



A New Home – The Choice is Yours
A guide to Wigan's Housing Scheme



April 2007

This information can be made available in large print or other formats. Please telephone 01942 486604 for more information.

People with hearing difficulties who have a Minicom can contact us through the typetalk operator by putting 18001 in front of any of our telephone numbers.



The following phrases say: If you do not read or speak English and need help understanding this information please leave a message on our community language line and an interpreter will ring you back.

عربي إذا أنت لا تقرأ أو لا تتكلم بالإنجليزية وتحتاج إلى المساعدة لكي تتمكن من فهم هذه المعلومات فالرجاء أن تترك رسالة عندنا على خط الجالية الخاص باللغة العربية رقم 01942 488430 ومن ثم سوف يتصل بكم مترجم.

粵語 如果您因看不懂或不會講英語而在理解這些資訊方面需要幫助，請通過我們的社區語言熱線 01942 488431 留言，會有口譯人員給您回復電話。

فارسي اگر نمی توانید متون انگلیسی را بخوانید یا به زبان انگلیسی صحبت کنید و برای درک این اطلاعات نیاز به کمک دارید لطفاً روی تلفن کمک های زبانی محلی 01942 488432 پیغام بگذارید و یک مترجم شفاهی به شما زنگ خواهد کرد.

Francais Si vous ne pouvez pas lire ou parler l'Anglais et avez besoin d'aide pour comprendre ces informations, veuillez laisser un message sur la messagerie téléphonique de notre service Linguistique en Ligne (Language Line) au 01942 488433 et un interprète vous rappellera.

गुजराती જો તમને અંગ્રેજી ભાષા ન વાંચતા કે બોલતા ન આવડતી હોય અને આ માહિતી સમજવા માટે તમારે મદદની જરૂર હોય તો તમે અમારા સમુદાયની લેંગ્વેજ લાઇનમાં આ 01942 488434 નંબર પર એક સંદેશ રાખી મૂકશો, અને અમારા અનુવાદકર્તા તમને સામેથી ફોન કરશે.

اردو اگر آپ انگریزی پڑھتے یا بولتے نہیں ہیں اور آپ کو ان معلومات کو سمجھنے کے لئے مدد کی ضرورت ہو تو براہ کرم اپنی معاشرتی زبان (اردو) کی لائن 01942 488435 پر پیغام چھوڑیں اور پھر کوئی ترجمان آپ کو واپس فون کرے گا۔

Introduction

This booklet will explain Wigan Council's policy on letting properties included in the scheme. Wigan and Leigh Housing Company (WALH) manages the policy on behalf of Wigan Council.

All properties are let through Wigan Council's Housing Allocation Scheme which is called – **“A New Home – The Choice is Yours”**.

The scheme has been based on four key principles:

- Customer choice
- Priority for those in housing need
- Equal access to Council housing for all
- Support for vulnerable people

You can see a full copy of Wigan Council's Housing Allocation Policy on our website propertyshop.walh.co.uk

If you would like a full copy of the policy you can ask for one from the Property Shops or Housing Offices.

Advice and assistance

There is free help and advice available at the Property Shops and Area Offices about the Housing Scheme including:-

- Help completing your Housing Application Form
- Providing information on how we deal with your application
- How to get references
- Advising you on how to express an interest in homes
- Helping you find a home if you are accepted on the Homefinder Scheme
- Advising you of availability of properties in the area you want
- Advice on how to appeal against certain decisions
- Advising you about other options for finding accommodation

How do I apply for a home?

You can get an application form from any Housing Office, Property Shop or from our website. You will need to complete the form and return it to either the Property Shops or any Housing Office. **If you need help to fill it in please tell us.**

The application is quite detailed. Please answer all the questions and provide any supporting information requested. (This will allow us to assess your application fully and quickly).

For example:

- Two suitable references
- Equity details (if you are an owner occupier)
- Details of contact, overnight or extended contact for any children
- Expected date of confinement (if you are pregnant).

We aim to assess your application within 10 working days of receiving it provided we have the supporting information that is required.

You will be notified by letter of your registration date, priority band and your reference number.

