



homefindersomerset.co.uk

Your Guide to Homefinder Somerset



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Homefinder Somerset is a way of looking for council and housing association homes.

Under Homefinder Somerset you can:

- Choose which homes interest you
- Move within Somerset

Homefinder Somerset covers the county of Somerset. This is the area covered by Somerset Council. It does not include North Somerset, which includes Weston-Super-Mare, or Bath and North East Somerset. References to Somerset in this guide refer to the area covered by Homefinder Somerset.

This guide explains how:

- To join the Homefinder Somerset register
- Applications are assessed
- To find information on available homes
- To express interest in homes (known as bidding)
- Successful applicants are selected

Your data

The personal information that you provide will be held securely. The Privacy Notice on the Homefinder Somerset website explains what personal data we collect from you and how we use it.

Step 1: Register

You can join the Homefinder Somerset register as long you:

- Are over 16 years old
- Have either been living in Somerset for the last 2 years, or have previously lived in Somerset for 3 of the last 5 years, or
- Have a local connection to Somerset, for example because you work in Somerset or have immediate family who have lived in Somerset for more than 5 years
- Are not subject to immigration control

The easiest way to join the Homefinder Somerset register is to visit the website www.homefindersomerset.co.uk and complete the online application form. Just click on 'Register' from the home page and follow the instructions.



Email and Password

When you complete your online application, you will be asked to provide your email address and to create a password. You will need these details to login to the website and bid for homes. It is vital that you remember your password, as you will need it to bid for homes.

If you forget your password, please visit the Sign in page of the Homefinder Somerset website and follow the instructions.

How applications are assessed

All applications to join the Homefinder Somerset register will be assessed and placed in one of four priority bands. This will be based on our assessment of your housing need.

This guide summarises how applications are assessed. For full details please see the Homefinder Somerset Policy, available on the Help page of the Homefinder Somerset website.

The four priority bands are:

Emergency Band

Your application will only be placed in the Emergency Band if your need for housing is assessed as so exceptional that you must take priority over all other applicants, and that applying as homeless is not appropriate.

For example:

- Your home has a severe impact on your health or wellbeing
- Your home has been assessed to be in a state of urgent disrepair
- You need to move to escape violence or the threat of violence, or a traumatic event
- You are bed blocking in hospital and cannot return to your home due to its unsuitability

Substantial evidence must exist to award this priority.

Gold Band

Your application will be placed in this band if:

- You are homeless and Somerset Council has accepted a main housing duty
- You are severely overcrowded
- You are a victim of harassment or violence at your home
- Your home has a significant impact on your health or welfare
- Your home has been assessed as being in high disrepair
- You are ready to move on from supported accommodation
- You are a care leaver and are ready for independent living
- You are a tenant of a Homefinder Somerset partner landlord and want to move to a smaller home from a large property (3+ bed) property
- You are a tenant of a Homefinder Somerset partner landlord whose home is subject to major works such as rebuilding or renovation





- You live in a property in Somerset managed by a Homefinder Somerset partner landlord where you have no legal right to succession, and the landlord intends to pursue possession of the property.
- You who have four or more silver band housing needs (see below)
- You who have been awarded 'moderate' medical impact and 'medium' disrepair award from the Silver Band.

Silver Band

Your application will be placed in this band if:

- Your home has a moderate impact on your health or welfare
- Your home has been assessed as being in medium disrepair
- You have a child (or children) and are lodging with friends or family or in accommodation with shared living facilities
- You are overcrowded and lack 1 bedroom
- You have been assessed as homeless by Somerset Council, but they have not accepted a main housing duty
- You live in separate accommodation to your partner, not by choice but due to the lack of suitable accommodation available
- You need to need to move for work in Somerset, where commuting from your current home would be unreasonable
- You need to move nearer to local facilities or relatives, to receive or give, essential and critical medical or other support or care

Bronze Band

Your application will be placed in this band if:

- You are adequately housed, own your home or have adequate financial resources to meet your own housing need
- Your home has a low impact on your health or welfare
- Your home has a significant or moderate impact on your health or welfare, but adaptations have been agreed
- You have accepted an offer of housing that does not fully meet your housing needs
- You have deliberately worsened your own circumstances
- You live in supported accommodation but are not ready to move on
- You are lodging with friends or family or in accommodation with shared living facilities but have no children



We will also assess the size of home that you can apply for. Under Homefinder Somerset one bedroom is usually allowed for each of the following:

