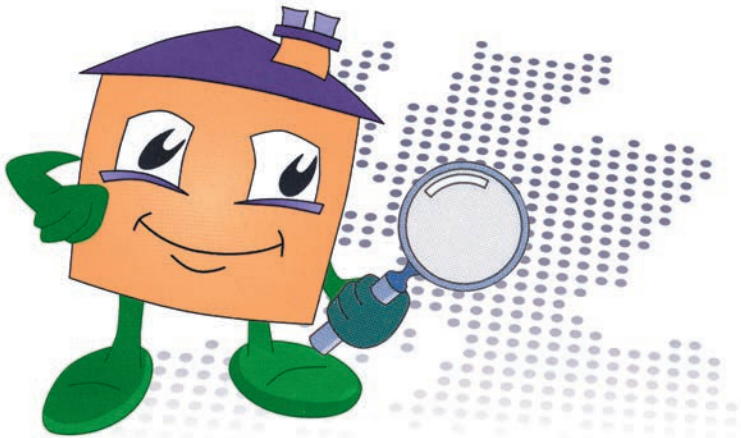


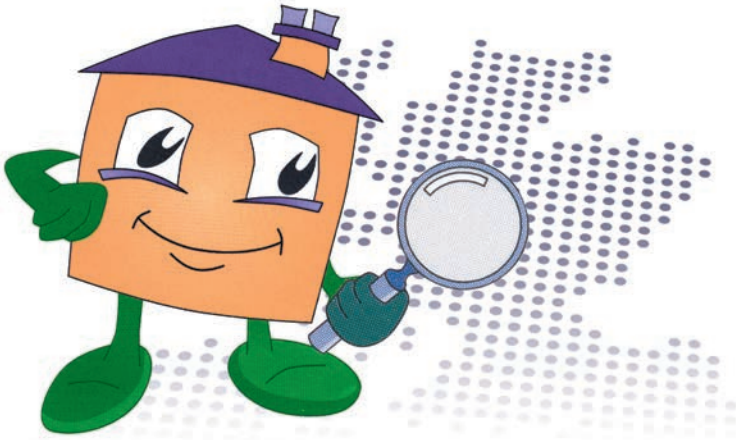


# Guide to Applying for a Home with Homehunt East Lothian



# Welcome to Homehunt

Simply a better way to provide homes.



This Guide contains important information which you must read carefully so that you understand how Homehunt works and don't do anything that might lower your chances of getting a property. If there is anything you don't understand or you need more advice or information, please contact us.

The Homehunt Register is shared by several Scottish landlords. You only have to register once then you can choose to be considered by one, a few or all of them depending on where you want to live. Once you have registered with Homehunt, you can apply for all properties advertised provided you have chosen to register with the landlord the property belongs to. There will usually be a lot of people applying for the same property and so there are some simple rules to decide as fairly as possible who will be offered the property. East Lothian Housing Association's rules are explained in this booklet, the other landlords will have different rules. Because rented accommodation is in very short supply in East Lothian, we strongly recommend that you apply to other housing providers such as East Lothian Council or other Housing Associations.

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## 1 What is Homehunt?

Homehunt is a choice-based allocations computer system. It is used by a number of different landlords operating in different areas throughout Scotland. You can register with any of these landlords, allowing you to apply for properties in lots of different areas. The advantage of a Choice Based Lettings (CBL) system is that you, the applicant, can see what properties are available at any time, and can choose to apply for the properties that are suitable for your needs, and are in areas where you would like to live. It is important that you actively look for properties but this is easy to do, especially if you use the website.

## 2 Registering

You need to register with East Lothian Housing Association before you can apply for one of our, or Homes for Life Housing Partnership's, properties. The easiest way to register is online at **[www.homehunt.info](http://www.homehunt.info)**. Once you have completed the registration, you choose which area(s) you want to live in and you will be given a list of Homehunt landlords who have properties in your area(s). If you prefer you can download and print an application form from the useful documents section of the website, or ask us to send one to you in the post by calling our office on **01620 825032**.

Once we have accepted your registration, you will be given a registration number. You need this number to log in to your registration on line, apply for properties or if you need to phone or write to us.

If your circumstances change at any time it is very important that you tell us because if you successfully apply for a property then we find that the information we have about you is incorrect you may not be offered the property.