References

All new applicants must provide 2 suitable references. If a joint application and you have not been together for 12 months or more each applicant will require two references. Usually these are from employers, current or former landlords or a professional person. Personal references from friends or relatives cannot be accepted. Please ask for assistance if you are finding this difficult.

Existing council tenants do not need to provide references instead a Housing Officer will visit you at your home. If your home visit is satisfactory and your rent account is clear your application will be made active.

Can anyone apply to go on the Register?

Almost anyone can apply to go on the housing register. People who have been guilty of anti-social behaviour or people from abroad who are ineligible for local authority social housing will not be accepted onto the register.

What if I am under 18 years old?

By law a person under 18 cannot hold a legal estate in land. If you are under 18 and have serious housing problems or are threatened with homelessness, you must discuss this with housing staff and they will give you advice, assistance and assess your support needs. If you are accepted onto the register and offered a property you would be signed up on a licence agreement.

What if I am from abroad?

By law certain people subject to immigration control do not qualify for public sector housing.

We can accept applications from:

- British Citizens
- European Economic Area Citizens
- People granted Refugee Status with reason to remain

For more information or advice contact any of our Housing Offices or Property Shops.

What if I am an Owner Occupier?

You will need to provide a current written estate agent valuation and current details of any outstanding mortgage. If you have more equity than the average house price in the borough which is currently £120,000 your application will be placed in Band 4. All circumstances regarding your housing needs will be taken into account and relevant advice provided as it may be that you are able to resolve your housing situation using your equity. You will be notified in writing of the decision.

Can you refuse or suspend my application?

If there is evidence that you or a member of your household are behaving or have behaved in a seriously unacceptable way, your application may be suspended.

This means your application would be accepted, but you would not be able to express an interest in properties until the behaviour had improved. This is usually for a set amount of time, for example 6 months. During this period you will have to show that the behaviour had improved.

Some examples of unacceptable behaviour are:

- If you are a tenant of Wigan Council breaking any of the conditions listed in Wigan Council's tenancy agreement
- Violence or threats of violence to staff
- Drug dealing
- Racial harassment
- Intimidation
- Noise

Your application can also be suspended if you have a housing debt. If you have held a tenancy previously with Wigan Council and have a housing debt your application will be suspended until you either:

- Pay all the debt
- Make an agreement and maintain regular payments over a minimum of 13 weeks.

You will need to keep the payments up to date, if you fail to do so and you are made an offer of accommodation the offer may be withdrawn if the repayments are not brought up to date in 48 hours.

Your application may also be suspended if a housing association or private sector landlord has served you with a notice of seeking possession for rent arrears.

If you are already a Wigan Council tenant and you have a housing debt you must clear the debt within 48 hours of being made an offer. If you cannot do so you need to notify the Area Housing Office making the offer as it may result in the offer being withdrawn and the property offered to the next person.

How does the Housing Scheme work?

Approximately 80% of properties will be let to applicants who have been assessed as being in the greatest housing need under the allocation policy. These properties will be advertised and let to the applicant in the highest band with the earliest registration date who meets the property criteria.

These are known as **Needs Based Homes (NBH)**

Approximately 20% of properties will be let to the applicant who has the earliest registration date and meets the property criteria.

These are known as **Time Based Homes (TBH)**

Sometimes properties will be let direct to an applicant in housing need e.g. if the property has been adapted for a disabled person and there is the need to match the household to the property, if there is a need to move a homeless applicant out of temporary accommodation or if a persons life is at risk. These properties may not be advertised.

What is the Banding System?

All applicants are placed in one of four bands. Your band takes account of your personal and household circumstances.

The scheme has 4 bands:

Band 1 Urgent Housing Need - for example,

- High priority medical / welfare needs
- Where we have a legal duty to re-house under homeless legislation
- People in a clearance area

Band 2 High Housing Need - for example,

- Medical / welfare needs
- Temporary moves whilst repairs are carried out
- Overcrowded households needing 3 or more extra bedrooms

Band 3 Housing Need - for example,

- Lodgers
- Over crowded households needing 2 or more extra bedrooms

Band 4 Standard Need - for example,

- Applicants suitably housed wishing to move to another area
- Applicants living in caravans or mobile homes

How do I apply for a Medical/Welfare Award?

