



Version 01

24/06/10

Options



Scheme User Guide
www.nhaoptions.co.uk

Welcome to the NHA Options

Scheme User Guide

NHA Options is committed to helping everyone to access our scheme.

If you have any specific requirements please contact us to discuss alternative ways of accessing the scheme. We can also provide information to you in;

- Large print
- Audio translations
- Braille
- Translation into other languages
- One to one help from staff

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Remember

To be considered for a property you need to actively take part in the scheme:

1. Look at adverts
2. Make your choice
3. Place your bid

If there is anything about NHA Options that you don't understand please contact Newcastle Housing Advice (NHA) so that we can help on **01782 635200** or email enquiries@newcastlehousingadvice.co.uk

Helping you find a home in Newcastle-under-Lyme

NHA Options (Newcastle Housing Advice Options) is a letting scheme that lets you choose where you would like to live. In the past your Council or Landlord decided when and where you would be offered a home. Now you have the chance to choose.

Every week we advertise a variety of homes to rent on our website for you to view. You can look at these adverts and decide whether you would like to be considered for any of the properties advertised. We also produce a property freesheet that is available at a variety of locations across the Borough.

This Scheme User Guide summarises how to access and use our scheme. It also aims to give you a better idea of what properties are available to rent in your area.

Every week we will provide feedback so that you are able to see how long successful customers have waited for a home and what level of priority they had been given. We believe that this information will be helpful to you when making decisions about where you want to live and how long you might have to wait.

There is a very high demand for social housing from landlords such as Aspire Housing and other Housing Associations. We are unable to rehouse everyone on the housing register because only a relatively small number of properties become available each year. There are however a number of other housing options available to you, which may mean you do not have to wait for long for a new home. Please contact NHA to discuss your housing options.

This information can be made available in
• Other languages • Large print • Braille • Audio tape • Computer disc.

If you would like information in another language or format, please ask us.

यदि आपको सूचना किसी अन्य भाषा या अन्य रूप में चाहिये तो कृपया हमसे कहे -Hindi

اگر این اطلاعات را به زبانی دیگر و یا در فرمتی دیگر میخواهید لطفاً از ما درخواست کنید -Farsi

اگر آپ کو معلومات کسی دیگر زبان یا دیگر شکل میں درکار ہوں تو برائے مہربانی ہم سے پوچھئے۔ -Urdu

Jeżeli chciałby Państwo uzyskać informacje w innym języku lub w innym formacie, - Polish
prosimy dać nam znać.

ئەگەر ئانیاریت بە زمانیکی که یا بە فۆرمیکی که دەوی تکیا به داوامان لی بکه -Kurdish

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Landlords

All properties owned by Aspire Housing are advertised via this scheme. In addition a number of Housing Associations with stock in the Borough also advertise some of their properties. This will be indicated in the adverts.

	Address	Website	Contact Number
	Kingsley, The Brampton, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffs, ST5 0QW	www.aspirehousing.co.uk	01782 635200
	Holme House, Manor Lane, Holmes Chapel, Cheshire, CW4 8AF	www.affinitysutton.com	01477 539250
	2nd Floor, 25 Bedford Street, London, WC2E 9ES	www.anchor.org.uk	08457 758595
	1 Exchange Court, Brabourne Ave, Wolverhampton Business Park, Wolverhampton, WV10 6AU	www.bromford.co.uk	0845 6050 603
	38 Moyne Gardens, Chellaston, Derby, DE73 6UE	www.ncha.co.uk	0845 605 9000
	Three Counties House, Festival Way, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffs, ST1 5PX	www.sanctuary.org.uk	01782 219200
	2-4 Woodhouse Street, Stoke on Trent, Staffs, ST4 1EJ	www.staffshousing.org.uk	01782 744533
	Housing Standards Team, PO Box 634, Civic Centre, Glebe Street, Stoke-on-Trent Staffs, ST4 1RJ	www.landlordaccreditation.co.uk	01782 232271

How the scheme works

The NHA Options scheme has 4 steps for you to follow:

STEP 1 – Registration

You don't need to register if you already have an application for rehousing with NHA.

