



Affinity Sutton Home Choice User Guide

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How the scheme works

Once your application has been accepted onto the housing register, you will receive a letter confirming your application details including:

- a unique reference and pin number
- the band in which the application has been placed
- the size of property you are eligible for
- the date in which your band is effective from
- information on how the choice based system works, where to find properties and how to place a bid
- information on advice/assistance
- a reminder to notify us of any changes of circumstances immediately

Once your application has been verified and made active, a homepage is created. You can log onto your homepage to look at which properties you have bid on. You can also look at your bid history for properties that have been let.

You must tell us of any changes in circumstances eg changes to your household size, medical conditions or housing situation. This is very important as it could result in a change to your banding and your eligibility for different type of properties. You can do this by logging onto your homepage or speaking to an advisor.

Using Affinity Sutton Home Choice

Available properties will be advertised every week on the **Affinity Sutton Home Choice** website. This is known as the **Bidding Cycle** where you can show your interest by placing a bid.

- 12am Wednesday to 11.59pm the following Monday – this will usually apply to homes that are going to become vacant in the next four weeks.
- Until we have sufficient numbers of bids shown – this will usually apply to homes that are usually available immediately. We also let our Rent4Less homes in this way.

You are able to bid on three properties during each bidding cycle. However, you should only bid on properties that you would like to move to.

You can place your bid by either:

- Telephone on 08458398985.
- Visiting the website www.affinitysutton.com/homechoice

Adverts

Property adverts will provide information about each available property. This will include:

- A photo of the property
- The property advert number
- The address of the property
- The property type
- The number of bedrooms
- The maximum number of people allowed to live in the property
- The floor level of the property
- The tenure that the property will be offered under
- Details of any local lettings plan that may apply
- The weekly rent, service charge and any other charges
- If pets are allowed or not
- If the property is sheltered
- Details of whether the property has a garden
- Details of whether the property has a lift
- Heating type in the property
- Details of any advert preferences
- Details of age restrictions

Registration

To register for housing, you need to complete an on-line application form. The lettings staff are available to assist you where needed and can complete the form on your behalf, over the phone should this be required.

The online registration form will calculate a 'banding' for you based on our banding criteria and confirm what priority band has been awarded.

During the registration process the system will prompt you to provide additional support documents. Examples include medical information, copy of a MatB1 certificate, or proof of harassment. You will need to send your documents to the lettings team who will upload them onto the application.

Verification

Once your application is complete, a member of the Lettings team will complete the verification. This will include carrying out specific checks on the information you have provided.

Your application may be cancelled if you fail to meet the requirements stated in the lettings policy.

Your application may also be cancelled if you do not provide the relevant proof documents within the requested timescale.

Once all checks are completed and you meet the criteria set out in the lettings policy, your application will be made active and accepted onto the housing register and you can begin bidding.

How to place a bid

Once your application has been made active you can log in to your homepage. To log in you will need to visit www.affinitysutton.com/homechoice

You will need to enter your username and your PIN number. These can be found on the letter that we have sent to you confirming that your application is now active.

Each time that a property is added to the site you will receive an email on your homepage. It is important that you check your homepage regularly because we will contact you through this page.

The 'My Details' page will list the properties that you have bid on and their current status.

Once you have logged in you can view all of the properties open for bidding. Click on the 'See Eligible Properties Only' button.

To view the full property advert click on the 'address'. If you wish to make a bid click the 'Add To Your Selection' button. This does not place a bid.

If you want to remove the property from your selection then click 'Remove From Your Selection'.

If you want to proceed to place a bid then click 'View Selected properties'. Click the box to the left hand side of the property address and then click 'Bid'.

Please update your contact details after placing a bid by clicking the link to the 'My Details' Page. This will ensure that we can contact you quickly should we need to.

If you want to withdraw a bid then click on my details and click the 'Withdraw Bid' link on the property you want to withdraw the bid from.

To logout click the 'Logout' button.

The offer

Once the **Bidding Cycle** has closed, we put the bids received in priority order to produce a shortlist of eligible applicants.

Your position is based firstly on the **Band** that you are in, secondly the **Points** you have been awarded and thirdly your **Qualification** date.