A medical or welfare award may be granted if the applicant or household needs to be rehoused to reduce the effect their current housing is having on the health or welfare of the household members.

Any supporting information you provide for example from your G.P. will be taken into consideration when assessing your housing priority.

If you wish to have your application considered on medical or welfare grounds you need to complete and return the application form for additional medical/welfare priority. Your request will be considered within 20 working days of receipt and you will be notified in writing of the outcome.

What if I do not agree with a decision that has been made about my application?

You can ask for a review of the following decisions made about your application:

- If your application is refused
- If your application is suspended
- Your registration date
- The band you have been placed in
- Any medical or welfare award
- If your application is cancelled

You must tell us if you want a review. You can do this by:

- Writing into any of our offices saying why you think the decision should be reviewed.
- E-mailing details to property.shop@walh.co.uk
- Asking a member of staff to write down your reasons for a review. You will then need to sign the statement.

All requests for a review will be dealt with fairly and in the same way.

You will be notified in writing of the outcome within 10 working days of your request for a review.

How long will I have to wait for a property?

We can't tell you exactly how long you will have to wait for a property. Waiting times depend on:

- The type and size of the home you need
- Whether or not it is available in the area you want
- The amount of demand from other applicants

You can express an interest for a home anywhere within Wigan Borough. If you consider properties in a wide range of areas you may get a home more quickly.

You might be the only person interested in a property so please express an interest even if you think you are not in the highest band.

Where will I see what properties are available?

Properties will be advertised on a weekly cycle from 9.00 a.m. Thursday until 5.30 p.m. on the following Tuesday.

Details of these properties can be found on:

- The property Shop website propertyshop.walh.co.uk
- Weekly Property Sheets (available from the Property Shops, housing offices and libraries)

How will I know if I am eligible for a property?

Each property advertised will have a short description, including the number of bedrooms, any special features and the weekly rent. Some properties will have a restriction known as property criteria, for example older people for sheltered housing or families preferred for family housing. This is so best and appropriate use is made of housing stock. If you do not meet the property criteria you will not be offered the property.

Things to consider before you express an interest in a property

- Make sure you are ready to and can afford to move
- Try to visit the area if possible to view the property externally remember you have 6 days to express an interest
- If you have children check the availability of places at local schools

How can I express an interest in a property?

You can express an interest in properties by visiting, telephoning, e-mailing or writing to the Property Shop or Housing Office, by ringing the Contact Centre or via the website propertyshop.walh.co.uk

You have between 9.00am every Thursday to 5.30pm every Tuesday to express an interest in as many vacant properties as you wish.

What happens next?

The successful person will be contacted by a member of staff from the Area Housing Office, usually by telephone, to offer them the property and arrange an accompanied viewing of the property with a member of staff.

Viewing takes place when any essential repair works have been completed.

If you decide to take the property arrangements will be made for you to sign the tenancy agreement at a Housing Office. Once you have signed the Tenancy Agreement you can have the keys to your new home.

All new tenancies will be introductory tenancies unless:

- You are already a secure tenant with Wigan Council or another local authority
- You are an assured tenant with a Housing Association or Housing Action Trust

Introductory tenancies are a probationary tenancy which lasts for twelve months. As long as you do not seriously break any tenancy conditions it will be made into a secure tenancy after twelve months.

What if I need help to Express an Interest in properties?

WALH offer a **Homefinder Scheme** to people who have difficulty accessing the service because of their personal circumstances. To find out more about the scheme and if you would qualify contact the Property Shops or Housing Offices.

If you want to nominate someone, for example a family member or support worker to express an interest in properties and act on your behalf you can do this by completing the contact section of the application form or notifying the Property Shop in writing.

Will I be contacted when I am on the Register ?

All applicants will be contacted annually to see if they still want to be on the register. You must reply to the review letter or your application will be cancelled.

What if my circumstances change?