If you have not already completed an application form you can do so in one of the following ways;

- Online at www.nhaoptions.co.uk
- By telephone on **01782 635200**
- In person at Aspire's Customer Services Centre in **Merrial Street**, where you can pick up an application form.

Once you have applied and been accepted onto the housing register we will;

- Give you a reference number
- Tell you what band you have been placed into
- Tell you the priority date that you have been given
- Tell you what property type you can bid on

You must keep us informed about any changes in your circumstances e.g. changes to your household size, medical condition or housing situation. This is very important as it could result in a change to your band or your eligibility for certain types of properties.

STEP 2 – Choosing your home

Available homes are advertised every week on the [NHA Options](http://www.nhaoptions.co.uk) website and the NHA Options freesheet, giving you information about each available property. See the back page for information on where you can pick up your copy of the freesheet.

The latest available homes will be advertised every Tuesday and you can register your interest in properties up until midnight the following Sunday (this is known as the bidding cycle).

You are not limited in the number of properties that you may register an interest in to 'bid' on, however you should only bid on properties that you would consider moving into and are eligible for.

You can bid on properties in the following ways;

- Online at the www.nhaoptions.co.uk
- By text message, **07781 472726** which is available 24 hrs.
- By telephone to NHA on **01782 635200**.
- In person at Aspire's Customer Services Centre in Merrial Street.

Please see Page 9-10 for more information of how to bid on available properties.

STEP 3 – The Offer

Once the bidding cycle has closed, we put the bids received in priority order to produce a shortlist of eligible applicants for each property.

Any offer is subject to your application being verified (checked and approved) to confirm your circumstances. If your application cannot be verified, the offer may be made to another applicant.

If your name is at the top of the shortlist, you will normally be invited to view the property. If you refuse this property the next person will be invited to view it.

You do not automatically get penalised for refusing a property, however we will contact you to review your circumstances if you refuse several properties that you have successfully bid for, especially if you are in high housing needs band and need to move urgently.

If you successfully bid for more than one property in the same bidding cycle, we will contact you to ask which property you would prefer as your first choice. We will usually contact you within a week of the closing of the bidding cycle.

We may invite more than one person to view a home at the same time but we will always offer the home first to the person with the highest priority who comes to the viewing. If we invite you to view a home and you do not intend to turn up, you should let us know.

Whilst a property is under offer to you, you won't be able to place bids on other properties.

STEP 4 – Feedback

Feedback information will be available on our website once homes have been let. The feedback tells you how many people have bid for the property along with the band and waiting time of the successful bidder.

This helps you to see how long successful bidders have been waiting for homes.

It is not possible to notify you individually when your bids have been unsuccessful.

HELP & ASSISTANCE

If you have any questions about how the scheme applies to you or about bidding for properties, there are fully trained staff available to support you, please telephone NHA on **01782 635200**.



The Banding Scheme

When you register for housing, we will assess your application and you will be placed into one of 7 housing needs bands described below.

If you think that you have been placed into the wrong band you can request a review of this decision by contacting NHA by telephone.

Applicants in housing need and with a local connection to Newcastle-under-Lyme will be considered first.

If you bid on the same home as someone else that is in the same band as you, we will usually offer the property to the person that has been waiting the longest in that band.

If you move up to a higher band, your waiting time will change. Your waiting time will start from the day that you moved up into the higher band. If you then move back to a lower band, your waiting time will go back to the same day that you were in the lower band (this is usually the date that you first went onto the housing register).

Below is a summary of the banding system for more information and a view of the Allocations Policy see www.nhaoptions.co.uk or if you want a copy of our Allocations Policy please telephone NHA.