- If your bid is showing as 'Property Still Open for Bidding' this means that the advert has not closed and people can bid on the property
- If your bid is showing as 'bid under consideration' this means that bidding has closed. It does not mean your bid has been considered for an offer.
- If your bid is showing as 'property offered to others' this means that others above you have been shortlisted and your bid was unsuccessful.
- If your bid is showing as 'declined' this means you have refused the property.
- If your bid is showing 'shortlisted' this means that you will be contacted for either more information or to invite you to a viewing.

All offers will be subject to the application being re-verified to confirm your circumstances and you will be advised of the offer in writing. You will be invited to view the property before you are asked if you wish to accept or refuse the offer.

In some areas there may be **multiple viewings** where a number of people on the shortlist are invited to view the property at one time. The property will be offered to the highest bidder who attends the viewing and then accepts the property.

You can **refuse two properties**, but you will be expected to accept the third property offered. If you decline the offer, your application will be reviewed in line with the lettings policy and the following may apply:

- Your priority on the housing register may be reduced or withdrawn
- Your application may be cancelled

Giving preference to different groups

Some adverts may give preference to certain groups of applicants, for example:

- Only applicants with an assessed need for an adapted property will be considered for a property that has adaptations.
- We may give preference on some adverts to current Affinity Sutton residents. Only current registered Affinity Sutton residents will be able to bid on these properties.
- We may give preference on some adverts to Homeseekers. This would mean that Affinity Sutton residents would not be able to bid on these properties.
- Some areas have local lettings plans in place which may restrict the household type moving into a particular neighbourhood or property

size. This is to try and build sustainable communities. Any special conditions or restrictions will be clearly stated in the property advert.

If no bidder meets the specified advert preference then we may use the property for a direct offer or offer it to the bidder who otherwise placed highest on the bid list.

What information is available once the property is let?

Once properties have been let, feedback information is available on our website which tells you:

- How many bids were placed for the individual property
- The band of the successful bidder
- The waiting time of the successful bidder

This information will be useful so you can recognise how long the successful bidder has been waiting for and how long you may have to wait for a similar property.

Can we notify you when your bid has been unsuccessful?

Our allocations policy aims to promote openness and transparency. We do this by providing feedback in relation to the banding priority of members who were successful for previous bids which enables current bidders to assess their chance of a potential waiting time to be re-housed. The feedback will contain the following information:

- The advert reference number and the property address
- The total number of bids received
- The band of the successful bidder
- The effective date of the successful bidder

How can this information help me?

The information can be useful for your future bids and may influence your decision making. For example, if you are in the same band as the successful bidder, take a look at their waiting time. This may indicate the length of time you may be waiting for a similar property and similar location.

Remember there will be a number of different factors that will affect how long it could take to be re-housed. You may want to look at different Housing Options within your local area.

Other Housing Options

Rent4Less properties

Properties under the Rent4Less scheme may be advertised on Home Choice. There are specific criteria for this product. Applicants will not place a bid on these properties but they will contact us by email or phone to express an interest. These properties will then be allocated in line with the Rent4Less procedure.

Mutual exchange

This is available to current tenants of local authorities or housing associations who want to exchange properties. You will need to contact your landlord to find out which exchange service they subscribe to. Once you have registered, you can visit the website to find possible exchanges.

Private renting

You can look in local newspapers and local shop windows at adverts for private rented housing. Here are some useful websites that advertise rented accommodation:

www.findaproerty.com

www.rightmove.co.uk

www.primelocation.com

Shared ownership

This product is aimed for those who earn too much to be considered for social housing but can't afford to buy outright. Please visit our website to find out more.

Exclusions

In some circumstances, we may have the right to exclude you from the Housing Register in line with our lettings policy. Anyone to whom this applies will be written to and advised the reason for exclusion once a decision is made.

How to contact us

If you have any questions regarding Home Choice, or you require help or guidance, you can contact us by the following:

- 0300 100 0303
- Maple House, 157-159 Masons Hill, Bromley, Kent, BR2 9HY
- customerservice@affinitysutton.com
- www.affinitysutton.com

Frequently Asked Questions

Why do I need to re-register?

