas within the borough you are willing to consider moving to. Your Kent Homechoice feedback page shows your ranking compared to other applicants when you have placed a bid on a property.
- **How long will a medical / welfare / hardship housing need assessment take?** To be accepted on to the housing register, you will have to have a housing need. Sometimes a further assessment needs to be undertaken by an officer. If this is necessary, you will be informed of this and you should be notified of the decision within 4 weeks.
- **How do I get a review or reassessment done?** If you do not agree with a decision concerning your housing register application or account, you can request a review. Generally, you have 21 days from being notified of the decision to ask for a review, but this varies. For full details of how to request a review please see MBC's Allocation Scheme.
- **Members of your family:** The test of normal residence as a member of the family will require residence as opposed to "staying" or "staying access" even in cases of joint custody or joint residence or similar orders. The Council in applying the test will consider whether there is a sufficient degree of permanence or regularity to constitute normal residence as a member of

the household. Account may be taken of whether the child is dependent upon the applicant. The Council may also take into account the supply and demand for accommodation in the Maidstone Borough and any under occupation that may result where a child spends part of the week with one parent and part of the week with another parent. Who can be considered part of an application?

- *Partner*
- *Children: Children are defined as members of the household who are under 18 years of age and the applicant must have legal responsibility for the children.*
- *Relatives*
- *Carers*
- *Any member of the household who can reasonably be considered residing with the applicant at the time of initial application*
- **What if I'm pregnant?** Pregnancy must be reported to the Council as a change of circumstances and relevant proof of pregnancy must be supplied. Upon entering the last trimester (usually the last 12 – 14 weeks) of a pregnancy, the pregnancy will be considered as an additional child for the purpose of assessing the bedroom needs of an applicant.
- **Area Preferences:**
  - Applicants should be aware that whilst their area preference will be respected, Maidstone has a limited supply of subsidised housing. In order to make the best use of this limited resource, and for an applicant to maximise their chances of being housed, applicants should bid on all properties that are suitable regardless of location.
  - The Kent Homechoice website will provide details of bidding activity including details of successful bids. Information is provided through Kent Homechoice that will enable the applicant to make an assessment of how long it will take to be housed. Some areas are more popular than others and some property types attract more bids than others. As applicants can identify areas of the Borough where many or few vacancies of suitably sized accommodation may become available, they can make an assessment as to the likelihood of a property becoming available in that area
- **Bedroom Allocation:**
  - Household composition determines the number of bedrooms in a home that an applicant can be awarded. The Council will use the bedroom standard recommended by the Secretary of State which allocates a separate bedroom to each:
    - Married or co-habiting couple
    - Person aged 16 years or over
    - Two children of the same sex up to the age of 16
    - Two children aged under 10 years regardless of sex
  - Extra bedrooms may be allocated in exceptional circumstances such as where an overnight carer is required (see paragraph 18.2) or an extra bedroom is required for a disabled child who would normally be expected to share a bedroom. This must be approved by a Senior Homechoice Officer.
  - An applicant is able to request a review of the Council's decision in respect of bedroom allocation by writing to the Homechoice and Strategy Manager (see Appendix B)
- **Being on the Register:**
  - Applicants must inform the Housing Service in writing or by email of any changes to their circumstances such as, but not limited to, change of address or composition of household within 30 days of the change occurring. This may result in a change to the band that the applicant has been placed in. This may affect an offer of accommodation if the information provided by the applicant is out of date and could result in the withdrawal of an offer.

- Applicants are entitled to remain on the register until their housing need has been resolved unless they are removed by the Council, however, all applicants must be active on the register and bidding for properties whenever possible and appropriate.
- Applicants are required to renew their housing register application every 12 months. The Council will contact applicants on an annual basis, reminding them of the requirement to renew, in order to remain on the Housing Register.
- If an applicant fails to respond within 28 days of being asked to renew their application will be removed. When a new housing register application is submitted after one has been removed, the applicant will be treated as a new case. This means the applicants' priority date will be set at the date of the new valid application.
- An applicant is able to request a review of the Council's decision to cancel an application by writing to the Senior Homechoice Officer (see Appendix B).

### The 5 Steps of the Kent Homechoice process:

- **Step 1: Membership:** You are automatically a member of Kent Homechoice if you are registered on the council's housing register. If you are not registered for housing you can register online. If you need assistance with your online application contact the Local Authority that you are applying to. Remember that you can only bid for properties in the area that you are registered in. If you need more information about whether you are eligible, please contact the Housing Options Team at your council.
- **Step 2: Registration:** Once your completed application has been assessed and you have been included on the housing register, your Council will write to you. We will tell you what band you are in and the size of property you are eligible for. If there are any changes to your household, accommodation or personal circumstances you can complete an online change of circumstance form by signing in and selecting 'change of circumstances'. You may have to complete another form and provide us with evidence. It is very important that we know any changes as it may alter your priority, or the type of property you are eligible for.
- **Step 3: Bidding:** All homes in Kent are advertised daily apart from homes in Canterbury, which are advertised weekly on Wednesdays. Under daily bidding each property advertised will be open for bidding for a minimum of 5 days. Each advert will show the 'Bidding Closes' date and you will have until the end of this date to bid for the home. You should only bid for homes you are eligible for which are advertised on this website only. The adverts give you information about each property available for letting and a photograph will be included. You can bid in the following ways:
  1. On the internet - <https://www.kenthomechoice.org.uk/choice/login.aspx#divRegister>
  2. Auto Bidding - If you would like to have bids placed for you automatically without you having to log in you can contact your Local Authority and ask for auto bidding to be set up for you.
  3. Staff assistance - View the contact section for your Council's details.
- **Step 4: Offer:** At the end of the bidding period, all bids for homes are put in priority order to produce a list of eligible applicants for each property. The landlord of each property offers from the list after making further eligibility checks. Following these checks if your name is still at the top of the "priority list" you will be invited to view the property. If you refuse, the next person who is eligible on the list will be offered the home. Please note that you will only be able to view a property when it has been formally offered to you. You may be penalised for refusing properties you have chosen. Your council will advise you if any action will be taken because you have refused a property. Some landlords invite more than one applicant to view their properties at the same time, although the property is always offered first to the applicant with the highest priority. If you are top of more than one list, the landlord will decide which property to offer you after contacting you and the other properties will be

offered elsewhere. If you receive an offer to view but you do not wish to, or are unable to attend you must contact the landlord immediately.

- **Step 5: Feedback:** It is not possible to notify you individually when your bids have been unsuccessful but you can get this information from the website (see 'feedback' after you have logged in). All properties that have been advertised will be listed once they have been let. This tells you how many people bid for each property as well as the band of the successful bidder and the time that they had been waiting for a property.

If you would like further details, or wish to discuss please contact a parish councillor. Please note that there is no such thing as silly question, and we will take up your concerns with MBC. We will respect and maintain your anonymity if so required. We want to help. We are here to help.

If you would like your name added to a list of interested parties held by your Parish Council please email your details to our parish clerk, Mrs Sherrie Babington, at: [stockburypc@sherriebabington.co.uk](mailto:stockburypc@sherriebabington.co.uk)

The Stockbury Parish Council