Band 1

You are included in Band 1 if:

- You need a home immediately, e.g. you have met the statutory homeless priority need criteria
- You have urgent circumstances that are a result of harassment or domestic violence
- You are involved with the child protection team and need to move urgently
- You have a severe medical condition and/or you are in hospital which means that you cannot stay/return to your home
- You live in Newcastle and your home is affected by a prohibition, demolition or compulsory purchase order
- You have met the statutory overcrowded criteria and need to move straight away
- You have three or more types of housing needs as outlined in Band 4 below
- You are an Aspire tenant and Aspire Housing agree that you need to move out of your home to carry out major repairs

Band 2

You will be included in Band 2 if:

- You are assessed as having two of the housing needs outlined in Band 4 below

Band 3

You will be included in Band 3 if:

- You are given 'preference system' priority. This will only be awarded to exceptional cases by the NHA Manager e.g. awarded to those who may have a limited time in their current property. Preference system priority will be time limited to a maximum of three months per applicant.

Band 4

You will be included in Band 4 if:

- You are at risk of homelessness and have received assistance from NHA
- You are ready to move on from supported accommodation and you have a support plan
- You need two extra bedrooms
- You are an Aspire tenant and your home is too big for you or you have an adapted property that you no longer need
- You are living in a flat, above the first floor, with children under 16 years old
- You have a serious health problem which means that your current accommodation is affecting your health

Band 5

You will be included in Band 5 if:

- You are a carer and need to move closer to your friend or relative who is in poor health
- You need to move on medical or social grounds
- You need one more bedroom
- You wish to move from supported accommodation but you do not have a support plan or move on date
- You are homeless but are not considered to be priority under homeless law
- You have a priority need but you are deemed to be intentionally homeless under homeless law

Band 6

You will be included in Band 6 if you have a housing need and:

- You have a history of unacceptable behaviour
- You have rent arrears from a previous tenancy
- You have been served with a Notice Seeking Possession for a breach of tenancy conditions
- You are in housing need but you could afford to find alternative accommodation in the private sector e.g. private renting or buying a property

Band 7

You will be included in Band 7 if:

- You have adequate housing but would like to move

Things to think about before you bid

When choosing a property to bid for you need to consider a number of points

What can I bid for?

When you register for housing you will receive a welcome letter telling you what band you are in and the type of property and how many bedrooms you are entitled to bid for. This will depend on the number of people and relationships within your household, including the age and sex of the children.

What if a home has an age restriction?

Some properties have a minimum age required, for example in some cases only people over 55 years can apply. This will be clearly stated in the advert.

What if a home has a mobility sign?

You can bid but we will give priority to those people whose needs match the adaptations already in the property. Please look out for mobility signs on the property adverts. We will also say what type of adaptation is in the property.

What if I have pets?

Pets are not allowed in some of the properties that we advertise because there are some properties that are not suitable for certain types of pets. Each of our Housing Association Partners has different policies regarding pets so you may wish to check before bidding. Please look out for the pet signs on the property adverts.

What if I decide I am no longer interested in a home that I have bid for?

You can decide that you are not interested in a property, but time is wasted if you bid on properties that you know you are not really interested in.

Before you bid, ask yourself if you would live in it if we offered it to you. If the answer is yes, then place a bid, but if the answer is no then please do not bid.

Why haven't I been invited to view the property?

If you are on the housing register you may not be invited if;

- You have rent arrears from a former tenancy

If you have an existing Aspire property and are looking to move you may not be invited if;

- You have not passed a home inspection
- You have rent arrears

If you have arrears on an Aspire tenancy please call Aspire on 01782 635200.

Why am I ineligible to bid for some properties?

You can only be considered for the type of properties that you have been assessed as being suitable for.

If you don't know what type of property you are eligible for, then you can check on-line via your personal account or if you contact NHA we will confirm your details.

What if I need help with bidding?

We have worked with agencies to develop an Access Strategy, all agencies offering support are listed on our website, alternatively please call NHA for assistance.