- A single applicant or couple (married or unmarried)
- Any two children of the same sex under the age of 16
- Any two children under 10 irrespective of sex
- Any other person aged 16 or over
- Any other child, (other than a child whose main home is elsewhere)
- A carer who does not form part of the household but provides a household member with long term overnight care

In most cases we will look at your application and confirm that you are able to start bidding for homes. We aim to write to you within 42 days to tell you:

- What band your application has been placed in, and the reason for this
- The size of home that you are eligible to bid for
- Your Effective Date
- Your personal reference number

You must always tell us if there are any changes in your circumstances, such as a change of address or the number of people in your household. Any change may affect your housing need and priority, and we will then reassess your application. If necessary, we will change your band, effective date and the size of home that you are eligible to bid for. If you do not do this, you may not be considered for a property at a later time.

If you need to update your details or upload supporting evidence, you will need to login to the Homefinder Somerset website and click on the 'Unlock your account page' button. You will then be sent an email containing a One-Time-Password that you need to enter.

This is a security feature designed to keep your personal details as safe as possible.



Step 2: Choose

How are homes advertised?

Homes available to let in Somerset are advertised each week on the Homefinder Somerset website.

Homes are advertised from 12.00 a.m. on Wednesday morning to 11.59 p.m. on the following Sunday night. No homes are advertised are on Mondays or Tuesdays.

The adverts tell you the location, size, rent and other features of the home, and who the landlord is.

The adverts also tell you if there are any special requirements that an applicant must meet. For example, the minimum age for older persons' accommodation, or if a local connection is required to a particular area in Somerset.

The icons shown on adverts tell you about a home. For example, how many bedrooms it has, who can bid for it and whether applicants must have a local connection to a particular area. You can see what the icons mean by hovering your mouse over them.

Bidding for homes

You can tell us which homes you would like to be considered for. This is called bidding. Bidding does not mean that you will part with any money.

You can bid for up to 3 homes each week. You can only bid for homes that match your household needs. For example, if you need a 2 bedroom home you will not usually be able to bid for 3 bedroom homes.

How to bid for homes:

- Visit the Homefinder Somerset website
- Click the 'Sign in' option
- Enter your email address and password. This will bring up the 'Your account' page. If you have forgotten your password, please click the 'Forgotten your password?' link and follow the instructions
- Click on View Homes to see basic details about the homes that you are eligible to bid for.
- Click on the address or photo of any homes that you are interested in to see the full details. You will be able to see your position, if you were to bid, on the list of people who have bid at that time. Please note that your position could change up until the end of the bidding period, as other people add or remove bids.
- To place a bid for a home click 'Place Bid'





If you change your mind and want to remove a bid, you can do this by clicking on the 'Your Account' option. This page shows your current bids and gives you the option to remove any current bids.

Please make sure that your phone number and email address are correct on the 'Your Account' page. If you need to update them, please click 'edit'. If we do not have your current contact details you may miss out on a home or your application may be closed.

What does local connection mean?

Adverts for some homes state that 'priority will be given to applicants who have a local connection'.

To have a local connection to a particular area (e.g. a parish) normally means that you must either have lived in the area for a minimum amount of time (e.g. the last 5 years), work there, or have close family members who live there. The advert will explain the local connection requirements.

Property Alerts

You can set up property alerts so that you are notified by email when a property matching what you have said you are looking for is being advertised.

To set up a property alert:

- Login into the Homefinder Somerset website
- Click on 'Your Property Alerts'
- You can confirm what type of homes you are interested in, and which local authority area, or areas, you are interested in.

Email alerts will automatically be sent to the email address you provided on your application on Wednesday and Sunday mornings. You will be sent details of homes that you are eligible to bid for.

Step 3: Selecting the successful applicant

At the end of each weekly advertising cycle a list is produced of all qualifying bids. The list sorts applicants by their band and how long they have been waiting.

If your bid meets all the specifications on the advert, and you are the top bidder, the landlord will carry out a number of checks which may include making sure that your circumstances have not changed from the information on your application and that your rent payments are up to date.



If you pass all the landlord checks, you will normally be invited to view the home. If you have had a change of circumstances that you haven't let us know about, have rent arrears or have been guilty of anti-social behaviour, and the landlord is unable to offer the home to you, they will move to the next applicant on the list. To help you with future bidding, you will get advice on the steps you would need to take to be considered for another home.

If you are being considered for a home, you will be able to see this from the 'Your Account' page. Whilst you are being considered you cannot bid for other homes.

