

Borders CHOICE·HOMES

The Key to over 5000 affordable homes
in the Scottish Borders



In partnership with Scottish Borders Council and Cairn Housing Association

YOUR GUIDE TO
Borders Choice Homes

Contents	Page No.
Registering	4
- you need to register before you can apply for properties	
Applying for Properties	4-5
- how to respond to adverts	
Offers of Property	5
- how and when offers are made	
Applying for Priority	6
- types of priority	
How to apply for Priority	6-7
- how and when to apply	
Awards for Priority	7-8
- the ways in which passes may be limited	
Using Your Priority	8-9
- how passes can expire or be withdrawn	
Where Priority is <u>not</u> Awarded	9
- an explanation of 'worsened circumstances'	
Registrations 'On Hold'	9-10
- circumstances under which registrations can be put 'On Hold'	
False Information	10
- providing false or misleading information can lead to your registration being put 'On Hold' for six months, or eviction action being taken if a tenancy has started	
Reporting Allocations	11
- what information we will publish following an allocation	
Where to go Homehunting	12
- where to find information about our available properties	

Welcome to the Borders Common Housing Register – Borders Choice Homes

Berwickshire Housing Association, Eildon Housing Association and Waverley Housing three major landlords in the Borders, together with Cairn Housing Association, a national housing provider and Scottish Borders Council, have introduced Borders Choice Homes using the homehunt allocations package. This makes applying for housing easier.

All that is required for you to access Borders Choice Homes is completion of a short form which replaces the traditional lengthy Housing Application Form. On completion the form can be returned to any participating landlord's housing office – details on back page of this booklet. Properties available for rent are advertised each week in the Berwickshire News, Berwick Advertiser, the Southern Reporter, at all landlords' offices, on freephone 0800 587 4868, and on the internet at www.homehunt.info.

As it is possible that more than one person will apply for a vacant house or flat, there are some simple rules to help us decide who should receive the first offer of the property.

Borders Choice Homes covers the Scottish Borders area. We hope you like this approach to letting properties.

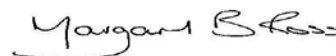
Happy homehunting!



Helen Forsyth
Chief Executive
Berwickshire HA



Nile Istephan
Chief Executive
Eildon HA



Margaret Ross
Chief Executive
Waverley Housing

Data Protection Notice

Berwickshire and Eildon Housing Associations and Waverley Housing (the partnering landlords) are the data controllers, whose registered offices are 55 Newtown Street, Duns, TD11 3AU, The Weaving Shed, Ettrick Mill, Dunsdale Road, Selkirk TD7 5EB and 27 North Bridge Street, Hawick, TD9 9BD respectively.

The information you provide on this form and other additional related information you may provide together with any that is obtained from a third party will be held and used in accordance with our Allocations and Data Protection Policies. The partnering landlords will use this information solely for the purpose of operating the Borders Choice Homes service and for administrative and statistical purposes. The partnering landlords will not disclose any information without your written consent unless it is required to do so by law or its regulators.

By returning this form you consent to our processing data about you that is defined by the Data Protection Act as sensitive. Examples include information about health, racial or ethnic origin, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, committed or alleged offences including court proceedings and sentences. This data will only be processed where absolutely necessary.

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

You have the right to see and receive a copy of any personal information (for which we may charge a small fee) that is held by the partnering landlords and to have any inaccuracies corrected.

Registering

You need to register with us before you can apply for a property. This is a very quick and easy process.

All we need is your name, current address and any landlord's details, password and date of birth, and the names and dates of birth of everyone who will move with you. We also ask you to tick and sign a few simple statements. Please answer these honestly as they are only included to help us find out whether you might need help or support in maintaining a tenancy with us.

Registration is completed 'whilst you wait' at any participating landlords' local office (or you can apply by post, telephone or online, although these methods will take longer as we will post out a short form for you to sign and return).

Once you are registered, you will receive a homehunt Priority Pack, which includes forms to register for Priority (which is explained later on in this leaflet). Feedback on allocations is provided on our website and within participating landlords' offices alongside our adverts.

Applying for Properties

Once registered you can apply for any property that is advertised (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 of retirement age and above).

When you see an advert for a property you are interested in you should apply for it by telling us your name, registration number, current address, password and date of birth, and

the property address. You can do this in person, by telephone or online – **but you must do this before the closing date and time specified in the advert.** If

you have Priority, this will be recognised automatically, provided that the property you are registering interest in meets your priority criteria, if any.



You can apply for as many advertised properties as you wish at any one time. However, if you qualify for more than one offer at the same time, we will assume that the property you apply for first is your first choice, and so on, in the order you chose to apply. If you qualify for an offer on one property, we will disregard any later applications you have made, so the order in which you apply could be very important to you.