### 3 Connection to East Lothian

There are not enough affordable rented homes for the people who need them and the shortage is particularly bad in East Lothian. We are required by law to allow anyone over the age of 16 to apply to us and to have their need for housing assessed but when we allocate properties we are allowed to prioritise people with a connection to East Lothian. You have a connection to East Lothian if you

- Already live here
- Work, have been offered or are looking for a job here
- Need to move here to be near a relative or carer
- Have special social or medical reasons for needing to be housed here
- Want to move here to get away from harassment or domestic abuse

### 4 Priority Passes

We want to make sure that we allocate the homes we have available to the people who need them most. So if you have a “significant housing need” you might qualify for a Priority Pass. You might be in significant housing need for one of the following reasons:

- You are homeless or threatened with homelessness.
- You are experiencing harassment or anti-social behaviour
- Your health is affected by your current housing situation
- You are overcrowded as you do not have enough bedrooms for your family
- Your home is too big and you need a smaller property (this applies only to ELHA or HfLHP tenants)
- Your property is unsuitable because of its condition or lack of amenities
- You need to move to a particular area for work or family reasons
- You have never had a tenancy and can't afford private sector housing



If any of these situations apply to you, you can apply for a Priority Pass. The easiest way to do this is online at [www.homehunt.info](http://www.homehunt.info) (you may have done this already). The website lists each pass separately, and you need to complete a separate online application form for each pass you think you may be eligible for. It is important that you submit applications for every type of priority you think applies to you, so we can assess your whole situation. If you prefer, you can request a Pass application form from our office. The application forms (both paper and online) have more information about the criteria you need to meet to qualify for each priority pass and are designed to collect the information we need to accurately assess your housing need in line with our allocations policy.

If you think you may be eligible for more than one priority pass, please fill in all of the pass applications you think may apply to your situation. If you are eligible for more than one priority pass, we will issue you whichever one gives you the highest priority or, if you qualify for two or more passes you may qualify for a cumulative pass which increases your priority. If you are unsure if you qualify for a pass, please call us to discuss your situation. We can advise you which priority pass best matches your situation, and can also help you with filling out the form or using the website.

Homeless Passes are only awarded where East Lothian Council has completed a homeless assessment and / or accepted a duty to house you. If you are homeless you must contact your local authority as soon as possible. Please note that we do not provide any temporary accommodation. The table over the page lists the Priority Passes we offer, and the different levels of priority we award.

## 5 How do we assess Priority Passes?

Priority passes are awarded on seven levels; Platinum, Gold Plus, Gold, Silver Plus, Silver, Bronze Plus and Bronze, as indicated in the table below. If you are eligible for a Priority Pass you will be issued one of the following Pass Types:

### Priority Pass Level

| Priority Type             | Platinum | Gold Plus | Gold | Silver Plus | Silver | Bronze Plus | Bronze |
|---------------------------|----------|-----------|------|-------------|--------|-------------|--------|
| Homelessness              | ✓        |           |      |             |        |             |        |
| Harassment                |          |           |      |             | ✓      |             | ✓      |
| Medical                   |          |           | ✓    |             | ✓      |             |        |
| Unsuitable Housing        |          |           | ✓    |             |        |             | ✓      |
| Overcrowding              |          |           | ✓    |             | ✓      |             | ✓      |
| Under-occupation          |          |           | ✓    |             | ✓      |             |        |
| Need to be in a Community |          |           |      |             | ✓      |             | ✓      |
| First Affordable Home     |          |           |      |             | ✓      |             | ✓      |
| Transfer                  |          | ✓         | ✓    |             | ✓      |             | ✓      |
| Cumulative                |          | ✓         |      | ✓           |        | ✓           |        |

When we receive your priority pass form, we will assess what level of priority you are entitled to based on the information you have provided in your priority pass application form so it's important you give us enough information to make a decision. Sometimes we may need more information, for example, we may ask for a letter from your doctor to clarify your medical needs, or a letter from your employer confirming where you work. If we need further information we will write to you or send an email to let you know.





If you have moved from a home that you had a legal right to occupy to another property where your housing situation is worse and you qualify for a Priority Pass in your new home, we will not normally award the Pass for a period of two years because you have deliberately or carelessly made your situation worse. Where this happens we will only award a Pass if you would have qualified for one in the home you moved from.

Once we have assessed your application we will confirm in writing if you have been awarded a Priority Pass. If you are awarded a Priority Pass it will be applied to your registration as soon as we have assessed your application and will be taken into consideration every time you bid for a property that falls within any limits set on your Pass (see section 6 below).