How to express your interest in properties

Bidding on the Internet

The quickest and easiest way to express an interest is through our website www.nhaoptions.co.uk. Instructions are given on screen but you will need to know your unique NHA Options reference number and date of birth in order to log on.

On the website there is an online copy of the freesheet, if you see a property that you are interested in and meet the eligibility criteria you can place a bid.

If you have made a bid but then change your mind you can remove the bid on the website as long as the bidding is still open. You can also view your bidding history once you have logged in.

Free internet access is available at various locations in the Borough as listed below (opening times may vary, please call for more information);

- Aspire Housing, Merrial Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme – **01782 635200**
- Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, The Guildhall, High Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme – **01782 717717**
- Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, Customer Contact Centre, Victoria Hall, Liverpool Road, Kidsgrove – **01782 717717**
- Staffordshire Housing Association – Woodhouse Street, Stoke-on-Trent – **01782 744533**
- Chesterton One Stop Shop – London Road, Chesterton – **01782 563603**
- Staffordshire County Council Libraries
 - Hall Street, Audley – **01782 720527**
 - Darmouth Ave, Clayton – **01782 616074**
 - Meadows Road, Kidsgrove – **01782 782445**
 - St Mary's C of E School, Knutton – **01782 297339**

- Eccleshall Road, Loggerheads – **01630 673117**
- Ironmarket, Newcastle-under-Lyme – **01782 297300**
- High Street, Silverdale – **01782 297444**
- Chester Road, Talke – **01782 782200**

Bidding by Telephone

You can bid by calling NHA on **01782 635200**

Bidding by text message

- Please check with your mobile phone company what they charge for SMS texts
- To add numbers to the text message keep pressing the keys until you get to the digit and select
- On most mobile phones to find the hash character first press the star key then select the hash mark
- You can enter your bids in both upper and lower case
- Check your NHA Options reference number and bids are correct before sending
- Please note that you will not receive a text message to confirm all of your bids unless there are mistakes in your text message and we are unable to process your bids.

To make a bid by text message follow the simple steps on the following page.

Bidding by text message

To make a bid by text message follow the simple steps below;

Action	Example
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Open a new text message 2. Type in your NHA Options reference number 3. Then followed immediately by a hash mark # 4. Enter the advert reference number of your first bid followed immediately by a hash mark # 	<p>Open a new text message NULBC1234 NULBC1234# NULBC 1234#422#</p>
If you have finished bidding then send. If not, keep following the instructions below.	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Enter the advert reference number of your second bid followed immediately by a hash mark # 	<p>NULBC1234#422#562#</p>
If you have finished bidding then send. If not, keep following the instructions above.	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. When you have entered all of your bids send your text message bid to 	<p>07781 472726</p>

The Adverts

This is an example of an advert

two bedroom bungalow

ref no: 882

Location: Ripon Avenue, Chesterton, Newcastle

Landlord: Aspire Housing

Rent: £70.26

Service charge: £2.55

Features: Gas central heating, care call system. Close to shops and regular bus service nearby.

Key to advert symbols

Number of bedrooms in the property	Number of people the property is suitable for
Property designed for people this age or above	Floor level of property, if flat or maisonette
Mobility Level 1 - Suitable for wheelchair user indoors and outdoors	Mobility Level 2 - Suitable for people who cannot manage steps or stairs and may use a wheelchair some of the day
Mobility Level 3 - Suitable for people only able to manage 1 or 2 steps or stairs	
Families	Homeseekers/Transfers
Local Connection - Village	Transfer
Garden	Homeseeker
Lift / No Lift	Pets allowed / pets not allowed

The feedback on all lettings will be provided on the website and in the weekly freesheet

The feedback contains information on lettings that have taken place since the previous edition. The feedback is colour coded in the same way as the adverts appearing in the magazine.