If there is nothing you like advertised or perhaps it is not a convenient time to move, there is no need to apply (although if you have Priority you risk losing it – see “Using Your Priority” on pgs 8-9). We will automatically write to you if you have not applied for properties within a 12 month period, to see if you wish to remain registered with us for housing.

Offers of Property

Borders Choice Homes will normally contact the successful applicant within 3 working days of the closing date. If you do not hear from us within this timescale, it is unlikely that you have been successful on this occasion and you should keep on applying for properties which suit your needs.

Once the closing date and time has been reached, everyone who applied for each advertised property will be considered, and an offer will normally be made according to the following steps:

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.
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 Borders Choice Homes 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 the relevant landlord’s policy.

If you refuse two offers without having a reasonable cause for refusing and you have used your priority, your priority will be removed. Your registration will be put ‘On Hold’ and you will not be able to apply for property for a period of six months.

If you do not have priority and refuse two reasonable offers your registration will be put ‘On Hold’ and you will not be able to apply for property for a period of six months.

If you have received an offer for a property, you will be unable to apply for other properties whilst that offer is still valid.

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 do expect to offer many of our properties to people without this.

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

Priority Level			
Priority Type	Gold	Silver	Bronze
Homelessness	✓		✓
Health Assessment	✓	✓	✓
Overcrowding		✓	✓
Under-Occupancy		✓	
Unsuitable Housing		✓	✓
Specific Need to be in a Community			✓

Priority is awarded for six months. If you are awarded priority and do not use this for all suitable properties advertised which meet your needs, then at the end of the six months priority is removed. If no suitable properties have been advertised, or you have applied for all suitable properties but were unsuccessful, your priority will be automatically renewed. This is explained more fully in the “Using Your Priority” section.

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 consider your current housing situation entitles you to Priority, you should complete the appropriate Priority Application Form.

Applying for Priority is straightforward (although if you require any help or advice at any time, please ask).

Do you fall into one of the priority groups?

- 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 relationship breakdown or other valid reason preventing you continuing to live there?
- 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 Berwickshire, Eildon or Scottish Borders Housing Associations or Waverley Housing are you **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 must reside within a specific community, eg to provide care or support to someone?

If your circumstances are that you do fall into any of these priority groups, please complete the relevant priority application forms and return these to any of the participating landlords' offices.

Awards for Priority

If you are awarded Priority, 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 pass criteria but certain passes are decided by Borders Choice Homes, or by Scottish Borders Council who assess Homeless Persons. See table on page 8.

Your pass will only be valid for properties that meet your criteria. You can still apply for properties which do not meet your pass criteria, however, you will be considered as a registered applicant without priority. There may be restrictions to your receiving an offer for a property outwith your pass criteria despite you applying as an ordinary registered applicant, if the property applied for is considered unsuitable for your needs. For example if your priority is for the Kelso area then your priority would only be recognised for properties in Kelso. Equally in this example your priority would be automatically renewed in six months time if no suitable properties had been advertised in Kelso even if there had been properties advertised in other places that were suitable for you and your family.

Please note: Only complete the priority application forms which you feel you qualify for. There is no need to fill in any details or return any of the other priority forms if these 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 only the highest level of priority to you.

Who can limit passes in towns/villages/areas				
Priority Area	Applicant	BCH	SBC	Applicant 2 nd
Homelessness		✓	✓	✓
Health Assessment		✓		✓
Overcrowding	✓			
Under-Occupancy	✓			
Unsuitable Housing	✓			
Specific need in the Community		✓		

BCH=Borders Choice Homes, SBC=Scottish Borders Council, Applicant 2nd means the applicant can decide priority criteria after Borders Choice Homes have considered any criteria first.

Who can limit passes to property features		
Priority feature	Applicant	BCH
Property Type (e.g. bungalow, flat, house etc.)		✓
Ground Floor Accommodation	✓	✓
Wheelchair Access	✓	✓
Level Access Shower		✓
Sheltered Housing	✓	✓

BCH=Borders Choice Homes

Using Your Priority

Where applicants change any priority criteria already in place, for example extend their areas of choice, such change in criteria will not apply or be taken into account in relation to the letting of any property currently being advertised.

If you have priority we would expect you to apply for **ALL** the properties that are available which meet your needs and that are in line with your priority criteria. BCH does not differentiate between flats and houses except where this is necessary on confirmed health grounds. So for example, if you are overcrowded and require 3 bedrooms, your overcrowding priority need would be met within a 3 bedroom flat as well as a 3 bedroom house so you must apply for both flats and houses.