Affinity Sutton is introducing a choice based lettings system called Home Choice. This system will be used to advertise properties that are not subject to nominations agreements.

In order to be considered for re-housing with us you will need to register on this system.

How do I register?

You need to register on-line at www.affinitysutton.com/homechoice

What if I do not have access to a computer or the internet?

If you are unable to access a computer then staff in the lettings team will be able to register you. Please contact 0300 100 0303 for assistance.

When will I be able to bid on properties?

You will be able to bid on properties when you have registered and your application has been made active. You will receive a username and PIN number which you will need to use in order to bid. You will also receive further information about how Home Choice works when your application has been accepted.

How does Home Choice work?

Properties not subject to nominations agreements will be advertised on-line. Applicants who are registered and active can place a bid on properties that they are eligible for and wish to be considered for.

Available properties will be advertised every week on the **Affinity Sutton Home Choice** website. This is known as the **Bidding Cycle** where you can show your interest by placing a bid.

- 12am Wednesday to 11.59pm the following Monday – this will usually apply to homes that are going to become vacant in the next 4 weeks
- Until we have sufficient numbers of bids shown – this will usually apply to homes that are usually available immediately. We also let our Rent4Less homes in this way

Once the advert is closed the lettings team produces a shortlist of eligible applicants. We will then allocate the property to the person at the top of the shortlist. All offers are subject to applicants meeting the criteria set out in the

lettings policy and on the advert. Applicants who are shortlisted for a property but are then found not to be eligible will have the offer withdrawn.

Is more information available?

Yes. Information can be found on line at www.affinitysutton.com/homechoice or by contacting the lettings team on 0300 100 0303

What can I bid on?

When your application is accepted onto the Housing register, you will be advised in writing of your banding, the type of property and how many bedrooms you can bid on. This will depend on the number of people and relationships within your household, including the age and gender of children.

What if a home has an age restriction?

Some properties will be advertised with a minimum age requirements for example some properties only allow people above the age of 55. This will be clearly stated on the advert.

What if I have pets?

Pets are not allowed in some of our properties, it depends on the type of property. The advert will clearly state if we allow pets in that specific property.

What if a home is adapted?

If a property has adaptations, this will clearly be stated on the advert. You will be able to bid on these properties, but priority will be given to those people whose needs we have assessed as matching the adaptation already in the property.

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

If you have made a bid but then change your mind, you can remove the bid on the website as long as the bidding cycle is still open. Please think carefully when placing your bids, and only bid on properties that you would like to be considered for. If you bid on a property you don't like, and refuse the offer, this will be count towards your refusal quota.

Why does my position change during the bidding cycle?

Your position depends upon who else placed a bid on that same property. Bidders are not awarded on a first come first served basis. For example anyone who places a bid on the property who is in a higher band than you will

be above you on the list. If a bidder has the same banding and the same points, those who have been registered for longer than you will be above you on the list. Anyone who hasn't been registered for as long as you will be below you on the bid list. Once the bidding cycle has closed, your final bid position will be recorded and cannot be changed.

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

If you have bid on a property but you have not been invited to a viewing it may be because

- you are not top of the shortlist
- You do not meet the advert preference
- Your situation is awaiting assessment due to your behaviour

What is an assured tenancy?

If you are offered an Assured Tenancy it means that, as long as you maintain the terms set out in your tenancy agreement, you will be able to remain in the property indefinitely. You will normally be offered a starter tenancy for the first twelve months before being offered an assured tenancy. Rents on these tenancies also offer much lower than normal 'market' rents

What is a fixed term tenancy?

If you are offered a Fixed Term Tenancy it means that you will not be able to remain in that property indefinitely. We offer most of our fixed term tenancies for a period of 5 years. However, we can offer just 2 years if there are exceptional circumstances. We will review your circumstances before the end of each fixed term tenancy. If your circumstances change and you no longer meet the criteria to remain in the property you may be asked to leave that property or be offered a more suitable accommodation as an alternative. Rents on these are slightly higher than social rents and are normally offered at around 80% of normal market rents.