Understanding the feedback reports

- **Freesheet issue date** – this is the date that the property was advertised in the NHA Options freesheet.
- **Advert reference** – this is the reference number given to properties advertised in the property freesheet. Each property has its own unique reference number and you will use this number when you bid on a property.
- **Size and property type** – this is simply a description of the property advertised.
- **Location** – this is the address of the property.
- **Bids** – this is the total number of bids that were made for each property. From this you will be able to see on average how many customers are interested in the same type of property and areas as you.
- **Banding and Waiting Time** – this information is very useful as you can look at what bands successful customers were in and how long they waited for a home and how long they waited in the priority band for a home.
- **Applicant Type** – this states whether an applicant has transferred from an existing tenancy or was an applicant from the Housing Register known as a 'Home seeker'.

How can this information help you?

You may wish to use this information to influence how you make your bids in the future, for example;

- If an applicant has been offered a property and was in the same band, note how long they waited. This may give some indication of the length of time that you may be waiting for a property of this type, in a similar location.
- You could bid for properties of different types and in areas that attract fewer bidders. However, remember that you should only bid on properties that you would consider moving into.
- You will be able to see in some instances that certain bands will not be offered certain property types in certain areas, if you are in one of these bands you may wish to consider other housing options.

Remember how long you wait for a property will depend on a number of factors, including;

- which band you are in.
- how long you have been on the housing register.
- the availability of properties within your chosen areas.
- how limited your areas of choice are e.g. if you are waiting for one area or street where very few homes become available.
- actively taking part in our scheme. If you don't bid you can't be considered for the homes advertised.

Example

Free-sheet issue date	Advert Ref	Size	Property type	Location	Bids	LETTING INFORMATION			
						Connection to Newcastle	Relevant date	Band	Applicant type
0000	0000	2 Bed	Flat	Town	53	Yes	01/01/05	2	Homeseeker
0000	0001	3 Bed	House	Silverdale	40	Yes	30/04/07	1	Transfer
0000	0002	1 Bed	Bungalow	Newchapel	10	Yes	06/06/09	4	Homeseeker

General Information

Deadline for placing a bid

All bids must be placed by midnight on a Sunday. The closing date will be shown on the front of the NHA Options freesheet and on the website. If you bid after this time the bid will not be considered.

Need help bidding?

If you need help bidding you can telephone 01782 635200. We will be able to help and advise you on how to bid.

How to bid;

-  Online at the www.nhaoptions.co.uk
-  By text message, **07781 472726** which is available 24 hrs.
-  By telephone to **01782 635200**
Mon - Fri: 8.00 till 5.30
Sat: 9.00 till 1.00
-  In person at Aspire's Customer Services Centre in Merrial Street:
Mon - Fri: 9.00 till 5.00
Sat: 9.00 till 1.00

Where to pick up your property freesheet

NHA Options will ensure that copies of the freesheet will be available free of charge. Every **Tuesday** a freesheet detailing the latest available properties will be available in the following locations (opening times may vary, please call for more information);

- Aspire Housing, Merrial Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme – **01782 635200**
- Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, The Guildhall, High Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme – **01782 717717**
- Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, Customer Contact Centre, Victoria Hall, Liverpool Road, Kidsgrove – **01782 717717**
- Sanctuary Housing – Three Counties House, Festival Park, Stoke-on-Trent – **01782 219200**
- Staffordshire Housing Association – Woodhouse Street, Stoke-on-Trent – **01782 744533**
- Chesterton One Stop Shop – London Road, Chesterton – **01782 563603**
- Staffordshire County Council Libraries
 - Hall Street, Audley – **01782 720527**
 - Darmouth Ave, Clayton – **01782 616074**
 - Meadows Road, Kidsgrove – **01782 782445**
 - St Mary's C of E School, Knutton – **01782 297339**
 - Eccleshall Road, Loggerheads – **01630 673117**
 - Ironmarket, Newcastle-under-Lyme – **01782 297300**
 - High Street, Silverdale – **01782 297444**
 - Chester Road, Talke – **01782 782200**

NHA Options is committed to helping everyone to access our scheme

If you have difficulties obtaining a freesheet or accessing the internet please call **01782 635200**