

Restart of Choice Based Lettings (CBL) bidding frequently asked questions

1. When will bidding restart?

The Choice Based Lettings (CBL) Home Connections site will restart for bidding on Thursday 13 August 2020.

2. Is the council changing the viewing process and if so how will it change?

Yes, we have changed the process to help keep you and our staff safer. We have made arrangements so that we no longer have multiple households viewing a property at the same time or very close together.

Initially, we are offering virtual viewings– so you, your family and friends can view the property and surrounding area in a video we send you. If you are shortlisted, we will email or WhatsApp you a video and detailed description of the property and surrounding area. A housing officer will contact you to confirm how you would like us to send this information. If you do not have email or a smartphone, we can send it to a friend or family member – please remember to let them know it is coming. Alternatively, if you wish to view the property in person, this can be arranged with a housing officer.

If you agree to a virtual viewing, we will send:

- a video of the property, shared by WhatsApp or email;
- a summary of the property (address, floor level, steps, lift access, rent and service charges etc.);
- a map reference link to the Google Earth location;
- the date and time of a telephone call appointment with a housing officer to discuss the property and answer any questions you may have about it.

The video will highlight:

- key features of the property;
- each room within the property;
- any communal spaces, under-stairs, stairwells, landing, storage areas;
- any balconies and outside space;
- views from the front and back door of the property.

Please note that we send the video footage and property description you receive to all shortlisted residents. Once you receive the video, you will have up to 24 hours to

make a decision and you are encouraged to visit the local area during this time and to consider if the location of the property is ideally suited to your needs.

If you are the first positioned bidder and you are unable to make a decision on the basis of the information we provide, please ask your housing officer about a viewing in person.

3. What type of properties will be advertised when I am able to bid again?

We expect there will be a smaller number of social housing properties to advertise once bidding restarts and this will increase towards the end of the year. This is because fewer people have moved and vacated their properties during the Covid-19 lockdown period.

We anticipate that the majority of properties to be advertised in the first few weeks will be social housing properties owned primarily by the council. Housing Association owned properties will be advertised once they have developed their own safe viewing and sign-up process.

4. How will bidding change?

The bidding system will not change. If you have a minimum of 120 points, you will be able to bid for a maximum of three properties weekly, in line with your assessed needs.

5. Will the way the council shortlists bids change when bidding restarts?

No, the way the housing service shortlists bids will not change. Bids will be shortlisted on the basis of the following criteria:

- the number of housing points you have been awarded;
- the type of property you can bid for i.e. ground floor, wheelchair etc.;
- the size of property you can bid for;
- if it is a local lettings property in line with the Allocation Scheme which can be found by clicking this **link**. *(Please refer to pages 23 and 24 for the Local Lettings policy)*

6. How will I be informed that I have been shortlisted for a property that I have bid for?

If you have been shortlisted, you will be informed via the Home Connections website once you log on to the Home Connections website. You will also be contacted by text message, email or phone call depending on the preference stated on your individual application.

7. If I am shortlisted, how do I tell the council that I am ill with Covid-19 or have another issue of concern?

When you are notified that you have been shortlisted, the housing officer will ask you whether you are ill with Covid-19. If you are ill with Covid-19, you will be asked if you would prefer to wait until you have recovered from your illness or whether you would like to:

- view a property via a video viewing;
- make a decision to accept a property;
- sign a tenancy agreement if an offer is made;
- potentially move within a week of signing a tenancy agreement.

If you have another issue of concern that might prevent you from viewing a property via a video viewing and if successful move to your new home after signing a tenancy agreement, please speak to the housing officer who will work with you so that you are not disadvantaged by your issue of concern.

8. If I am unable to view the video, are there alternative ways to view a property?

If you are unable to view the video you receive, please inform the housing officer and they will discuss alternatives with you.

9. How long will I have to decide whether I would like to accept or decline a property after receiving the video of the property I have bid for?

Before the council suspended bidding, residents were asked to accept or decline the property at the viewing. However, with the video viewing process, you will have up to 24 hours to respond to the housing officer and accept or decline the property. You will have more time to discuss the details of the property with your family/friends before deciding to accept or decline the property.

10. Are there be any changes to the council's tenancy sign up process?

Yes – we have reduced the amount of face to face contact during this process, to keep you and our staff safe. If you have decided to accept the property you viewed and are the successful resident, you will be contacted by the Housing Tenant Services team (HST). Your tenancy agreement is a legal document and we do need to meet with you in person for you to sign it. This meeting will take five minutes.

If you are unable to attend the sign-up meeting, please explain why. In some cases, the housing officer may be able to arrange transportation to collect you and bring you to the office for your sign up.

At the tenancy sign up, you will:

- have to observe social distancing of 2 metres;
- have to sanitise your hands and wear gloves provided at the sign up;
- be provided with a new pen that you will be able to take away with you or dispose of after the sign up.

The housing officer will ensure:

- surfaces are wiped down between sign ups;
- they sanitise their hands and wear personal protective equipment (gloves, mask) during the sign up process.

After your tenancy sign up meeting, the HST will call you within 24 hours to discuss the terms and conditions of your tenancy and to answer any questions you may have.

11. How soon will I have to move after I sign the new tenancy agreement?

The majority of tenancies will start on the Monday following your sign up appointment. Please use the time between signing up and the tenancy starting to pack, arrange your removals and obtain any items such as white goods (fridge, freezer, washing machine and oven).

12. What happens if I need more time to make arrangements to move?

If you need more time to make arrangements to move, this should be discussed with your housing officer before you sign the tenancy agreement at the tenancy sign up. In exceptional circumstances, a tenancy start date delay may be agreed e.g. if the property needs to be specially adapted for you. In these circumstances, a sign up may be delayed for a short period so that you don't have two tenancies running at the same time.

13. If I have signed a tenancy agreement but am unable to arrange removals at this time, what should I do?

We will not usually delay a tenancy start date for this reason. If you are unable to transport your items by car, consider using a removal company. If you are a council tenant transferring to another property, the council does not normally pay for or arrange removals. However, please do inform the housing officer before you sign the tenancy agreement if you are likely to struggle to make these arrangements. The officer will then consider how you might be supported to move to your new tenancy.

14. If I have signed a tenancy agreement but don't have any white goods (fridge, freezer, washing machine, oven), what should I do?

Companies such as Argos are able to arrange delivery of goods to your doorstep. If you are struggling financially, you can apply for help to buy white goods from the council's Resident Support Scheme (**RSS**). An RSS payment will take a few days but this should not prevent a move to your new home; we will talk to you about this at the sign up appointment. If you are a council tenant, you may decide to bring your existing white goods with you. Please let your housing officer know if you need any additional help with this.

15. The property I am due to move to is not decorated. Is there any support I could receive with this?

The council can normally offer movers help with the costs of decorating your property through our decoration vouchers and carpets scheme (*please refer to page 14 in our 'Guide for new tenants'*) Please speak to the housing officer when you sign for the tenancy. We do not normally delay a tenancy start date because a property is not decorated.

16. What happens if I am unable to move after having signed a tenancy agreement and received the keys to the property?

If you have signed a tenancy agreement for a property, received the keys but are unable to move in, you must inform the housing officer immediately. If the housing officer **does not agree** to a delayed move-in date, you will be asked to formally give up the tenancy as quickly as possible, so that the property may be offered to the next shortlisted resident who accepted the property.

The return of the keys and formal giving up of the tenancy is critical to ensure you are not charged the full rent, service charges and council tax at both your current home and the property you were due to move to. You will carry on being charged for these until the keys to the property are returned to the housing office at 222 Upper St, N1 1XR.