If your application for a Priority Pass is unsuccessful, or if you believe you have been awarded the wrong level of priority, you can appeal. We will give you information on how to appeal a decision on a priority pass application in the letter informing you of our decision.

## 6 Limiting Priority Passes

Priority Passes are valid for two years. If you don't use your pass to apply for properties of the size you need in the areas you have chosen then, at the end of the 2 years, we will withdraw the pass.

If we haven't advertised any suitable properties, then the pass will be automatically renewed. When you apply for a Priority Pass, in most cases you can choose to limit the Pass to specific towns or villages, or types of property. Some Passes are limited by us. The table below shows how Passes can be limited, and by whom.

### Who can limit passes to property features?

| Property Type                                    | Applicant | ELHA* |
|--|-----------|-------|
| Amenity property (a community alarm is provided) | ✓         |       |
| Bungalow   | ✓         | ✓     |
| First floor flat (can manage a flight of stairs) | ✓         |       |
| Ground floor flat                                | ✓         | ✓     |
| House  | ✓         |       |
| Second floor flat or higher                      | ✓         |       |
| Sheltered property                               | ✓         | ✓     |
| <b>Special Requirements</b>                      |           |       |
| Ground floor                                     | ✓         | ✓     |
| Sheltered property                               | ✓         | ✓     |
| Walk in shower                                   | ✓         | ✓     |
| Wet floor shower                                 | ✓         | ✓     |
| Wheelchair access                                | ✓         | ✓     |
| Fully Wheelchair adapted property                | ✓         | ✓     |

\*limited only as part of a medical assessment



## Who can limit passes to area?

| Priority Type                | Applicant | ELHA | Applicant 2nd* |
|------------------------------|-----------|------|----------------|
| Homelessness                 | ✓         |      |                |
| Harassment                   | ✓         | ✓    |                |
| Medical                      |           | ✓    | ✓              |
| Unsuitable Housing           | ✓         |      |                |
| Overcrowding/Underoccupation | ✓         |      |                |
| Need to be in the Community  |           | ✓    | ✓              |
| First Affordable Home        | ✓         |      |                |

\*Applicant 2nd means the applicant can limit the pass only after ELHA has considered any limitations first.

If your Pass is 'limited' (whether by us or by you), it means that it is only recognised for properties that meet the, 'limited' criteria. You can still apply for properties that do not meet the 'limited' criteria but your pass is not recognised and you are applying as a registered applicant with no Priority Pass.

So, for example, if your Pass was limited to properties in Haddington, then you could only use it to apply for properties in Haddington. If we advertised properties of a suitable size in Haddington and you decided not to apply for them then your Pass would be withdrawn after 2 years – but equally in this example, your Priority Pass would be renewed if no suitable properties had been advertised in Haddington even if there had been suitable properties advertised in other places.

One of the ways that we decide who, out of everyone who applies, is offered a property is by looking at who has the highest level of priority pass. If you do limit your pass, you can always change the limits you have put on it if you want, but the new limits wouldn't apply to any properties advertised at the time you asked for the change.

There are situations where we can withdraw a Priority Pass. If you are offered a property because you have a Priority Pass and you refuse the offer we will remove your Priority Pass from your registration. If you have a Homeless Priority Pass and refuse an offer you may also risk losing your homeless priority with the local authority. If your pass is removed because you refused an offer of housing, but you think you had good reasons to refuse the offer, you can appeal.

## **7 How long does my Priority Pass last?**

If you have a priority pass and you do not apply for all suitable properties (i.e. properties that are the right size and type in the areas your pass covers), we will withdraw your pass. Once a pass is withdrawn, it will not be awarded for the same circumstances for 6 months (although if your circumstances change, you might qualify for a different type of pass). If you use a Priority Pass to apply for an advertised property then refuse the offer without having a good reason for refusing, your Priority Pass will be withdrawn for a period of 2 years. It is your responsibility to re-apply for priority at the end of this period. If you do lose your Pass, you are entitled to appeal if you wish. Even if you lose your Priority Pass you can still apply for houses as a registered applicant.



## 8 Applying for a house

Our adverts appear online weekly at **[www.homehunt.info](http://www.homehunt.info)**, and in the East Lothian News and Musselburgh News. We send a copy of our adverts to agencies such as East Lothian Council, Citizens Advice Bureaux and local libraries. You can also phone **01620 828415** to hear a list of properties available each week. Once you have completed your registration you can apply for any property that we advertise, as long as it is suitable for you (for example, we wouldn't allow you to apply for a house that was too small for your family).