It is your responsibility to tell us immediately of any change in your circumstances. This includes change of address, telephone number, medical condition etc. This will allow your application to be reassessed to make sure you are in the correct band and for us to be able to contact you quickly with any offer of accommodation.

What if I no longer want to be on the Register?

Please contact the Property Shop if you want to cancel your application for housing.

Are there any other ways to find a move?

Yes you could consider the following

If you are a tenant consider a Mutual Exchange

A mutual exchange is when you arrange to swap homes with someone else. You have to be a Secure Council Tenant or Housing Association Tenant to apply. You must have your Landlords written permission before you swap.

You can get more information of properties on the scheme from any Housing Office or Property Shop. The exchange register is updated weekly and is available to view at Area Housing Offices, the Property Shops, Unity House and Leigh Homes HQ. Some properties are advertised in the Weekly Property Sheet.

Consider Renting From a Private Landlords

Wigan Council run a Private Landlord Accreditation Scheme which means landlords properties are inspected and must meet some minimum standards, be in good repair and properly managed by the landlord.

If you are interested you can get contact details from the Property Shops.

Other Organisations involved in this Housing Scheme

Wigan Council have nomination rights to empty properties owned by Housing Associations in the Borough. These properties will be advertised in the same way as Council properties.

If you are re-housed by a Housing Association you will become a tenant of that association.

Partners in the scheme are:-

Arena Housing Association

Phone: 01744 755221

Website: www.arena-housing.com

Adactus

Phone: 01942 608715

Website: www.adactushousing.co.uk

Anchor Trust

Phone: 08457 758595

Website: www.anchor.org.uk

English Churches Housing Group / The Riverside Group

Phone: 0845 0707074

Website: www.echg.org.uk www.riverside.org.uk

Housing 21

Phone: 01274 744190

Website: www.housing21.co.uk

North British Housing Association

Phone: 01204 370301

Website: www.nbh.co.uk

Useful Contact Numbers and Addresses

Useful Contact Numbers and Addresses

Wigan & Leigh Housing Headquarters contact details

Telephone enquiries: Monday to Friday 8.45 a.m. to 5.00 p.m.

Address: Wigan & Leigh Housing
Unity House
Westwood Park Drive
Wigan
WN3 4HE

Phone: 01942 486500

Fax: 01942 485601

Minicom: 01942 486503

Email: enquiries@walh.co.uk

Website: www.walh.co.uk

Property Shops

Wigan & Leigh Housing have two Property Shops located in Wigan and Leigh town centres. The Property Shops process housing register applications and advertise Council properties and some Housing Association properties in an informal, estate agency style setting. Customers can browse, choose and bid for available homes and get help and advice.

Wigan Property Shop
3 Library Street
Wigan
WN1 1NN
Tel: 01942 404128
Fax: 01942 404129

Leigh Property Shop
4-6 Market Street
Leigh
WN7 1DS
Tel: 01942 404091
Fax: 01942 404092

Opening times: 9.00 a.m. – 5.30 p.m. Monday to Friday
10:00 a.m. – 4.00 p.m. Saturday
12 noon – 4.00 p.m. Sunday

Website: propertyshop.walh.co.uk

Email address: propertyshop@walh.co.uk

Wigan and Leigh Housing Contact Centre

Tel: 01942 705040

Opening times Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm
Saturday 8am to 12.30pm

Area Housing Offices

We have Area Housing Offices in the Borough to help and advise our customers. Offices are open 9.00 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. Telephone contact is via the Contact Centre on 01942 705040.

Wigan Area Housing Office

School Lane
Scholes
Wigan
Lancashire WN1 3QX

Leigh Area Housing Office

Town Hall
Market Place
Leigh
Lancashire WN7 1DY

Ashton Area Housing Office

Town Hall, Bryn Street
Ashton-in-Makerfield
Wigan
Lancashire WN4 9AY

Atherton Area Office

Atherton Town Hall
Bolton Road
Atherton
Manchester
M46 9JP

Pemberton Area Housing Office

3 Orrell Road
Orrell
Wigan
Lancashire WN5 8EW

Platt Bridge Area Office

617 Liverpool Road
Platt Bridge
Wigan
WN7 5NG