If you do not apply for **ALL** advertised properties which meet your priority criteria, your priority will be removed after six months. Once it is removed it cannot be awarded for the same circumstances for another six months although if your circumstances change during this period you can apply for your priority to be re-assessed.

If you have applied for all suitable properties but have simply been unsuccessful your priority will automatically be renewed after six months. If you use your priority status but turn down two reasonable offers your pass will be removed. Similarly, if your circumstances change and you are no longer entitled to your priority, this will be removed.

If your priority is removed but you feel there were circumstances which prevented you from applying for all the properties you should have you can request a review of this decision. You should do this in writing stating the reasons why you did not apply for **all** listed suitable properties. Hand in or post your request to any participating landlord's local office.

If your priority is removed you are still entitled to apply for properties as an ordinary registered applicant.

Where Priority is not awarded

If you decide to move from one property that you had the legal right to remain in to another property in which your housing situation is worse this means that you may have 'worsened your circumstances'. If this is the case you may not be awarded priority for these circumstances for six months even if you would normally qualify for this in your new home. Where this occurs, you will only be entitled to priority award if you would have received this at your previous address.

Registrations 'On Hold'

As part of the registration process, you will be asked to tick and sign several statements (see also **False Information** below). If we need to contact other agencies to find out more information in relation to your housing needs, then your registration will be put 'On Hold', until this information has been gathered and the 'Hold' status no longer applies.

In certain circumstances, registrations will be put 'On Hold'. You will not be able to apply for any houses until the 'Hold' status is removed.

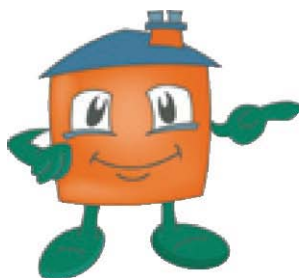
Examples of when registrations are put 'On Hold' include:

- Unsigned or incomplete registrations;
- If you or anyone to be housed with you has outstanding rent arrears of more than one month or any tenancy related debt, eg rechargeable repairs relating to a current or previous tenancy with either Berwickshire Housing Association, Cairn Housing Association, Eildon Housing Association, Waverley Housing or any other Landlord and there is no arrangement in place to pay them off which has been maintained for at least 3 months. Registrations will be held until confirmation is received of any arrangement from your current or previous landlord;
- If you or anyone to be housed with you has been evicted for anti-social behaviour, or been the subject of an Anti-Social Behaviour Order or Criminal Anti-Social Behaviour, Borders Choice Homes will make enquiries to ensure that such behaviour has ceased and is unlikely to re-occur;
- In instances where Risk assessment is required, registrations may be put 'On Hold' until the appropriate risk assessment is completed;
- Where you or anyone to be housed with you is identified as requiring support but this is refused or until support is in place as required for you or anyone to be housed with you, for the purposes of sustaining the tenancy;
- For refusal of two reasonable offers of accommodation.

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 Pass you have, and place your registration 'On Hold' for six months. If a tenancy has started, we will immediately take steps to recover the property.



To find out which properties are available see our adverts in The Berwickshire News, The Southern Reporter or call our Freephone number **0800 587 4868** or visit us online at **www.homehunt.info**

Reporting Allocations

We will publish details of how our allocations are made at www.homehunt.info and in other agreed places. We will say whether or not 'best use' was made of the property, whether or not priority was awarded, and how long the successful applicant had been registered.

This gives everyone some idea of the demand for different properties within the areas covered by Borders Choice Homes and could help you make reasonable choices about where you want to live.



Where to go Homehunting

Our adverts appear weekly in The Southern Reporter, The Berwickshire News and Berwick Advertiser, in any participating landlords' local office, on our freephone number 0800 587 4868, or by logging on to our website at **www.homehunt.info**

You can also find out more about the participating landlords at the Scottish Borders Housing Forum website at **<http://housing.scottishborders.gov.uk>**

Finally, if you need any help or advice at any time, or you have any comments you would like to make, please contact any participating landlord's local office:

<p>Berwickshire Housing Association: 55 Newtown Street, Duns TD11 3AU TEL: 01361 883115 26 High Street, Eyemouth TD14 5EU TEL: 018907 50888</p>	<p>Eildon Housing Association: The Weaving Shed, Ettrick Mill, Dunsdale Road, Selkirk TD7 5EB TEL: 0845 604 3733</p>
<p>Cairn Housing Association: 43 London Street, Edinburgh EH3 6LX TEL: 0131 556 4511</p>	<p>Waverley Housing: 27 North Bridge Street, Hawick TD9 9BD TEL: 01450 364200</p>

If you would like this information in Braille, larger print or translated into another language, please request this at any participating landlord's office.



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