If you decide to refuse the home, it will be offered to the next applicant on the list who meets the conditions specified in the advert.

If you refuse a number of homes, you may be suspended from bidding.

If you have been accepted as homeless by a Somerset local authority, you should always seek advice before refusing a home, as this could affect your chances to be accommodated, and may end any duty the local authority has to provide you with a home.

When the home is ready, you will be contacted about signing the tenancy agreement and collecting the keys.

Feedback

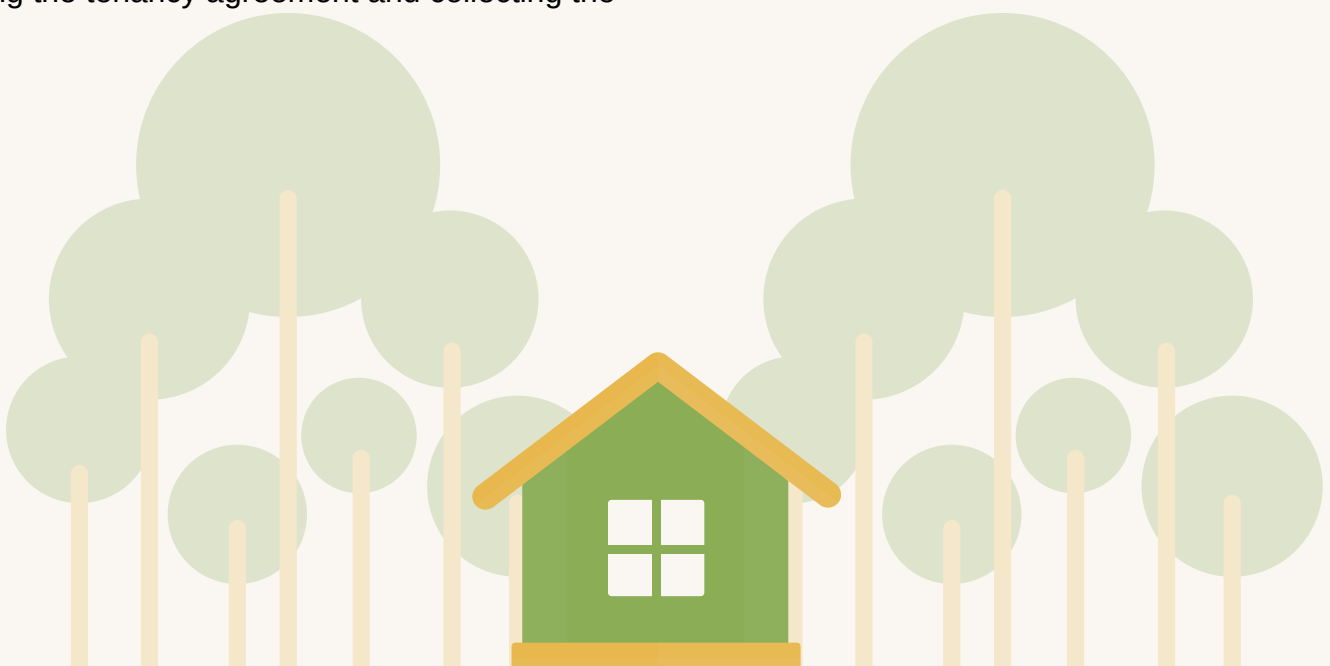
From the 'Your Account' page you can get feedback about your current and previous bids. You will be able to see how many bids were placed for homes that you bid for, and your position on the list of bidders. If you have been rejected for a property or have refused an offer you will be able to see the reason. If you have been unsuccessful for a property that has been let, you will be able to see the band of the successful applicant, and how long they have been waiting.

This information will give you a better idea of

- How popular a particular type of home or area is
- Whether you are likely to be successful in bidding for a council or housing association home
- How long you may have to wait

You can then decide whether to look for other types of home, or areas where you may not have to wait as long, or whether to look at other housing options, such as private renting.

For more information on how Homefinder Somerset works please visit www.homefindersomerset.co.uk or contact the Somerset Council Housing Options Team





Somerset Council

Housing Options Team North
Email: housingoptions.north@somerset.gov.uk

Housing Options Team South
Email: housingoptions.south@somerset.gov.uk

Housing Options Team East
Email: housingoptions.east@somerset.gov.uk

Housing Options Team West
Email: housingoptions.west@somerset.gov.uk