When you see an advert for a property you are interested in you can apply online by logging in to your registration (remember you will need your registration number). Alternatively, you can apply over the phone, in writing or in person at our office. Properties are advertised for a limited period of time so it is important that you contact us before the closing date and time specified in the advert.

If you successfully apply for a property and then refuse the offer we will normally suspend your priority for two years. It is therefore really important that you only apply for properties that you would accept if you are offered. It's a good idea to check Google Maps "Explore this Area" for information about the area (<https://google.co.uk/maps>). If public transport links are important to you, you should also look at <http://www.traveline.info> for information about buses and trains.

You can apply for as many advertised properties as you wish at any one time. If you qualify for more than one offer at the same time, we will assume that the property you applied for first is your first choice, and so on, in the order you chose to apply. You can only be made one offer at any one time, so the order in which you apply could be important to you.

If you do not want to apply for advertised properties each week, you do not have to. There is no requirement to apply for properties - although if you have a Priority Pass you may risk losing it. Every year we will send you a reminder to check whether you still wish to remain registered with Homehunt.

## 9 Offers of Property

Once the closing date and time for the advert has been reached, we look at all of the applicants who have applied for advertised properties. We will normally make an offer according to the following steps:

- 1 Who would make 'best use' of the property – for example, by using all the available bedrooms or by using disabled adaptations.
- 2 If more than one applicant would make 'best use' of a property, we will offer it to the person with the highest level of Priority Pass (see the explanation of Priority Passes in sections 4-5).
- 3 If more than one person has the same level of Priority Pass, the offer will go to the person who has held their Priority Pass the longest unless one of our tenants has applied- they will get priority.
- 4 If there are no applicants with Priority Passes, the offer will go to the applicant who first registered with Homehunt unless one of our tenants has applied - they will get priority.

There are some exceptional circumstances when this may not apply. If you would like more information about this, you can download our Allocations Policy from the document downloads section of our website or call us for details.

If you are successful in applying for a property you will be notified within one week of the closing date of the advert.

Please note that if you refuse an offer of a property you have applied for, your Priority Pass will normally be withdrawn and you will not be able to re-apply for the same Pass for two years. Because of this it is really important that you think about whether or not a property will suit you before you apply for it.



## 10 Reporting Allocations

After an offer of property has been accepted, we will publish details of how the allocation was made on the Homehunt website. We will say whether or not 'best use' was made of a property, whether a priority pass was used and also how long the successful applicant had been registered for.

This gives everyone some idea of the demand for different properties and can help you make reasonable choices about where you want to live. For example, is it more important to have a home sooner and go for properties that are in low demand, or can you wait for the 'perfect' property to come along elsewhere?

## 11 Who is not eligible for housing?

In certain circumstances, registrations can be 'suspended'. This means you will not be able to apply for any houses until the 'suspended' status is removed.

As part of the registration process, you will be asked to answer several questions and sign to confirm that all of the information you have given us is correct. The answers you give show whether or not you meet the criteria to apply for housing with us (see also false information). If any criteria are not met, your registration will not be made 'live' until you can demonstrate to us that you can now meet the criteria to apply for housing. Examples of when registrations are 'suspended' include:

- You have outstanding rent arrears either with ELHA or another landlord, and you haven't maintained an agreement to pay them off
- You have a history of anti-social behaviour or criminal activity (subject to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act) when action has been taken (or is pending) by Police, local authority, landlord etc. The registration will remain 'suspended' until we are satisfied that any such behaviour is unlikely to re-occur.
- You supply false or misleading information – see below
- We have asked you for more information and have not yet received it

If you would like more information about whether or not you are eligible, please contact us. If you are not eligible, we will advise you what you need to do to be able to apply for properties.

## 12 False information

If you give us false or misleading information or withhold information in an attempt to secure an offer of property, we will immediately withdraw any Priority Pass you have, and your registration will be 'suspended' for two years. If a tenancy has started, we will immediately take steps to recover the property.

## 13 Contact us

If you need any help or advice or you have any comments you would like to make, please contact us at:

East Lothian Housing Association Ltd  
18-20 Market Street  
Haddington  
East Lothian  
EH41 3JL

Tel: 01620 825032

Email: [info@elha.com](mailto:info@elha.com)

You can also go to the Homehunt website [www.homehunt.info](http://www.homehunt.info) or our website [www.elha.com](http://www.elha.com) to find out more about us and our services.

ELHA will produce this information on request in Audio Tape, Large Print and Community Languages.



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